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INTRODUCTION



Figure I.1. David Paul, Titus Isaac, Sam Abraham, and Peter Thomas, circa July 4, 1931, Tanacross. David Paul was married to Titus's daughter, Ena. Titus was married to Annie Esau. Peter Thomas was married to Sarah from Mentasta and was Kenneth Thomas Sr.'s father. Photo by E. A. McIntosh, William E. Simeone photo collection.

This book is about Northern Dene who live in the upper Tanana region of east-central Alaska. It is based largely on interviews with Dene elders born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a link to their experiences, their lives, and their understanding of the world. It is also meant to be a primary source document for anyone trying to understand Dene heritage in the region, the significance of places, resources,

and the cultural values that sustained a way of life.¹ Together, the elders' narratives reveal a unique and compelling perspective, offering a fascinating commentary on a way of life that is gone forever and their approach to continuity and change over the past 100 years. Through their stories, the elders unveil a sweep of history and events but also a detailed portrait of the people themselves.

¹ I have to thank Bill Schneider for these words.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological evidence indicates people have occupied the Tanana River valley for at least 14,000 years (Potter, Holmes, and Yesner 2013; Smith 2022). Between 1,900 and 1,250 years ago, Mount Churchill, a volcano in the St. Elias Range on the border of Alaska and Yukon Territory, erupted, which may have been the impetus for the migration of the Dene ancestors of the Navajo and Apachean peoples into the American Southwest (Ives 2003). Since the last eruption about 1,200 years ago, the region's environment has been relatively stable. Archaeologists consider material dating to this time as Athabascan, representing the material culture of contemporary Dene ancestors.

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Two languages, with several dialects, are spoken in the upper Tanana region: Upper Tanana (UT), spoken in the communities of Scottie Creek, Northway, and Tetlin, and Tanacross (T), spoken in Tanacross, Dot Lake, and Healy Lake. Anthropologists named the people Upper Tanana based on where they lived and their distinct Athabascan language. Upper Tanana Dene refer to themselves collectively as *dineh shyuh* (UT) or *dendee shuh lin* (T). More specifically they are a “people of a certain place.” For example, in the Tanacross language people from Ketchumstuk are called *Yaadóǵ Xt’een iin* or “inland area people,” while those from Mansfield or Dihthâad are called *Dihthâad Xt’een iin*. Upper Tanana speakers refer collectively to people from Tanacross, Salcha, Chena, and Minto as *Ndaa’a tu’ t’iinn*, indicating they come from downriver. Nabesna people are *Naabmiah niign ut’iin*, while people from the upper Chisana River are called *Ddhäl to t’iin*, or “among the mountains people.” People from Northway are referred to as *K’ehththiign ut’iin*, after their fish camp at K’ehththiign, or “lake outlet,” and Tetlin people are *Teedlay ut’iin*.

While the residents of contemporary villages have come to identify with their community, it is hard to talk about each community as a discrete or distinctive unit. Analysis of early census data (see appendix D) illustrates Robert McKennan’s (1969) point that the upper Tanana bands formed interlocking social units rather than discrete entities. For example, the census shows the close connection between Upper Tanana, Tanacross, and Upper Ahtna. It also shows the movement between bands precipitated by the fur trade, mining development, and disease.

ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

The valley of the upper Tanana River is bounded on the south by the glaciated peaks of the Wrangell Mountains, the source of the Chisana and Nabesna Rivers. The northern periphery is formed by the vast rolling expanse of the Yukon-Tanana uplands that deliver the headwaters of the Fortymile and Ladue Rivers (see figure I.2). The region is bisected by the Tanana River, which emerges from the confluence of the Chisana and Nabesna Rivers. From there, the Tanana flows in a northwesterly direction fed by a series of smaller creeks and rivers, including Scottie, Gardiner, Mansfield, George, and Sand Creeks and the Tetlin, Tok, Robertson, Healy, and Johnson Rivers. Small lakes and wetlands are sprinkled across the flat plain of the upper Tanana valley and offer excellent habitat for wildlife and migratory birds. Except in the higher elevations of alpine tundra, the region is covered by forest dominated by white spruce and birch. In areas of permafrost, shallow rooted species such as black spruce prevail and stands of willow are common near streams. Plant life utilized by Dene include mosses, sedges, blueberries, bearberries, cranberries, rose hips, Labrador tea, wild potato or carrot, and wild celery.

The Fortymile, Nelchina, and Chisana caribou herds pass through the region on their annual migrations and were once the most

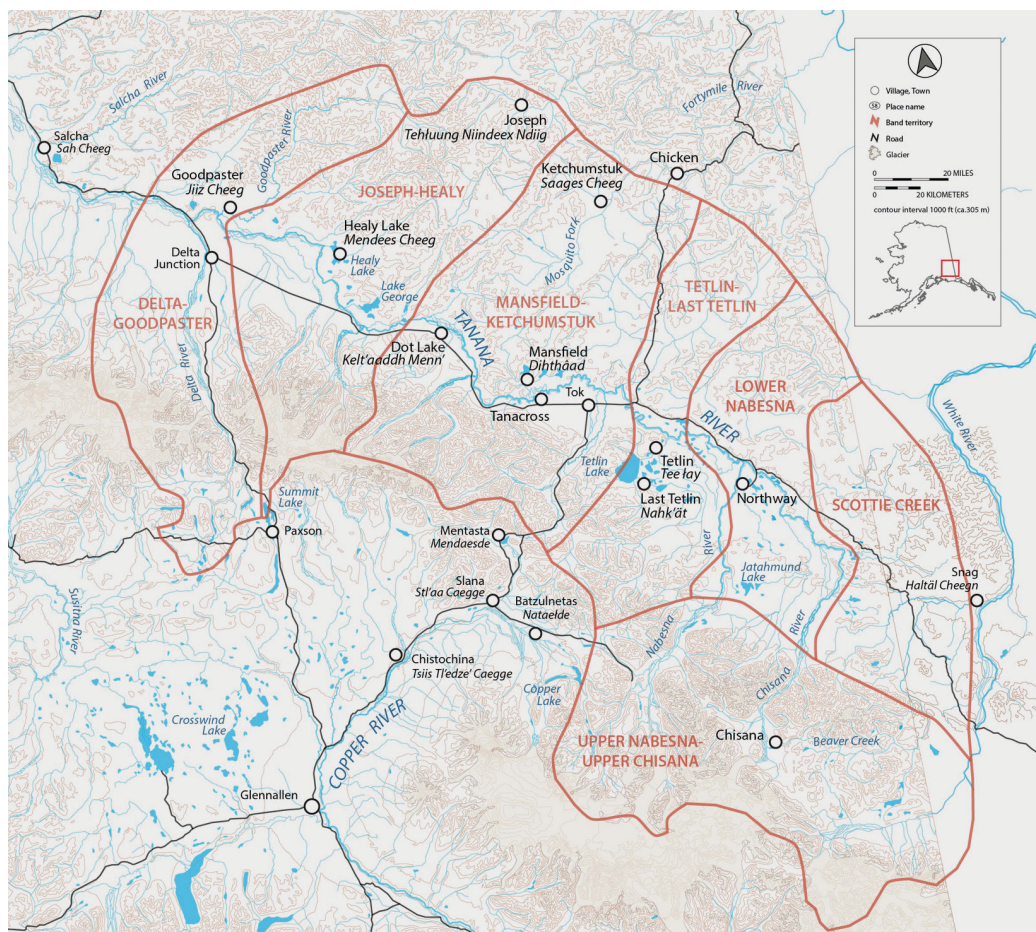


Figure 1.2. The upper Tanana region showing historical and contemporary communities and the boundaries of traditional band territories. See appendix B for a description of band territories and village histories. Map by Matt O'Leary, adapted from McKennan (1981: 564).

important single source of food and material for clothing and tools. Dene elders say moose were scarce in the nineteenth century. Since then, the population has increased, and today moose are a major source of food in all upper Tanana communities. Dall sheep inhabit the higher elevations and were once extensively hunted for meat and their skins for clothing. Other animals include black and brown bears, snowshoe hare, beaver, muskrat, fox, lynx, wolf, and wolverine. Currently, no salmon runs reach the upper Tanana. Of major importance are various species of whitefish, northern pike, burbot, and grayling.

Dene life and culture are fundamentally tied to the environment, and most if not all the varied species of plants, animals, and fish have been integrated into upper Tanana culture and retain a social and spiritual relationship to the people. Dene people conceive of the world as a multidimensional space consisting of people, animals, plants, earth, water, and air. It is a landscape lived in and lived with. Dene elders born at the beginning of the twentieth century existed in and experienced a world very different from the one we live in today. Theirs was a world without capitalism or Christianity, towns, roads, grocery stores,

electricity, running water, or television—a seemingly empty land. Everyone born before World War II was born away from hospitals, stores, and the eyes of White people. They all had considerable knowledge of country life.

In this world Dene created a life that embraced the stillness and the presence of powerful animals who, unlike humans, were contained unto themselves, had no need of anything outside of themselves, who could be seen and unseen, and could destroy humans. Humans knew animals were like them but more powerful because they were everything unto themselves. To survive, humans had to know animals, to feel them, to intuit them and absorb the animals' enduring traits of strength, speed, and agility.

Success depended on knowing what was *ijjih* (UT) or *injih* (T). Often translated as that which is forbidden or taboo, *injih* guided every detail of life, including hunting, the potlatch, washing one's face, and the use of language (Mishler 1986; Guédon 2005; Lovick 2020). It is *ijjih*, for example, to speak directly about animals. Instead, people must speak indirectly using euphemisms. For example, it is *ijjih* to say you are going hunting, or that you have killed a moose; instead, it is proper to refer to the moose indirectly. It is also *injih* to talk about oneself, which is seen as bragging and could lead to bad luck (Lovick 2020: 36–37). In knowing what is *ijjih*, humans learned to be attentive, cultivate awareness, maintain a proper attitude, and follow protocol.

In the Dene tradition everything is connected. Humans and nature are inseparable. All things are animate or have agency and possess a spirit. Human beings remain a part of nature and reciprocally obligated to animals not just because animals provide humans with food but as beings with a common origin and equivalent natures. Animals and humans participate in an enduring relationship governed by *ijjih*. The idea of the person extends to all living things. Animals are considered nonhuman

persons (see Hallowell 1960). Dene, for example, extend the term *grandfather* to both humans and grizzly bears. In the Upper Tanana language, the term for grandfather is *tsay* while the word for male bear is *neettsay* (“our grandfather”), which is considered a respectful term. Upper Tanana Dene do not make a distinction in the use of the term *grandfather*: it applies to both humans and nonhuman persons.

The important point here is that relationships matter. Human beings do not stand apart from the world but exist in a world of relatedness. It is human beings' relationship with the world that makes things happen. Whatever exists now, whatever success a person has, is the product of their relationship with the world. Knowledge is about learning, understanding, and participating through correct actions that sustain the web of life-giving relations of which the knower is part (Blaser 2018). In this respect every part of the Dene tradition is directed at living a balanced life in an unpredictable world in which human beings are completely dependent on the goodwill of powerful animals. This means living in harmony with all things, human and nonhuman. Elders point out it is essential to maintain approved standards of personal and social conduct because achieving a full life depends on one's own conduct as well as the conduct of others, whether human or animal. Humans have an obligation to act appropriately, whether dealing with other human beings or nonhuman persons. Sharing is a prime example of appropriate behavior. Sharing creates a balance or sense of proportion that must be maintained in all interpersonal relations and activities. Hoarding or any manifestation of greed is disapproved of. Sharing is of central importance, because without sharing no one can survive. Animals share their flesh so humans can survive; humans share with one another so they, too, can survive. But Dene were not simply altruistic; they share because not sharing can cause serious problems, including unrest and

dissatisfaction or ultimately death if the person slighted decides to cause personal harm.

Margaret Kirsteatter talked about the importance of sharing when she talked about food and the necessity of saving everything in case of starvation. Margaret explained that when people experienced bad luck, others had an obligation to help them survive.

Our old people used to tell us. People come through the country, if he is hungry, bad luck, they make the people survive [it]. Even old bone, put it away. And the marrow bone, moose foot. They dry. And some of these days people you know [have] bad luck, they come through the country visiting one another, you know, they survive it. So even still save those, too, right now. (Andrews and Huntington 1980: n.p.)

Up until the end of the nineteenth century, upper Tanana Dene lived in small, autonomous groups composed of closely related kin. Kinship affiliations were extensive, reaching beyond the immediate group and providing people with a network of relationships from which to seek assistance in time of need. Society was organized into moieties, or two halves, called Raven and Sea Gull. Each moiety was composed of several matrilineal clans. Moieties separate the different clans into opposites who intermarry, help one another during life crises, and support each other during potlatches. Approved marriages were between a man and woman of opposite clans. Descent was matrilineal, that is, a person traced their descent through their mother. A person was born into their mother's clan and remained a member of that clan their entire life. A person's clanmates were considered relatives, while people in other clans were considered nonrelatives, friends, sweethearts, and marriage partners.

As members of opposite moieties and clans, young people were instructed to share liberally with their friends and in-laws. As elder Fred

John of Mentasta instructed, "Your friends, you should hold them up high. Leave your brothers and sisters alone" (Kari 1986: 38). In this regard sharing or gift-giving was an important part of clan reciprocity. To be a cohesive group, a functioning clan, members must acknowledge and honor those persons in the opposite clan, who, traditionally, were often the clan of their father. One of the most important ways of doing this was through the potlatch. The word *potlatch*, while widely used today, is derived from Native American trade jargon and was brought to Alaska by prospectors at the end of the nineteenth century. In the languages of the upper Tanana, the potlatch is *xtiitl* (T) or *tijl* (UT) and applies to various formal occasions when one group hosts another, distributing gifts to the guests to mark important events, especially a change in a person's state of being as they progress from child to adult, from birth to death.

Sharing was also the obligation of rich men called *xáxkeh* (T) or *hàskeh* (UT), who were at the top of the social ladder and gained their station through their superior abilities in hunting, healing, generosity, oratory, and extensive knowledge of clan history and mythology. While wealth served to signify rank, a rich man's status was based on his generosity and ability to care for those less fortunate. In every instance, sharing connected Dene to the wider cosmos because sharing the meat, skins, and other products of the land pleased the spirits of the animals who were the source of all life. Sharing was a way of showing respect to those entities that gave their lives so humans could live, and it also ensured that animals would continue to give themselves to humans.

COLONIALISM

Under American colonialism, the world was transformed. Native people's beliefs were labeled as superstition, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "unjustified beliefs not

supported by reason or scientific thinking.” Injiih became irrelevant. Humans became separated from the land and nature, and instead nature became grand, passive, and mechanical, the backdrop for human intentionality (Tsing 2015). The world was segregated into discrete, clear-cut categories. Nature was separated from culture and the natural from the supernatural. Elders like Darlene Northway lamented the loss of knowledge and the ignorance of young people today, saying they “live instead as White people” (Sam, Demit-Barnes, and Northway 2021: 226).

Colonization of Alaska began with the Russians in the eighteenth century, but because of their remote location, upper Tanana Dene were little affected. Russia ceded Alaska to the United States in 1867, and the new territory became a military district, but neither the army nor any other government agency paid much attention to interior Alaska until the discovery of gold in 1898 on the Klondike River in Yukon Territory, Canada. Intensive colonization followed. On one level, the gold rush changed everything: American colonialism, spearheaded by missionaries, traders, and government agents, sought to create a whole new world in which Dene either had to change or perish. Alaska became “White man’s country,” as Senator William Dillingham of Vermont put it (Dillingham 1904: 29). Dene became wards of the American government with no rights except those granted by the government. On another level, because the upper Tanana was isolated, there were no roads, and the Tanana River was difficult to navigate, Dene experienced minimal interference and retained almost complete control of their daily lives. It was not until the construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942 and influx of non-Native settlers after World War II that Dene felt the full impact of settler colonialism.

The process of colonizing Alaska was both overt and subtle. The fur trade, which influenced Dene long before they ever saw a White person, brought new goods, making their lives

easier but also making Dene dependent on a system they had no control over. Trapping became a part of the Dene tradition and was integrated into the seasonal cycle. People altered their appearance, changing their hairstyles and clothing to mimic what they saw when attending rendezvous or visiting trading posts. In general, fur traders had little interest in changing Native people, preferring they stay on the land and trap. Missionaries, on the other hand, came with an expressed commitment to change Native life—not only to convert people to Christianity but recreate them in the missionaries’ own image as settled, educated Christians. In this vision, life on the land, hunting and constantly moving with the seasons, was not an acceptable way of life. For their part, Dene accepted some of the missionaries’ ideas and were willing to change to fit into the new world order, but they resisted other changes, for example, hiding traditional religious practices and outright rejecting the missionaries’ insistence they give up the potlatch.

The construction of the Alaska Highway ended the isolation of the upper Tanana region and Alaska. After 1940, the pace of change accelerated, and Dene began losing control not only of the rate of change but their very lives. They became second-class citizens and learned a new kind of isolation in which they were largely ignored and left to fend for themselves in a changing world where they could no longer make a living from the land. Children were required to attend school, and many were sent away to boarding schools where they became estranged from the culture and language of those who stayed in the village. While life changed, people did not give up their attachment to the land or to their culture. The potlatch thrived. Land became the issue. Under the 1958 Statehood Act, the State of Alaska began to select lands, which put them at odds with Native elders such as Andrew Isaac. In countless interviews, Chief Andrew Isaac and others reiterated not only their attachment to the land but the necessity

of keeping the land for future generations. For the elders, the land and the culture of the land was everything.

In 2021, upper Tanana Dene reside in five communities: the largest is Tetlin, with 120 people, followed by Tanacross (116), Northway (89), Dot Lake (41), and Healy Lake (23) (Alaska DCRA 2019; figure I.2). All except Healy Lake are accessible by a gravel road that leads to a cluster of single-family homes, a school, a church, and a community building where community feasts and potlatches are held. Few villages have a store. There is an elected government with president and village council. Members of extended families live close to one another, and most day-to-day activity takes place at this level. On certain occasions, the entire village functions as a unit, for example, to hold a potlatch or a spring carnival. Contemporary Dene, including those living outside the region, have a strong sense of identity with their communities and the surrounding landscape. While many aspects of the traditional social organization have disappeared, such as cross-cousin partnerships and clan-based marriage restrictions, there is still a strong emphasis on kinship and affiliation with family members. Traditionally defined relationships are still an important part of community life, and clans and clan membership still play a central role in upper Tanana social life.

The passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in December 1971 gave Alaska Native people some measure of self-determination, yet people still struggle to find something in modern American culture that will replace the all-engaging sense of purpose that life on the land provided. This is a big challenge. Now, in 2021, many young people—those in their thirties and forties—have left their villages to live in Fairbanks, Anchorage, or even out of state. They have jobs and families and still maintain close ties to the village. They hold language lessons and get together, often over the internet. They are building a new community. Their children will never know life in the

country, and they may never know life in a village, but they are still Dene.

SOCIAL SCIENCE AMONG UPPER TANANA DENE

Robert McKennan came north in 1929 as a PhD student from Harvard University. He was the first anthropologist to spend time with Dene in east-central Alaska. Starting out in Chisana, where he met many relatives of people living today, he then attended a potlatch at Batzulnetas put on by Charlie Sanford, Katie John's father, and stayed at lower Nabesna, where he met Chief Sam, Follet Isaac, Walter Northway, and many other Dene before heading back to Harvard in the summer of 1930. In his monograph *The Upper Tanana Indians* (1959), McKennan describes various traits of upper Tanana culture along with a short history of the region. His aim was to document a fast-disappearing culture being rapidly transformed by Dene people's increasing contact with non-Natives.

When McKennan visited the region, Dene were deeply involved in the fur trade. During the Russian colonial period, they made trips down the Tanana River to trade at *Noochuloghoyet* at the confluence of the Tanana and Yukon Rivers. After Russia sold Alaska to the United States in 1867, Dene traveled over to the upper Yukon River to trade with Americans at Fort Reliance, Eagle, and Fortymile. By the time McKennan arrived, John Hajdukovich and other traders had firmly established themselves on the upper Tanana River and were supplying a steady stream of consumer goods.

The period between 1900 and the start of World War II in 1940 is richly documented by historian Michael Brown in his 1984 monograph *Indians, Traders, and Bureaucrats in the Upper Tanana District: A History of the Tetlin Reserve*, written for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Between 1910 and 1940, upper Tanana Dene were becoming accustomed to

the presence of *nondlêed* (T) or *noodlee* (UT) (White people) in their homeland. They had to learn not only how to exist within a new world order where the US government claimed sovereignty over their homeland but how to deal with the idiosyncrasies of individual government agents, traders, and missionaries, all of whom had different agendas. For example, Upper Tanana Dene faced increasing pressure from White trappers and hunters, including wealthy trophy hunters brought into the region by the trader Hajdukovich. They also faced pressure from naturalists such as O. J. Murie, who were concerned Dene were killing too many caribou. Like most Western-trained scientists, Murie focused on the size of animal populations, believing that reducing the harvest was the way only way to maintain a healthy population. Dene viewed the situation differently. It was injih not to kill animals that presented themselves to be killed; the population was based not on how many animals were killed but killing them in a respectful manner. If animals were not killed, they would not reproduce themselves.

It was only after the war that anthropologists began to visit the region regularly. During a short trip in July 1946, Walter Goldschmidt and Theodore Haas documented “the present lands used and occupied by the native Athapascan Indians of the villages of Northway (Nabesna), Tanacross (Mansfield), and Tetlin (Tetling)” (Goldschmidt 1948). Their report contains a detailed examination of land ownership and use patterns, along with a description of conflicts between Dene and White trappers and hunters. In interviews with elders, such as Chief Walter Northway, Goldschmidt documented changes that many elders deplored, including the weakening bonds within communities and the older men’s inability to control the behavior of the youth, which was essential for survival. In contrast Albert Heinrich (1957: 22), an anthropologist who worked primarily in Tetlin,

thought the social structure, while under stress, was “very much alive” and “barring some drastic, unforeseeable impetus toward acculturation, that, in gradually altering form, the ‘old ways’ will have considerable influence for quite some time to come.”

In the summer of 1960, anthropologists Frederica de Laguna and Catharine McClellan made their first trip to the upper Tanana. McClellan was a student of de Laguna’s who had begun a lifelong association with Tutchone in the Yukon Territory beginning in the 1940s. In 1954 she and de Laguna began working with Ahtna elders to document their traditional culture. Eight years later, in 1968, they were joined by another of de Laguna’s students Marie-Françoise Guédon. Neither de Laguna nor McClellan ever published anything on upper Tanana culture (1960a), but they left copious notes as well as what they called “circumstances,” or the setting. On their first day in Tanacross, for example, de Laguna wrote they were escorted around the village by Charlie James, who took them to Joe Joseph’s house where they met Joe’s wife Salina and her brother the Reverend David Paul. Later that day they met Annie Moses, and de Laguna took a photograph of Charlie holding a bear spear.

When de Laguna and McClellan arrived in 1960, much of the hunting culture was gone. Almost all the remote settlements had been abandoned as people relocated to live close to the Alaska Highway. They led relatively sedentary lives while working seasonal jobs, such as fighting forest fires in the summer. The highway offered Dene access to all parts of Alaska and brought influences from every direction of the country as tourists and new settlers flocked to the area. Christian missionaries made further inroads, and children attended school throughout much of the year. And alcohol had taken a toll to the point that some people, to get away from the drinking, had moved out of Tanacross and established the community of Dot Lake. At the same time, all the elders, and

many of the older children, who had not been sent away, spoke their language, held traditional beliefs, and practiced the potlatch.

In 1968 de Laguna brought Guédon on a visit to Tetlin to introduce her to the community. Guédon returned to the village a year later and stayed to collect information for her dissertation, “People of Tetlin, Why Are You Singing” (Guédon 1974), which became a primary source of information on upper Tanana culture. While “almost completely settled,” Guédon thought Upper Tanana Dene had “preserved” elements of their traditional culture and were involved in a culture revival based on what Dene were calling the “Indian way” (Guédon 1974: 19). Although she worked primarily in Tetlin, Guédon visited Tanacross and Northway, and in 2005 published *Le rêve et la forêt: Histories de chamanes nabesna*, about Dene shamanism.

Also in the 1960s, anthropologist Mertie Baggen began working with various elders from different communities on the middle and upper Tanana to document their traditional culture, but she was killed in an automobile accident before she could publish her findings. Mertie interviewed Myrtle Wright, who had served alongside her husband the Reverend Arthur Wright in Tanacross in the early 1920s. Mrs. Wright described a potlatch at Tanacross given by Big Frank and told Mertie that her husband had once written an article highly critical of the potlatch but later had a change of heart. Mertie’s archival collection contains her fieldnotes and manuscript, which in 1974 were organized and summarized by Elizabeth Andrews into a paper called “A Partial Compilation of the Fieldnotes of Mertie Baggen, with an Emphasis on the Salchaket Band of the Middle Tanana.” Eventually Elizabeth wrote her master’s thesis “Salcha: An Athapaskan Band of the Tanana River and Its Culture” (1975), based in part on Baggen’s notes.

In the early 1970s, Roger Pitts and Ramon Vitt, students from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, conducted research for their

master’s theses. In “The Changing Settlement Patterns and Housing Types of the Upper Tanana Indians,” Pitts (1972) traced changes in Upper Tanana settlement patterns and housing types and described how fifty years of colonialism had profoundly affected the people as they shifted from an itinerant to more sedentary way of life. In “Hunting Practices of the Upper Tanana Athapaskans,” Vitt (1971) set out to reconstruct the “hunting culture” and document subsequent changes that had occurred through 1970. He thought the traditional hunting culture had pretty much disappeared because fewer young men were active hunters, and reliance had grown on jobs and government support. He concluded that the Upper Tanana Athabascans had “abandoned their individuality and their independence for dependence on the non-native and his economic-based world and today they exist between two cultures, not really belonging to either one” (188).

Almost thirty years later, anthropologist Norm Easton (2001) wrote about the intergenerational differences between the younger and older generations of Dene, primarily along the Alaska-Canada border in the communities of Northway, Alaska, and Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory. According to Easton, the generation born prior to the mid-1950s had a culturally cohesive traditional upbringing with a life-long participation in the hunting economy. Succeeding generations, on the other hand, are rooted in the non-Native system of schools and electronic media and are more reliant on wage labor or social assistance. In 2021 Easton published *An Ethnohistory of the Chisana River Basin*, which in many respects is a companion piece to this volume. In his conclusion, Easton (2021: 114) wrote that through the colonial process of separating people from the land there has been a “serious erosion of contemporary knowledge of the area’s history, use and potential among many younger Dene,” yet attachment to the land remains strong. He goes on to say that

much of modern Dene culture, cloaked as it is in “homeboy fashions, the English language, use of automobiles and hip-hop music, is invisible to the casual outsider. Yet despite the changes it is still there and remains unalterably Dineh in nature” (114).

Starting in the early 1980s, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game’s Division of Subsistence began research in many of the upper Tanana communities (Andersen and Jennings 2001; Case 1986; Halpin 1987; Koskey 2006, 2007; Marcotte 1989; Marcotte, Wheeler, and Alexander 1992; Martin 1983). The division’s emphasis was on describing the subsistence economy of each community and quantifying the amount of wildlife resources consumed by residents. The question was, how much had outside influences, particularly the capitalist system and wage labor, altered traditional hunting and fishing activities and how much did animal, fish, and plant resources continue to add to local economies? Based on household surveys and analysis of quantitative data, the research found that, despite increased access to grocery stores, upper Tanana Dene continue to maintain a close connection to their homeland and harvest an abundance of wild foods, particularly moose, whitefish, and berries.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book is composed of eleven chapters and four appendices. The first eight chapters, based on interviews with Dene elders from published and unpublished sources, are about traditional Dene culture as practiced from 1880 to 1940. During that time, Upper Tanana Dene went from living entirely from the land

and moving with the seasons to living in permanent communities. The last three chapters are about the colonial processes that impinged on Dene, forcing them off the land and into the communities they occupy today. The four appendices include a description of Dene culture by Paul Kirsteatter; a description, with maps, of traditional band territories and the history of select Upper Tanana communities; a selection of documents relating to the fur trade; and census data.

The information presented in this book is drawn from both informant interviews conducted by the author and from other interviews conducted in different times by different interviewees. Interviews were conducted in both Dene and English, and those conducted in Dene were transcribed and then translated with the help of fluent Dene speakers. When interviewed, the elders often assumed a certain familiarity with local history and culture. For this reason, I have provided some contextual information from different sources, including the work of other anthropologists and historians. This information is intended to augment the context and chronology necessary to weave together the many Dene voices into a cohesive statement of their history. I have not edited the interviews except to add information for clarity. Words enclosed in square brackets were added by the interviewer, editor, or translator to provide additional information or clarification. While many of the elders were not completely fluent in English, their language has a distinctive rhythm and quality, and their facility with language is reflected in their emphatic statements. They knew what they wanted to say to their children, grandchildren, and future generations.