

RECOLLECTIONS OF MY PAST AND ASPIRATIONS FOR MY FUTURE

PAUL KINNINOOK, *Alaskan*



THE name Alaska suggests glaciers creeping across a bleak waste, picturesque houses of ice, wolf-dog teams, unbelievable hardships, thrilling adventure, the grandeur of a vast frigid expanse—all that is romantic and mysterious. It is a land of which much is read and little is known. Before I begin with the story of my former life and the condition of my people, I want to say that all of Alaska is not like the country of which we read in books. The warm Japan current so modifies the climate of the coast and adjacent islands that it differs little from the climate of Oregon. It is only in the interior and the far north that intense cold prevails.

I was born in March, 1892, in the little Indian village of Port Tongas. Port Tongas is on an island in the extreme southeastern part of Alaska, near Cape Fox village which is on the main land. In these two villages a number of different tribes lived, but they were often called by the name of the town in which they dwelt, as are Port Tongas or Cape Fox people. They all spoke the Thlinget language.

The houses in these villages were set in rows like the houses of a city, but not so close together. They were large, low, and flat-roofed, with windows in the front and in the back. In the center of the house was a fireplace, eight or ten feet square, usually a little lower than the floor and filled with gravel from the beach. The gravel was removed every week and replaced by clean. A hole in the center of the roof permitted the smoke to escape. The front of some of the houses were decorated with queer paintings of animals and fish.

The natives traveled over the water in large dugout canoes with two sails. It was hard work to make headway against the wind, but when the wind was fair traveling was easy.

Most of the people of the two villages were slaves of the intoxicant. When drunk they would often wound and sometimes even kill each other. When any of the families of our house or neighborhood were drinking, I would hide all the dangerous weapons I could find and gather the small children and take them to a place of safety on the beach. I was small myself, but I was strong enough to take care of the little ones.

I saw few gold or silver coins or little money of any kind when I was a child. In those days the natives made their living by hunting, trap-