

AN ESKIMO COMMUNITY AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

JAMES W. VANSTONE

In recent years anthropologists writing on community study methods have pointed out that few such studies attempt to describe and analyze in detail the interrelations of a community with its social-cultural environment (Steward, 1950; Arensberg, 1954; Redfield, 1956). In addition, Steward has stressed the fact that the historical approach has been infrequently used in community studies and when it is, rarely covers more than a few years of the immediate past. "The result is that analysis of function tends to be predominantly synchronic and lacks insights into basic trends that the historical method might give" (1950, p. 24).

Two recent papers have attempted to deal with the problems mentioned above. Opler outlines the way in which Senapur, a village in north central India, has been interacting constantly with the outside world for at least the past two hundred years and suggests that it is "the pattern of outside contact rather than the fact of outside contact that is altered" (1956, p. 9). In concluding his paper, he writes, "An attempt has been made in this paper to see an Indian village in terms of its extensions, and as part of larger units organized on social organizational, political, caste or religious grounds. The involvement of Senapur villagers with organizations, places and events outside of the village is considerable and it seems that this has been the case for a very long time. Yet it has not interfered with the separate identity and cohesiveness of the community, which in some respects is more marked than before" (1956, p. 10).

Smith and Reyes have considered the "changes over time in the interrelations of one community with the world outside, and Opler's (1956) proposition that the unity and identity of a community as well as its extensions form part of the same process" (1957, p. 464). In studying culture change at the community level, they are interested not only in determining the changes over time in the community's connections with the outside world, but also in establishing which of these changes affect, or have affected, individuals, groups, and the community as a whole (1957, p. 464).

The unit of study for Smith and Reyes is the Japanese agricultural community of Kurusu and their method of categorizing the factors that identify and unify the community as well as interrelate it with its social-cultural environment is described as follows:

"There are activities and organizations (in the community) which:

- 1) Internally define Kurusu as a unit, giving its residents a sense of community;
- 2) Place Kurusu within a network or hierarchy of interrelationships, in which Kurusu is externally defined as a unit by some outside agency or organization;

- 3) Involve individuals and groups in Kurusu with individuals and groups outside the community, and in which Kurusu is not defined as a unit;
- 4) Have the potential for increasing the scale of Kurusu's world, but which are means for contact rather than contact itself" (1957, p. 465).

The time perspective used by Smith and Reyes includes the twenty-five years between 1930 and 1955. Within this time span they seek to determine whether a particular identifier or interrelation has a) vanished, b) declined in importance, c) remained unchanged or d) increased in importance or been newly introduced (1957, p. 465).

The purpose of the present paper is to place in historical perspective the interrelations of one community with the outside world using the same method of categorization as that employed by Smith and Reyes and keeping in mind Opler's comments concerning possible changes in the pattern of outside contact. The community under consideration is the Eskimo village of Point Hope in northwest Alaska studied by the author in 1955 and 1956.¹

Point Hope, a community of approximately 250 individuals, is located along the northwest coast of Alaska midway between the larger towns of Kotzebue and Point Barrow. The inhabitants of Point Hope, like those of other villages along the arctic coast, are largely dependent upon the hunting of sea mammals for their subsistence. The area around the village is sparsely settled, the nearest communities being fifty miles to the south and one hundred miles to the north.

The time perspective to be used in considering community interrelations at Point Hope spans the fifty-six years between 1900 and 1956. In dealing with interrelations that are no longer a part of the culture, the data used have been obtained from historical records, an ethnographic report by Rainey (1947), and interviews with elderly village inhabitants.

I

In order to have a base from which to consider community interrelations at Point Hope, we are interested in establishing the fact that community cohesiveness exists. Of the various activities and associations that characterize Point Hope and provide a sense of community feeling, the following fifty-six year trends can be recognized:

- 1) Vanished: large extended families as the most important unit of the social structure; yearly cycle of ceremonies held in the *qalegi* or men's house; aboriginal warfare;

¹The Point Hope study was supported by the Arctic Aero-medical Laboratory, Ladd Air Force Base, Alaska, under contract number AF 41(657)-32, project number 7-7957-4, and by the University of Alaska. The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Mr. Wendell Oswalt, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, who read the manuscript and made many helpful suggestions.

- 2) *Declining*: yearly subsistence round; village endogamy;
- 3) *Unchanged*: the church; bond of common residence;
- 4) *Increasing or new*: None.

The powerful extended families that once characterized Point Hope community life have long since been replaced by small conjugal units, usually composed of a man, his wife, their children, and perhaps one or two dependent relatives. Although very little detailed information can be obtained about the old extended families, it appears that their relationships with one another were often characterized by feuds and bitter rivalries (Rainey, 1947, pp. 240-242). Nevertheless, communal solidarity apparently transcended these bitter family feuds, probably because of the bond of common residence, village endogamy, and the cooperative nature of the subsistence activities. However, since each extended family was a closely knit, almost independent, social unit, it is likely that their disappearance has weakened family-centered loyalties and brought about a strengthening of community ties.

Although warfare with neighboring groups had probably disappeared before 1900, it can be considered as having been an important factor in community cohesiveness because it united the community against a common enemy.

The annual cycle of ceremonies in the *qalegi*, which was closely connected with the subsistence cycle, has been described in detail by Rainey (1947). It is sufficient to point out here that its value as a unifying force in the community has not been completely lost since disconnected remnants of the cycle have been combined and are now performed as part of a week-long Christmas program that is one of the most important yearly functions involving the entire community.

The yearly subsistence round, though listed as declining, is still the most vital single force in the community and probably the most important factor in affirming village unity and identity. The hunting of sea mammals and other food-getting activities involves the community in a cycle of cooperative endeavor to which village life has been geared for centuries; the spring whale hunt in particular requires the cooperative effort of everyone in the village. The people are proud of their position as one of the few whaling communities along the arctic coast and also of the fact that hunting in general is better than in most other places. All villagers are agreed that Point Hope is "a good place to live." Since the people are fully dependent upon hunting for the bulk of their food supply, the subsistence cycle is of the greatest significance for community well being. Although an increasing amount of cash is being earned by villagers through the employment outside the village during the summer months, this by no means takes the place of other subsistence activities. However, it does take some of the uncertainty out of a subsistence economy and at the same time makes it possible for the villagers to enjoy some of the luxuries with which they have become familiar through contact with European and American culture.

The subsistence cycle, as a unifying system in the community, appears to be in no immediate danger of disintegration. However, if a time should come when summer employment no longer satisfies the need for a cash income, a movement of people from the village to urban centers can be expected. Predominant wage work and the purchase of food would not be compatible with village life.

The Protestant Episcopal Church established a mission at Point Hope in 1890 and has continued to be the only church in the community up to the present time. More than sixty years of Christian teaching has all but obliterated the body of aboriginal religious and supernatural beliefs that helped the pre-contact Point Hoper to relate to his natural surroundings and solve some of the problems presented by a difficult environment. Point Hope lacks the religious factionalism that characterizes many Alaskan villages and there can be no doubt but that homogeneity in religious faith has been an important factor in maintaining village unity.

In summary, it will be noted that while within the past fifty-six years there has been nothing new emerge to unify Point Hope and none of the existing unifying forces are increasing, nevertheless the continued importance of the seasonal cycle of subsistence activities together with other activities and associations involving the entire village suggests that the community still has a strong sense of unity despite the influx of new ideas and the development of outside interests.

II

There are a number of important interrelations in which Point Hope is externally defined as a unit by some outside agency. The fifty-six year trends to be noted in this regard are as follows:

- 1) *Vanished*: reindeer herding;
- 2) *Declining*: none;
- 3) *Unchanged*: the church;
- 4) *Increasing or new*: the store; post office; school; National Guard; formal community organization; voting precinct; health services; welfare services.

The reindeer herding program and the government school represented Point Hope's first intensive contact with the United States government; both institutions were established in the village during the last decade of the 19th century. The original importation of reindeer into Alaska was supposed to be for the benefit of the Eskimo population. Lapp herders were brought from northern Norway to teach the people the proper methods for caring for the herds. The project was under the direction of the Bureau of Education and although there was a herd at Point Hope until 1948, the attempt to make reindeer herders out of the Alaskan Eskimos was largely unsuccessful, mainly because they are a sedentary people who follow a definite cycle of hunting and fishing activities quite foreign to the nomadic routine of close herding.

However, reindeer herding was important in the history of Point Hope's contact with government agencies. The deer were owned by a joint stock company of Eskimos, herders were trained outside the village and government officials visited the community. The Bureau of Education was the first outside agency to define Point Hope as a unit.

Although the first Episcopal missionary at Point Hope maintained a school from the time of his arrival, a government school building was not constructed until 1904 and the Bureau of Education did not assume full control until 1924; in 1931 administrative control was transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Point Hope school taught grades one through six until 1953 when the seventh and eighth grades were added. With the exception of the Episcopal priest and his wife, the school teachers are the only permanent white residents in the village and because they are the representatives of the United States government and practically the only means of contact between the people and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, they have a considerable amount of influence. The Point Hope school has been an important means of contact for the villagers for many years. Through it, village young people learn to read and write English, increase their geographical knowledge, and become familiar with many aspects of the outside world. Thus its influence on the village increases year by year. Since 1953 it has been possible to complete high school entrance requirements in the village and as a result, more young people express interest in attending the Bureau of Indian Affairs high school at Mt. Edgecumbe in southeastern Alaska. Through improved contacts with the outside world, young people are developing interests centered outside the village. An opportunity to travel away from the community and see some of the things they have read about in magazines and heard about over the radio, has great appeal. However, increased high school attendance raises problems concerning the future of the community. It is too early to be able to predict what percentage of graduates will be returning to the village and what problems of adjustment they will have to make. It seems likely, however, that many Mt. Edgecumbe graduates will not return, unless there is no alternative, since the trades taught at the Bureau of Indian Affairs high school are not trades that can be practiced in the village. It is therefore probable that as more young people leave the village to complete their education and become more oriented toward a money economy, they will become correspondingly disoriented from community subsistence activities and will seek economic opportunities away from the village.

Smith and Reyes have pointed out an interesting community reaction to some of the external definitions of Kurusu as a unit. "Community members have responded to several of them very much as they do in situations and on occasions they themselves have defined the community as a unit" (1957, p. 467). A similar sense of community shown at Point Hope with respect to the formal community organization, the church, and, to a lesser extent, the school.

In 1920 the Episcopal Church organized a village council to control

the local affairs of the village and in 1940, when the village was chartered as a corporation of the United States, the council came under the general direction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1956, the Point Hope village council consisted of eleven members who were elected by the villagers for three year terms. The Point Hope council is more genuinely operative than in many Alaskan villages though it lacks the means of enforcing its decisions. Also, the general absence under aboriginal conditions of any group or organization having disciplinary powers has made it difficult for the council to become established as a functioning regulatory group appropriate to the new culture. Its effectiveness depends heavily on the prestige of its members and the system of elections has generally assured that individuals properly qualified have held the positions. In this way it has been possible for the villagers to express in a formal manner a factor of village influence and control that is inherent in Eskimo culture. The council acts for the village in official dealings with outside agencies and is the outward expression of communal solidarity. It is in charge of many social functions involving the entire community and its actions are nearly always a true reflection of community attitudes.

The function of the church in village life has already been discussed and we have seen how it is involved in establishing a sense of community. A certain aspect of this is demonstrated by the fact that resentment against the community is often taken out on the church. That is, people who have something against the village as a whole will find that about the only action they can take to show their indignation or disapproval is to stop attending church; they boycott the one socially approved activity in which nearly all the community takes part. The church and school buildings, though constructed by outside agencies for purposes essentially foreign to Point Hope culture, are the true focal point of village activities today. The school is available for council meetings, films, dances and the meetings of all village organizations; the parish hall of the Episcopal Church is available for similar functions and is the center of important community activities at Christmas and Thanksgiving. As such, they are important factors in maintaining a sense of community.

III

The largest number of interrelations of Point Hope with the outside world involve individuals and groups in Point Hope with individuals and groups outside the community but in which Point Hope is not defined as a unit. The fifty-six year trends observable are as follows:

- 1) *Vanished*: trading expeditions; trading partners; commercial whaling;
- 2) *Declining*: trapping; visiting during the whaling season; military service;
- 3) *Unchanged*: none;
- 4) *Increasing or new*: summer employment outside the village;

extra-community ties resulting from exogamy; contacts with the American legal system; village organizations (PTA, Women's Club, Mother's Club, Girl Scouts, Health Council, etc.); newspapers and magazines; American holidays; American games and entertainment; unemployment compensation; technological devices; local crafts; modern transportation; modern communications.

Some of these factors involving community interrelations will be discussed in more detail later, but a more complete treatment of two of them here will show how they differ from the interrelations previously discussed. The handling of furs and products of local manufacture by the village store is illustrative of the way in which a local activity can relate a community to the outside world. The Point Hope store is not operated by a trader resident in the village but is affiliated with the Alaska Native Industries Cooperative Association, a non-profit cooperative purchasing agency in Seattle operated through the Department of the Interior. It has been listed as involving an interrelation in which Point Hope is externally defined by an outside agency. The village store handles furs which it disposes of through ANICA or through independent Seattle fur buyers. The villagers bring their seal skins, fox pelts or polar bear skins to the store which takes them on consignment, two-thirds of the price being paid in store credit to the seller at the time of the sale. The store then ships the furs to the buyer in Seattle and when that transaction is complete, the original seller receives the remaining third of the sale price. With the exception of polar bear skins, the store does not do as large a business in furs as it did fifteen or twenty years ago when the price of fox pelts was high. However, the villagers are vitally interested in fluctuating fur prices and information from Seattle fur buyers is posted in the store where it can be read by everyone.

A similar situation exists with regard to products of local manufacture. The store buys whalebone masks, ivory carvings and baleen baskets on consignment from the villagers and ships them to the Alaska Native Arts and Crafts Association in Juneau which disposes of them to retail merchants. The individual craftsman receives two-thirds of the selling price at once and the other third, minus two percent handling charge, when the item is sold to the retailer. The sale of products of local manufacture is on the increase and a larger number of villagers are finding it worth while to do ivory and bone carving. This development of the market for curios is tied in with the general development of the tourist industry in Alaska, a factor which is certain to be of importance in future community contacts with the outside world.

A significant type of interaction with the outside world is that involving the adoption of new technological equipment. Perhaps the most obvious aspects of change in Point Hope culture pertain to technology and have resulted in the almost complete abandonment of the traditional Eskimo material culture. Nearly all the tools and weapons now in use in the village are manufactured rather than home made

and must be purchased with cash. Even the few that are made in the village require some material in their manufacture that must be purchased. Aboriginal methods and concepts have been rapidly replaced by the most recent 20th century methods and concepts, and the people of Point Hope, far from regarding such change suspiciously, have been quick to recognize the advantages of such efficient new techniques and instruments. However, the Point Hoper, like his counterpart in the Japanese agricultural community of Kurusu, finds his "dependence on outside sources of supply and the necessity for earning enough cash to meet the costs of fuel and parts increasingly bind him to a world over which he has less and less control" (Smith and Reyes, 1957, p. 470).

IV

Wilson and Wilson, in their discussion of the boundaries of society, point out that "the extent of conscious relations, contemporary and historical, is the extent of a particular society" (1954, p. 24). Since all contemporary societies overlap and shade into one another, each one must have a point of reference before it can be defined. Thus if we speak of Point Hope society, we are referring to "all the relations directly realized" by the people of Point Hope (1954, p. 25). Within societies are "areas and periods of common life of more or less intensity" which are called communities (1954, p. 30). Thus the Point Hope community, with its more intense relationships, is differentiated from the extra-communal contacts that are the less intense relationships of Point Hope society.

The same authors have defined the scale of a society as being "the number of people in relation and the intensity of those relations" (1954, p. 25), and we have seen the various ways in which Point Hope's scale has been increased over a fifty-six year period not only because more people are in conscious relations with one another, but also because relations between Alaska and the outside world are more intense than they were. There are certain factors of modern Point Hope life that have the potential for increasing the scale of Point Hope's world and are the means of contact. These factors for increasing the scale of the community are, significantly, all on the increase and they all automatically relate the community with the outside world, give access to urban ways and generally break down the community's isolation. Increasing mass communication media include magazines and newspapers, postal service, mail order catalogues, radio, telegraph, motion pictures and books. The introduction and increasing development of air transportation in northwest Alaska has been perhaps the most significant factor for increasing the scale of the community and it is closely related to many of the interrelations previously discussed. It is important to realize, however, that closer proximity to urban centers the familiarity with urban ways have not resulted, to an appreciable extent, in the urbanization of the community. Many features of community life, as we have seen, give Point Hope residents a sense of community and reinforce traditional community values.

V

In discussing the relations of Senapur with the outside world, Opler has pointed out that it is possible to emphasize interaction "without even raising the question of economic self-sufficiency, without pointing out that Senapur today draws upon the outside market for cloth, many tools, dyes, kitchen utensils, matches and kerosene, among other things" (1956, p. 8). He further stresses the fact that "the basic articulations of Senapur and Senapur people with other communities and far-flung places . . . is not a recent development or a consequence of modern communications and transportation" (1956, pp. 8-9). In order to stress the usefulness of these ideas as they concern Point Hope's relations with the outside world, five aspects of community interaction that have been mentioned previously will be discussed in some detail. These are trading expeditions, the concept of trading partners, visiting during the whaling season, warfare, and extra-community ties resulting from exogamy. All of these are aspects of non-material culture and all have considerable historical depth.

During the summers, as recently as fifty years ago, many Point Hope families traveled by boat along the coast southeast to a trading center at Hotham Inlet in Kotzebue Sound near the present town of Kotzebue, or northeast to the mouth of the Utukok River. At Hotham Inlet they traded with inland Eskimo from the Noatak, Kobuk and Selawik rivers as well as other coastal peoples from Wales, the Diomed Islands, Port Clarence and East Cape, Siberia. The coastal people traded seal oil, whale oil, seal and walrus hides and ivory to the inland people for furs, dried fish, jade and other inland products. A lively trade in ammunition, rifles, glass beads, tea, lead, drilling, tobacco and alcoholic beverages was also carried out (Rainey, 1947, pp. 267-68; Porter, 1893, p. 137). At the mouth of the Utukok, the Point Hope people carried on a similar trade with coastal and inland Eskimo of Northwest Alaska.

Closely connected with summer trading expeditions, and an important social relationship involving adult men, was the partner concept. In aboriginal times this term was used to identify the relationship between two individuals in different villages who were partners for purposes of trade. Thus if Point Hope people were trading with an inland group at Kotzebue, or with another coastal village, it would be advantageous for a person to have a trading partner both to trade with and to offer protection if any ill feeling developed between members of the two villages. If, for example, a Point Hope man should have sexual relations with a woman at Noatak, the child that resulted would often be considered as a partner of its father's children at Point Hope. This is one way in which the inter-village partner relationship could be established and the kinship term for children so related was formerly an important one. The partner concept of the type just described as well as the trading expeditions to Kotzebue and the mouth of the Utukok have long since disappeared. However, they represented

an early manifestation of community interaction and were an important aspect of Point Hope life, economically as well as socially.

Although interaction with neighboring as well as far-flung peoples was common for the late 19th and early 20th century Point Hoper, these relationships were by no means always peaceful and were often carried out under circumstances of mutual animosity and distrust that occasionally threatened to erupt into open warfare. It is probable, as we have previously mentioned, that actual warfare had disappeared by the beginning of the 20th century. However, late 19th century observers reported that Point Hopers claimed they once exercised control over much of the country between Kotzebue Sound and Icy Cape. In the latter part of the 18th century, according to community tradition, the people from around Noatak began encroaching on Point Hope territory and it wasn't long until they had occupied the southern part of the Point Hope region as far north as Kivalina. One summer, about the year 1880, a great land and sea fight reportedly took place between Point Hope and Noatak Eskimos just below Cape Seppings. The Point Hope people were defeated and forced to withdraw from all that part of the country. So badly were they defeated that they lost most of their good hunters and suffered greatly from famine (Wells, 1890, pp. 10-11). Wars of this kind have taken on an almost legendary character in the minds of the Point Hopers and though the Eskimos are generally a peaceful people, there can be no doubt but that such battles actually did take place. It also seems certain that the people of Point Hope either controlled or were at least thoroughly familiar with a large area in all directions from the village and resented the intrusion of neighboring groups. Warfare has been previously listed as a factor in establishing and maintaining a sense of community and although never of major importance in Point Hope culture, did much to increase awareness of neighboring peoples.

Since Point Hope is the best whaling location along the northwest coast of Alaska, it has long been common for people from the neighboring village of Kivalina as well as more distant villages such as Kotzebue, Noatak, Point Lay and Point Barrow take part in the hunt and the ceremonies that follow the end of the whaling season. This custom is less common today than it was fifty years ago but people still come to the village to visit friends and relatives at that time. Toward the end of the 19th century, when commercial whaling offered employment to people from the coastal villages, large numbers of coastal and even some inland Eskimos camped near Point Hope to assist in the commercial whaling operations. A certain amount of trade was carried on and a great football game was played each spring following the whaling feast or *nulukatuk*. The playing field extended as much as ten miles along the beach and the game, which more closely resembles soccer than it does American football, usually continued for several days. The visiting Eskimos often far outnumbered the Point Hope people and there were often bitter fights that resulted in serious injuries. The great players of that period are still remembered and talked about in the village (Rainey, 1947, p. 256).

Extra-community ties resulting from exogamy are perhaps less important historically than those resulting from the types of contact mentioned above. Under aboriginal circumstances, village endogamy prevailed and it has only been within the past ten to fifteen years that Point Hoppers have looked outside the community for their marriage partners. However, the lines of communication that have been opened by this means are significant and as more Point Hoppers leave the community for varying lengths of time, either for purposes of employment or to go to school, exogamous marriages will increase and become of greater importance as a factor for interaction with the outside world. In recent years, the marriage of several Point Hope girls to white men has extended kinship ties to the continental United States.

CONCLUSIONS

Smith and Reyes have suggested "that change at the community level cannot be understood without an understanding of the role of agencies outside the community, for it is our impression that purely internal change unrelated to outside factors is a relatively rare phenomenon" (1957, p. 471). Both Opler and Smith and Reyes have stressed the fact that if we are to comprehend the nature of communities we must give careful attention to the pattern of the interactions of such groups with the world around them. The data presented here sustain these views and have shown that the Eskimo village of Point Hope, though geographically more isolated than either Senapur or Kurusu, has a complex network of inter-relations which greatly influence nearly every phase of community life. Although the community has been successful in maintaining its unity and identity, it is clear that a true understanding of the functioning of Point Hope culture cannot be achieved without reference to its relations with the outside world.

Attention has been focused upon Opler's comments concerning the changing pattern of outside contact. It has been shown that important contacts between Point Hope and other communities have been long established and are not a recent development nor are they the results of modern systems of communication and transportation. By placing community interaction in historical perspective, it has been possible to see clearly the changing pattern of contact and to appreciate the factors responsible for Point Hope's steady increase in scale.

Bibliography

- Arensburg, C.
1954 "The Community Study Method." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 60, pp. 109-124. Chicago.
- Opler, M. E.
1956 "The Extensions in an Indian Village." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, pp. 5-10. Ann Arbor.
- Porter, R. P.
1893 *Report on Population and Resources of Alaska at the 11th Census*. Washington.
- Rainey, F. G.
1947 "The Whale Hunters of Tigara." *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 41, pt. 2. New York.
- Redfield, R.
1956 *Peasant Society and Culture*. Chicago.
- Smith, R. J. and E. P. Reyes
1957 "Community Interrelations with the Outside World: The Case of a Japanese Agricultural Community." *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 463-472. Menasha.
- Steward, J. H.
1950 *Area Research: Concepts and Methods*. Social Science Research Council. New York.
- Wells, R.
1890 "English-Eskimo and Eskimo-English Vocabularies." *Bureau of Education Circular of Information*, No. 2. Washington.
- Wilson, G. and M. Wilson
1954 *The Analysis of Social Change*. Cleveland.
- James W. VanStone
Cleveland, Ohio