

*International standards on
a local scale:*
Building the Ahtna digital linguistic
and ethnographic archive

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Today's goals

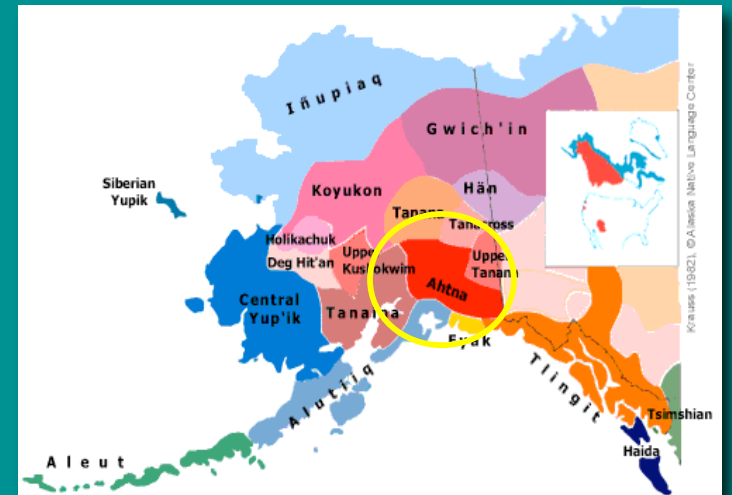
- To describe the development of *C'ek'aedi Hwnax*, Alaska's first digital language archive to be
 - Indigenously-administered and
 - OLAC-compliant
- What's ahead:
 - Who we are
 - The need for a local archive
 - Building the archive
 - Future plans
 - Conclusions

Who we are



The Ahtna community

- 8 modern villages in Copper and Upper Susitna River valleys of southcentral Alaska
- One of 11 Athabascan-speaking groups in Alaska
- ~30 elderly speakers, all bilingual with English
- Strong interest in cultural and linguistic preservation



Chief Ben Neely
and Secondchief
Fred Ewan



The Ahtna Heritage Foundation

- Non-profit corporation serving 8 Ahtna villages



- Mission statement:

“to strengthen our people by **preserving and promoting the Ahtna culture** and supporting education”

- Natural fit for administering an archive

Size of the corpus

- Ahtna Heritage Fndtn holdings
- Alaska Native Language Archive collection (U. AK)
- 14(h)1: Interviews about historic/cemetery sites, AK Native Claims Settlement Act
- OTH-Backscatter: Interviews for potential Air Force research facility
- Copper River Native Assoc.
- Chickaloon Village collection
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Ahtna individuals



The need for a local archive



Need:

Increased local access to materials

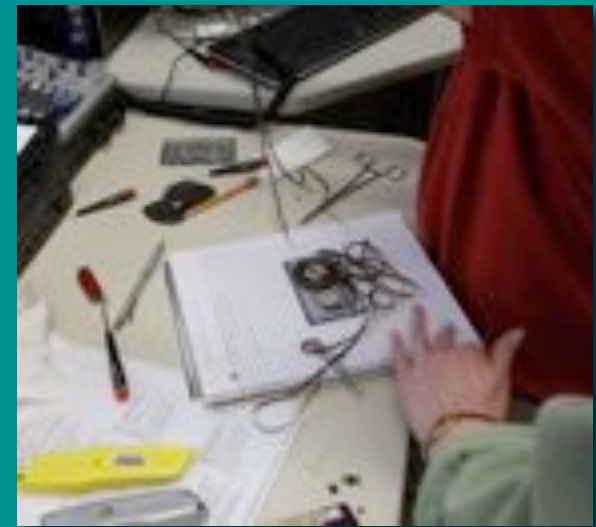
- 2009: 11 village meetings voicing
 - awareness of existence of recordings
 - uncertainty over who owns them, how to gain access
 - **desire for access to records of our own history**



Need:

To protect fragile recordings

- Digitization of tapes agreed to be **of top priority**
- Awareness of
 - vulnerability of media
 - irreplaceability of contents

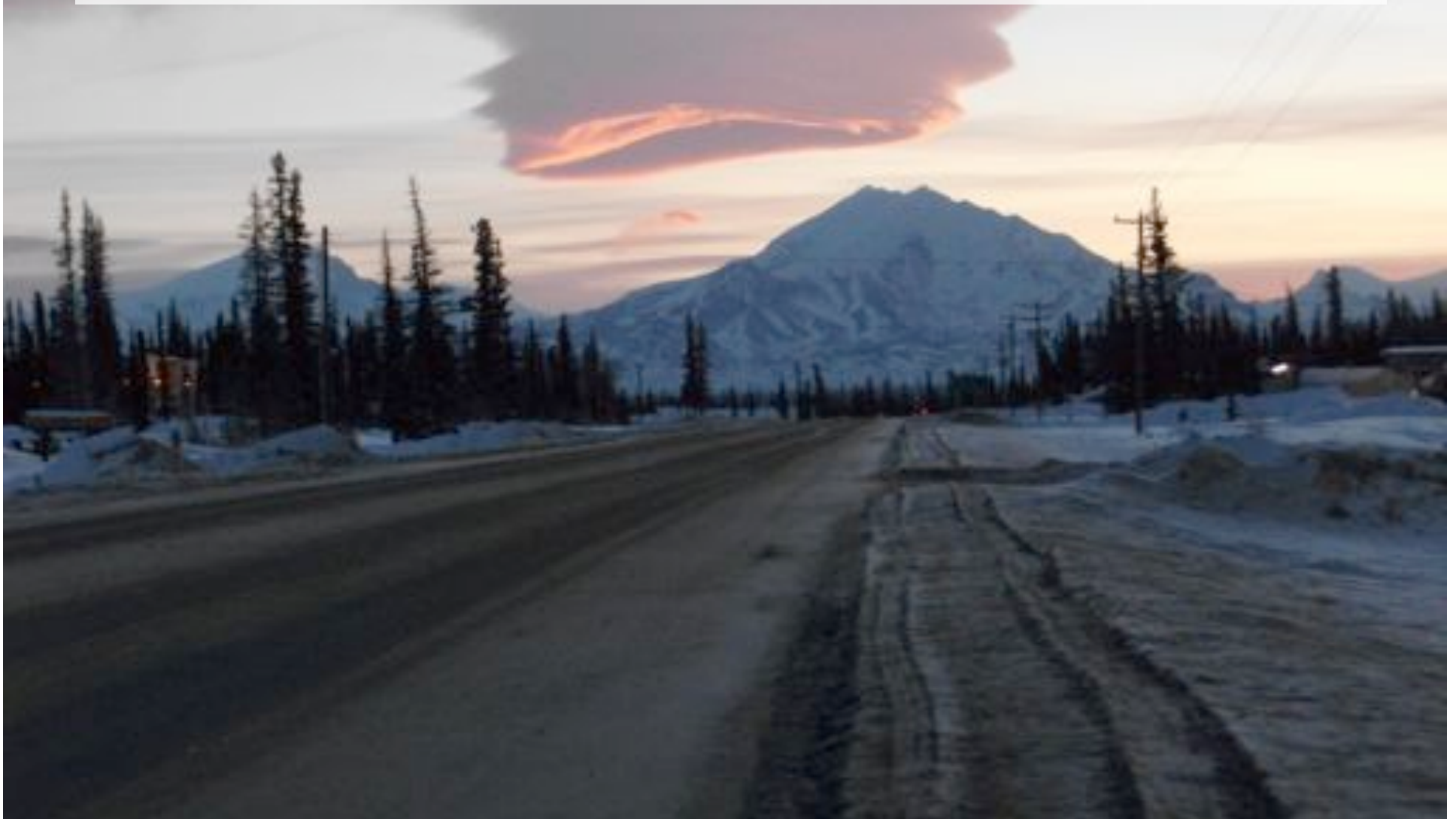


Need: To involve the Elders



- Traditional transmission of knowledge
- Protocols on who has access to knowledge
 - e.g. songs for certain villages, certain people
- Questions of how to treat these protocols
 - We will need to build new policies: intersection of old and new
- Others' policies on this have not yet been seen

Building the *C'ek'aedi Hwnax* Archive



Funding



- Spring 2009:
 - Applied to **Institute of Museum and Library Services** Native American Library Services Enhancement Grant
- Fall 2009:
 - Awarded US\$**149,839** over two years
 - Plus US\$**39,063** in cost sharing from AHF, UAF, Berez consultant time
- Work began early 2010

Facility + Equipment

- Ahtna Cultural Center, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
- Professional-quality digitization suite
 - A-D converter
 - Dual cassette deck
 - VHS and video converter
 - Monitors, control center, rack with power
 - 2TB RAID storage
 - Fire-proof cabinet for tape storage
- Based on equipment at Kaipuleohone Archive (UHM)



Involvement of Elders



- Elders' Tea
- “Seal of approval”
 - Others more likely to deposit their collections too
- Enriching descriptive metadata during visits
- Chose name for the facility and the archive

Involvement of Elders

“C’ek’aedi Hwnax” [c’ε’k’æti nax]

c’e- k’ae -di hwnax

INDEF.POSS- in; cavity -NOM house

‘things-the-deceased-leave-behind house’ =

‘Legacy House’



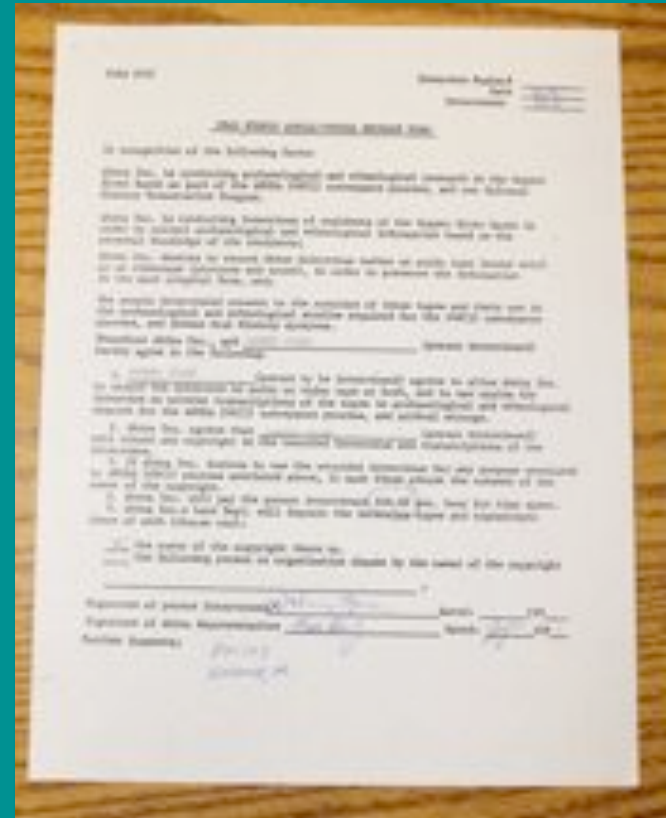
Training

- Outside consultant (from University of Hawai'i) to train staff in
 - building database
 - digitization procedures
 - tape curation
 - metadata collection



Policies

- Acquisition policies
- General access policies
 - Ahtna people
 - Non-Ahtna people
 - Researchers
- Still in development:
 - More specific clan & family ownership issues



Current collection

- To date: 17,000+ minutes digitized, including:
 - AHF Collection
 - 14(h)1
 - OTH-Backscatter
 - ANLA Collection
 - Several small private collections
 - Copper River Native Association
- Coming in future:
 - Chickaloon Village, BIA, other private collections



MOA with ANLA, Fairbanks

- Sharing of entire Ahtna collection
- “Gray storage” backup in perpetuity
- Decisions about access to Ahtna collection turned over to C’ek’aedi Hwnax



Future plans



Increased access



- Public workstation in the Cultural Center in summer 2011
 - Browse catalog, listen to recordings
- Plans to build networked workstations in 8 Ahtna villages by 2013
 - Allow widespread access across Ahtna territory
 - Integrating a ‘public comments’ feature to enrich descriptive metadata
- Build on contents of recordings to further revitalization of Ahtna language

Network of archives in AK



Conclusions



Conclusions

- Native language archiving in Alaska has traditionally been a task of universities
 - Better access to know-how
 - Better access to technology
 - Better access to funding
- Now:
 - Know-how is more accessible
 - Technology is cheaper
 - Funding is more widespread

Conclusions

Archives that are **administered locally** can better **mobilize language materials** for use in the home community... while still benefiting from a **partnership with the academic sphere** for data back-up, technical training, and networking.

Conclusions

- It is possible to create a language archive that
 - increases ownership of and access to language
 - is housed and run locally
 - addresses local concerns
 - meets international standards
 - builds partnerships
 - is sustainable
- And to do it in **about a year**



Conclusions

- If you are interested in talking to us about **how your community might build a similar archive**, please contact us:
- Karen Linnell:
ahtnaheritage.klinnell@gmail.com
- Andrea Berez:
andrea.berez@gmail.com

Xona. Tsin'aen sigu!

Tsin'aen to the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the Ahtna Heritage Foundation.

