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Résumé de l'article

Voilà longtemps que d'une manière ou d'une autre, les Nunamiut d'Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska, vont en ville et ce, avant même qu'ils n'aient abandonné, en 1949-1950, leur vie de nomades pour se sédentariser dans un village à 100 milles de la route la plus proche et à 250 milles de Fairbanks. Des années avant qu'ils ne mettent pied en ville, quelques-uns avait déjà des comptes créditeurs à la *Northern Commercial Company*. Au milieu des années cinquante, quelques hommes du village furent recrutés pour participer à des expériences d'adaptation au froid menées par le Ladd AFB dans les environs de Fairbanks. Ce fut leur premier vol en avion et leur première expérience de la vie citadine. Les urgences médicales —une épidémie de grippe, la tuberculose et d'autres maladies demandant soins médicaux— constituaient, dans les années cinquante, l'autre ticket pour la ville, et dans ce cas, il fallait habituellement attendre l'arrivée du vol mensuel pour pouvoir être transporté. Mais dès les années soixante, les services médicaux pour autochtones firent en sorte que les femmes d'Anaktuvuk venaient en ville pour accoucher à l'hôpital. Aujourd'hui, Fairbanks n'est pas seulement un cabinet médical, c'est aussi un centre commercial et un supermarché pour les villages isolés comme Anaktuvuk Pass. C'est encore beaucoup d'autres choses pour les Nunamiut —le site des jeux olympiques annuels eskimos-indiens, le festival des arts autochtones de l'Université d'Alaska à Fairbanks et la foire estivale de la vallée de la Tanana (*Tanana Valley Fair*). C'est la deuxième avenue avec sa succession de bars défraîchis. Cet article examine plus de 50 ans de voyages en ville, l'importance de la «ville» dans la vie des villageois et les associations variées que Fairbanks représente pour les Nunamiut.

Essai / Essay

Anaktuvuk Pass goes to town

Margaret B. Blackman*

Résumé: Anaktuvuk Pass va en ville

Voilà longtemps que d'une manière ou d'une autre, les Nunamiut d'Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska, vont en ville et ce, avant même qu'ils n'aient abandonné, en 1949-1950, leur vie de nomades pour se sédentariser dans un village à 100 milles de la route la plus proche et à 250 milles de Fairbanks. Des années avant qu'ils ne mettent pied en ville, quelques-uns avait déjà des comptes créditeurs à la *Northern Commercial Company*. Au milieu des années cinquante, quelques hommes du village furent recrutés pour participer à des expériences d'adaptation au froid menées par le Ladd AFB dans les environs de Fairbanks. Ce fut leur premier vol en avion et leur première expérience de la vie citadine. Les urgences médicales —une épidémie de grippe, la tuberculose et d'autres maladies demandant soins médicaux— constituaient, dans les années cinquante, l'autre ticket pour la ville, et dans ce cas, il fallait habituellement attendre l'arrivée du vol mensuel pour pouvoir être transporté. Mais dès les années soixante, les services médicaux pour autochtones firent en sorte que les femmes d'Anaktuvuk venaient en ville pour accoucher à l'hôpital. Aujourd'hui, Fairbanks n'est pas seulement un cabinet médical, c'est aussi un centre commercial et un supermarché pour les villages isolés comme Anaktuvuk Pass. C'est encore beaucoup d'autres choses pour les Nunamiut —le site des jeux olympiques annuels eskimos-indiens, le festival des arts autochtones de l'Université d'Alaska à Fairbanks et la foire estivale de la vallée de la Tanana (*Tanana Valley Fair*). C'est la deuxième avenue avec sa succession de bars défraîchis. Cet article examine plus de 50 ans de voyages en ville, l'importance de la «ville» dans la vie des villageois et les associations variées que Fairbanks représente pour les Nunamiut.

Abstract: Anaktuvuk Pass goes to town

The Nunamiut of Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska have been going to town, one way or another, even before they relinquished their nomadic life in 1949-1950 to become settled in a village 100 miles from the nearest road and 250 miles from Fairbanks. Some years before they ever set foot in town, a few had credit accounts at the city's Northern Commercial Company. In the mid-1950s a few village men were recruited as human subjects for cold adaptation experiments carried out at Ladd AFB outside of Fairbanks. This was their first plane ride and their first taste of city life. Medical emergencies—a flu epidemic, TB, and other illnesses that demanded

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medical treatment were the other ticket to Fairbanks in the 1950s, and then one typically had to wait to be flown out until the monthly mail plane came in. But by the 1960s the Native health care system saw to it that Anaktuvuk women came to town to deliver their babies in the hospital. Today Fairbanks is not only the doctor's office but also the shopping mall and supermarket for outlying villages like Anaktuvuk Pass. It is many other things as well to the Nunamiut—site of the annual World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, the University of Alaska's annual Festival of Native Arts, and the summer Tanana Valley Fair. It is Second Avenue with its string of dingy bars. This paper looks at more than 50 years of going to town, the significance of "town" in villagers' lives, and the varied associations Fairbanks holds for the Nunamiut.

Introduction

"I always say, every time I go Fairbanks, it's just like end of the world. So busy. No time to relax." My Nunamiut friend Lela Ahgook shook her head and laughed. We were sitting in her living room in Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska, talking about hunting and the spur of the moment camping trip she and her husband Noah had taken a few days before. Somehow the city crept into our conversation. Maybe that is not surprising as Anaktuvuk villagers have been going to Fairbanks—"town"—for more than 50 years. And, for at least that long, town has been coming to them. In fact, one of the most noteworthy things about this one small, isolated inland Iñupiat village, is the pervasive and enduring presence that the urban areas of Alaska, especially Fairbanks, have had here.

The city of Fairbanks lies 250 air miles southwest of the Nunamiut village of Anaktuvuk Pass, which sits in Alaska's scenic Brooks Range, 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle and 80 miles from the nearest road. By any set of standards, Anaktuvuk is isolated. Fairbanks is an hour and a half flight away in a small bush plane. A round trip ticket costs $260 at the village corporation office, discounted 15% from the standard airfare. Four round trip flights with the most popular air service earn you a free fifth journey. On any day—and airline service is twice daily—a few of the village's 320 people stand on the gravel airstrip, bags in hand, headed for town. What has "going to town" meant to the Nunamiut over more than a half century of journeys and what associations does Fairbanks hold for the people of this mountain village?

Fairbanks and the Nunamiut before 1947

Fairbanks loomed large in Nunamiut lives even before the village began forming in 1949. Airplanes brought the world of the city and the scientists from it to the Nunamiut. In 1943 a pilot/owner of a small airlines, ferrying supplies between Fairbanks and Barrow, befriended the Nunamiut when he landed his floatplane on a

lake where a small group of them had their winter camp. Subsequently, he and the bush pilots who worked for him began supplying the Nunamiut with badly needed ammunition for hunting and with the flour, sugar, tea, coffee, lard, and tobacco that they had until then acquired in annual long trips to trading posts on the arctic coast or in the interior. In exchange, the pilots delivered the furs the Nunamiut accumulated in winter trapping to Fairbanks, applying the credit for them to the accounts two of the Nunamiut men established with the Northern Commercial Company in Fairbanks (Metzger 1983). This contact was likely the vehicle for the Nunamiut's acquisition of the radio.

During the Second World War, when the Nunamiut were still nomadic and covered an area of several hundred square miles in their annual cycle, Fairbanks and the world beyond it came to them through the radio. Two native men owned Zenith table model radios, powered by 12 volt batteries which they carried with them as they moved camp. At night, inside the skin tents, the families gathered around the radios to listen to Tundra Topics and news of the war on Radio Station KFAR in Fairbanks. Sitting close by their radios, the two English speakers in this small band offered up a running translation of the broadcasts for their audience. Arctic biologist Laurence Irving who met the Nunamiut at their winter camp in 1947, remarked of the leader of the little band, "Simon asked us some penetrating questions about the progress of current political negotiations in Palestine and India which he occasionally heard discussed by radio commentators, but as he seemed to understand those affairs better than we, he courteously deferred to our curiosity about the animals and birds of his country" (Irving n.d.: 2). Simon Paneak was clearly not your average Nunamiut, but with an English dictionary and little technology his mind travelled far from his country.

1947 and after

Since 1947 when Laurence Irving contacted Simon Paneak's band, the Nunamiut have had a long and mutually profitable relationship with scientists who have ventured to Alaska's north slope. The early scientists provided an important and lasting connection to the city and its possibilities. When they left at the end of the field season, researchers often stayed in touch, sending news and goods from the city. Laurence Irving and Simon Paneak carried on a steady correspondence for nearly three decades[1]. Simon's letter of April 1951, which reached Irving at his, home in Anchorage is typical of many: "We will look for you in next month. I hope you bring fountain pen for me. Radio batteries for my radio from Schiller-Rausch. Batteries no. 45060; new kind of radio."

The desire for and reliance on the foodstuffs and other goods that the city could provide had much to do with Nunamiut settlement. In consultation with Sig Wien, the bush pilot whom they first encountered in 1943, the Nunamiut selected, in 1949, a base campsite containing a lake large enough for landing float and ski planes. They chose

1 This correspondence is in the Laurence Irving Collection at the Polar Regions Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

this site as well because it was situated along a major migratory route of the Barren Ground caribou. By the following year, the Nunamiut were officially on the demographic map of the United States when they were counted in the first US census of the north central Brooks Range of northern Alaska. And the year after that, 1951, Anaktuvuk Pass was granted the post office it had requested, assuring regular monthly delivery of letters and freight shipped by US mail, as well as transportation from Anaktuvuk Pass to Fairbanks and beyond.

Several Nunamiut got their first exposure to the city because of scientific interest in human adaptation to cold climates. In the early days of the Cold War, the Aeromedical lab at Ladd AFB in Fairbanks began conducting studies in cold adaptation. They recruited human subjects from four Iñupiat villages in order to compare their performance on a series of tests to that of non-native army men[2]. The four Nunamiut men who made the inaugural trip in 1951 eagerly did so, as participation in the research project meant wages at a time when the bounty on wolves and fur trapping provided the only sources of cash income. At the military base, the Iñupiat sat in cold rooms naked from the waist up as their body temperatures were periodically recorded and they donned masks that measured their oxygen uptake while they ran on treadmills. At night they ventured into Fairbanks, bearing a note from an Army officer to hand to a policeman should they get lost. One of the Nunamiut men had lived in Fairbanks for several years as a youngster. But the rest of them, exclaimed Justus Mekiana, remembering the experience 40 years later,[3] "[…] don't know anything about the big city. We follow him all of the time. Which way he go, we follow him. If he get lost, we lost. Sometimes we go in the big dancing, where the girls dancing on top of your table." A smile so wide that it crinkled his eyes spread across Justus' face at the memory. "On top of your table, the big dancing […]."

In the years following these research trips to Fairbanks Nunamiut travel to the city accelerated. In the late 1950s a handful of Anaktuvuk youth flew off to Indian Affairs boarding schools in Southeast Alaska and Oregon, getting their first taste of urban life when they overnighted in Fairbanks en route. By 1960 the mail plane began weekly flights to the village and a new gravel landing strip better served the increasing air traffic between Anaktuvuk Pass and Fairbanks. In the 1960s villagers travelled to Fairbanks a couple of times a year to purchase goods that would take a month or more to receive by mail order catalogue. On these journeys they carried with them handcrafted caribou skin masks to sell to Fairbanks tourist shops. Cash from mask sales bought the goods they needed and allowed them to prolong their stays in town. A schoolteacher, watching the ebb and flow of villagers to town in the 1960s reported: "[…] travel to Fairbanks or Barrow appears to be increasing, [but] no large movements occur and village life continues essentially unaltered" (Cline 1975: 15).

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2 The cold metabolism studies were conducted under the auspices of Dr. Kaare Rodahl and published in a series of articles, the most extensive of which was "Eskimo Metabolism" (Rodahl 1954). Rodahl (1963) also authored a memoir about his field research with the Iñupiat.

3 Unless otherwise noted, quotes from Anaktuvuk Pass residents are from the author's interviews and/or conversations with them from 1999 to 2004.

Oddly enough, had things turned out differently, the entire population of Anaktuvuk Pass might have ended up square in the middle of Fairbanks just a few years later. By 1967 villagers had stripped the area within 35 miles of the village of Arctic willows, their main source of fuel. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) suggested that the village relocate to where they could be more easily and cheaply supplied with fuel oil. Umiat, an abandoned military installation on the Colville River was offered as one option, and Fairbanks was the other. Following a series of meetings with all involved agencies, villagers voted to stay in Anaktuvuk Pass and a fuel oil supply program was begun by the BIA (Hanson 2003).

One village family, however, did voluntarily relocate to Fairbanks in the late1960s for a period of three years when the husband, Zach, secured a job with the Arctic Research Laboratory at the University of Alaska as the animal caretaker on a wolf research project. He saw the move as an opportunity to pay for his new village house, make a lot of money and then return to Anaktuvuk Pass to live. His wife, Doris, saw the situation somewhat differently, "Hope I never see another chicken!" she exclaimed in a letter to the schoolteacher in Anaktuvuk. "I want to live where I can be free, where I don't have to worry about my kids all the time. In the village someone always looks out for them; in the city I have to do it. All the time I worry about my kids" (Cline 1975: 29).

Nunamiut and the city in the 21st century

Forty years later travel to Fairbanks is frequent and routine, but the views Doris expressed about the city in the 1960s persist, especially among older adults. Village and town remain opposites. Anaktuvuk is freedom; Fairbanks, rules; the village is safe, the city dangerous. And indeed villagers' personal experiences bear this out. In the summertime village children enjoy a heady freedom—they stay up as late as they are physically able, eat when they please, and go wherever they wish in the village. As Doris correctly observed, *someone* will look out for them. In the city, they are subject to and confined by the White man's rules, some of which they are likely not even aware of. In the summer of 2004, I listened to 8 year-old Dion declare to his mother and grandmother that, come fall, he was going to go live with his aunt in Fairbanks. "You won't like it," his grandmother advised, "no freedom." I smiled, remembering 16 summers ago when his mother, then an 8 year-old herself, expressed the very same desire and received the very same answer.

In reality, the dangers of the city loom larger for adults than children. Between 2001 and 2004 alone, four villagers have died suddenly and unexpectedly in Fairbanks. One in an automobile crash, two in a murder-suicide, and one, my friend Lela's son, in a drowning. All were alcohol related. Drinking has been an enticement of the city for the Nunamiut from the beginning. The previously cited school teacher/commentator from the 1960s, noted that drinking, for men of this no-alcohol-allowed dry village, was a popular Fairbanks recreation. "Once their business is taken care of," he wrote, "they drift to the bars where they may find friends" (Cline 1975: 14). Today, drinking is no less popular among women than men. Villagers express relief that it mostly takes

place away from the village, in the city, but their characterisation of the alcohol binge there—"Too much Fairbanks"—says it all.

For Anaktuvuk villagers Fairbanks is far more than a strip of bars along 2nd Avenue downtown (I should add that 2nd Avenue is rapidly becoming gentrified with a new hotel and upscale restaurants). Fairbanks is also the doctors' and dentist's offices, the hospital, the shopping mall and the handicraft market; it is the August Tanana Valley Fair, and the festivals like WEIO, the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, that celebrate Native arts and culture. And in the fall of 2005, and again in the fall of 2007, it was the convention site of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), the statewide Native Association.

As Susan Lobo (2001) notes, the city is about place. "Place" not simply as geographical markers, but the organisations, activities and relationships connected with them. To the Nunamiut the significant places in Fairbanks are a handful of spots on a grid of largely nameless urban streets. The anchor to the Nunamiut's urban world is the Klondike Inn where many Native people from interior Alaska villages stay when they come to town. It is inexpensive by Fairbanks' standards, the rooms have kitchenettes, and it is conveniently located to shopping and the airport. More parking lot than edifice, the Klondike is a pink and blue strip of a frontier motel, situated along the main road to the airport and within walking distance of two supermarkets, several fast food restaurants, a liquor store, and Value Village, a much patronised used clothing and furniture store. Beyond walking distance, downtown, lie the bars of 2nd Avenue, the tourist shops that buy Native handicrafts, and the bingo hall where villagers go to engage in one of their favourite pastimes. Farther out are Wal-mart and Sams Club. To get to any of these places one needs transportation, which usually means a cab.

When her frequent and my infrequent visits to Fairbanks coincide, I call my friend Lela at the Klondike. She has come to town for a doctor's appointment or for a meeting of the regional Native Health Care committee that she is a member of. I pick her up and we head off to dinner at Sourdough Sam's, a family meat and potatoes diner where she brings me up to date on village happenings. Driving back to the Klondike at the evening's end I anticipate her question, cleverly fobbed off on an absent third party and presented like a good interviewer who knows how to diminish its directness. She begins, "Valerie (or some other relative whom she has talked to since arriving in town) asked if we were going to run around tomorrow." Meaning: she has errands to do, and I have a car. I am more than happy to oblige. Cabs are expensive, the bus time consuming and inconvenient. Lela and I have a great time together, and besides, for me "running around" is ethnography. "Sure," I answer, "Where do you want to go?" She rattles off a couple of places. The snowmobile dealer where the family purchased their snow machine now in need of new skis, the hardware store for fishhooks, the bush airlines to look for a check someone from the village owes her and has promised to send up on tomorrow's afternoon plane. She has already paid more than one visit to a man from the village who is hospitalised here. When villagers come to town they invariably visit any community member who is hospitalised. Thankfully, Lela has already been to Value Village this trip so we can skip that, but she has several masks that she brought with her to town. "You can help me sell my masks," she instructs.

The following afternoon we go first to Red Moose Gifts and Crafts at 5th and Noble downtown, a rabbit warren of hallways, nooks, and tiny rooms groaning with shelves of craft supplies. That another Anaktuvuk villager has preceded her here is evident from the 12 masks stacked on the counter. Lela has come to buy artificial sinew so she selects a big bobbin and heads to the counter. There she picks up one of the Anaktuvuk masks, critically examining its backside. "Do you make these?" the shopkeeper asks, figuring that she is from Anaktuvuk. "No," she shakes her head, "Mine are better than that."

From the Red Moose, we walk to Alaska House, an upscale downtown art gallery whose owner has purchased Lela's masks before. She takes two. I know some art shops that Lela does not, so we drive to two that she would never otherwise venture into. We score in one; they also buy two masks. Back in the car, Lela exclaims, "Gee, you take me to places in Fairbanks I didn't even know," adding that it is difficult to take a taxi when one is looking for some place and is unsure of its exact location. She tells me that she used to drive in Fairbanks but got cited once for making a right hand turn from the left-hand lane and has not driven in town since.

En route to our final stop of the day, just for fun I make a short detour to the Alaska Raw Fur Company, a destination on Fairbanks anthropologists' "Favorite Places To Take Your Native Village Friends" map. The shiny, luxuriant bounty of Alaskan furs and the smoked moose hide are a visual and olfactory treat. From there it is a quick drive to the bush airlines where Lela hopes to find the check she is owed. No luck, it is not there. I have forgotten to wear my watch. What time is it, I ask her. She looks down at her watch. "3 o'clock. Only 3!" She is surprised. "Time sure goes slowly in town." "Not at home," she adds. "Nothing to do here." I, of course, would conclude just the opposite. "Well," I ask, "are you ready to go home?" "*Ready to go home*," she asserts. I think she means the Klondike, but after three days in Fairbanks, I suspect she has also had her fill of the city.

Lela's connection to the city is long and many faceted. She was one of those early boarding school students who passed through Fairbanks in the 1950s. In the late 1960s, when she served as village postmaster, she was a village correspondent for an irregular column that appeared in the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* called "Anaktuvuk Passages." One can safely assume, I think, that the column was aimed at city folk interested in Native life and bush villages. True to her current assertions about the village versus the city, Lela portrayed Anaktuvuk as lively and busy. Writing in March of 1969 she exclaimed, "Many plane each day. What a noisy little Village now!" Ironically, it was more than 30 years from those days before the newspaper itself came to the village on a regular basis. Today the city and its news arrive daily at the village store. Although the column Lela wrote is no longer carried by the paper, the *News-Miner* regularly publishes obituaries of Native people from bush villages and is thus a news source for a larger native community.

In more ways than one the city comes regularly to Anaktuvuk Pass. The village is a tourist destination, especially since Anaktuvuk is the stopping off point for access to Gates of the Arctic National Park, which surrounds it on three sides. The village has

appeared twice, 20 years apart, in the Travel section of the Sunday *New York Times*. Today, the Simon Paneak Memorial museum, housed in a small log building in the village, receives more than 1,000 visitors each summer from the United States and abroad. Virtually every good flying day in the summer, Alaska North Tours, a Fairbanks based Company, sends day visitors to the village where they are met by an aging van and a company tour guide (currently a Native villager) who provides a two-hour tour of the village while the plane waits on the airstrip to return them to the city. The tour director hires village youth as guides and before the tourist season is in full swing they practice and perfect what they will say to the season's visitors (who are never referred to as "tourists").

So that villagers could see for themselves what visitors are shown and told, a few years ago the tour director offered Anaktuvuk people a pre-season tour on the van. The youth guides would try their new guiding skills on their elders who would pretend to be tourists/visitors. To entice folks to take part, the company offered door prizes, which are always popular in Anaktuvuk Pass. The big prize was supposed to be a free trip to Fairbanks on the tour plane when space was available, but the eight hours of baby sitting proved to be the most popular door prize. On the appointed day, as each elder climbed aboard the van, the youth guides asked where he or she was from. The elders assumed the imagined demeanour of urbanites from distinct regions of the US. "I'm from South Carolina," drawled Doris. "California," Rachel answered, wrapping her arms around herself, affecting a shiver, and exclaiming, "It's so cold here. It's so cold here!" "Texas." Molly offered her wide Nunamiut smile. Rhoda drew a momentary blank, then blurted out, "Chicago-miut," followed by her infectious giggle. None of them have been to those places, but they have firmly formed ideas of "the city."

Conclusion

For the Nunamiut, Fairbanks—the city—holds a mix of competing and conflicting meanings: For many adults it is freedom to engage in behaviours—primarily drinking—not permitted in the village; but there is no freedom there for children, they tell their offspring. Life is faster paced and more exciting in Fairbanks than in the village, but excitement soon gives way to tedium. The city holds an almost equal measure of happy and sad memories for Anaktuvuk people. Everyone remembers with pride the first place awards a village dance group has won at World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, but some can no longer stay at the Klondike because of the tragic murder-suicide of a beloved village couple that took place in its parking lot in 2001. In Fairbanks one happily socialises with Native friends from other villagers and visits a trading partner who now resides in the city, but also becomes lonely for relatives at home and for the rhythms of village life. Anaktuvuk draws one back. From the vantage point of the central Brooks Range, Anaktuvuk Pass seems as remote from Fairbanks as it geographically is, but in reality the village could hardly exist today without the urban supply centre and service provider.

I hear villagers' complex relationships to the city expressed every time I fly from Anaktuvuk Pass with them to Fairbanks at the end of a summer field season. A

grandmother, escorting a small grandchild back to her non-native mother in Fairbanks talks to the child, but really to anyone who will listen: “Poor baby, now you go back to rules; no more freedom.” From the back of the plane, a young female villager excitedly shouts, “Pizza!” as the plane touches the runway at the Fairbanks International Airport. A mother, bringing her 9 year-old son to town for a doctor’s visit comforts him, “Welcome to Fairbanks, our second home.”

Acknowledgments

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