

## INTRODUCTION

My artifact is a collection of documents from the Alaska Resident Fishermen's Union. The collection consists of one letter from Secretary John Edlmann as well as nine pages of Kenai resident signatures from the summer of 1934. The Alaska Resident Fishermen's Union requested that the people of Kenai record the amount of money they had earned fishing over the summer. Additionally, 81 personal statements from the heads of Kenai families are included, 79 of the 81 signed (Kenai Historical Society 435).

This project explores the founding of Kenai, Alaska and the development of the fishing industry on the Kenai Peninsula. Through examination of the Union's documents, I found the personal statements very fascinating, as each entry has its own voice. This is the reason I chose to analyze my artifact through the scope of register (variations of language applied to different circumstances). It is interesting to consider how the Peninsula's road traveled may have impacted each person's voice and language.

## LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS: REGISTER

Five types of register (Nordquist):

**Frozen Formal**  
**Consultative Casual Intimate**

I examined my artifact through the scope of register, which is the different use of language depending on the circumstance within which someone is speaking or writing. In these language variations, registers are determined by occasion, context, purpose, and audience (Nordquist 1).

As I examined the personal statements, I found that though all entries could be classified as formal, there were also differences in the grammar, length, and tones of the entries that made the language stand out in unique ways. My main discovery whilst examining the statements was that people over the age of 40 seemed to be less preoccupied with writing and sounding formal compared to the younger generations. Their entries were shorter and often blunt, causing the tone behind the words to sound more exasperated. On the other hand, the younger workers' entries contained more instances of grammatical informalities, such as ending sentences in prepositions or leaving out nominative pronouns such as 'I.'

### Examples:

Mike Peter (32) – I was fishing this season and was paid off with \$103.00. My store bills were \$96.00. Net \$7.00. I have one sister and one brother to take care of. My brother-in-law died 4 yrs. ago leaving 5 children which were sent to Eklutna. Their mother died in 1932. These children have been sent back to me from Eklutna. The oldest is 12 yrs. old. Their name is Standafir.

Alex Shashka (60) – I have 3 children; one is in school. I have to support a blind man, Paul Morpy, age 62.

Ward Showalter (32) – I have 4 children; 1 is in school. I fished for 2 months. After bills were paid, was \$30. in debt.

Charles March (61) – I have 2 children in school. I fished this summer and made nothing.

# Alaska Resident Fishermen's Union: Personal Statements

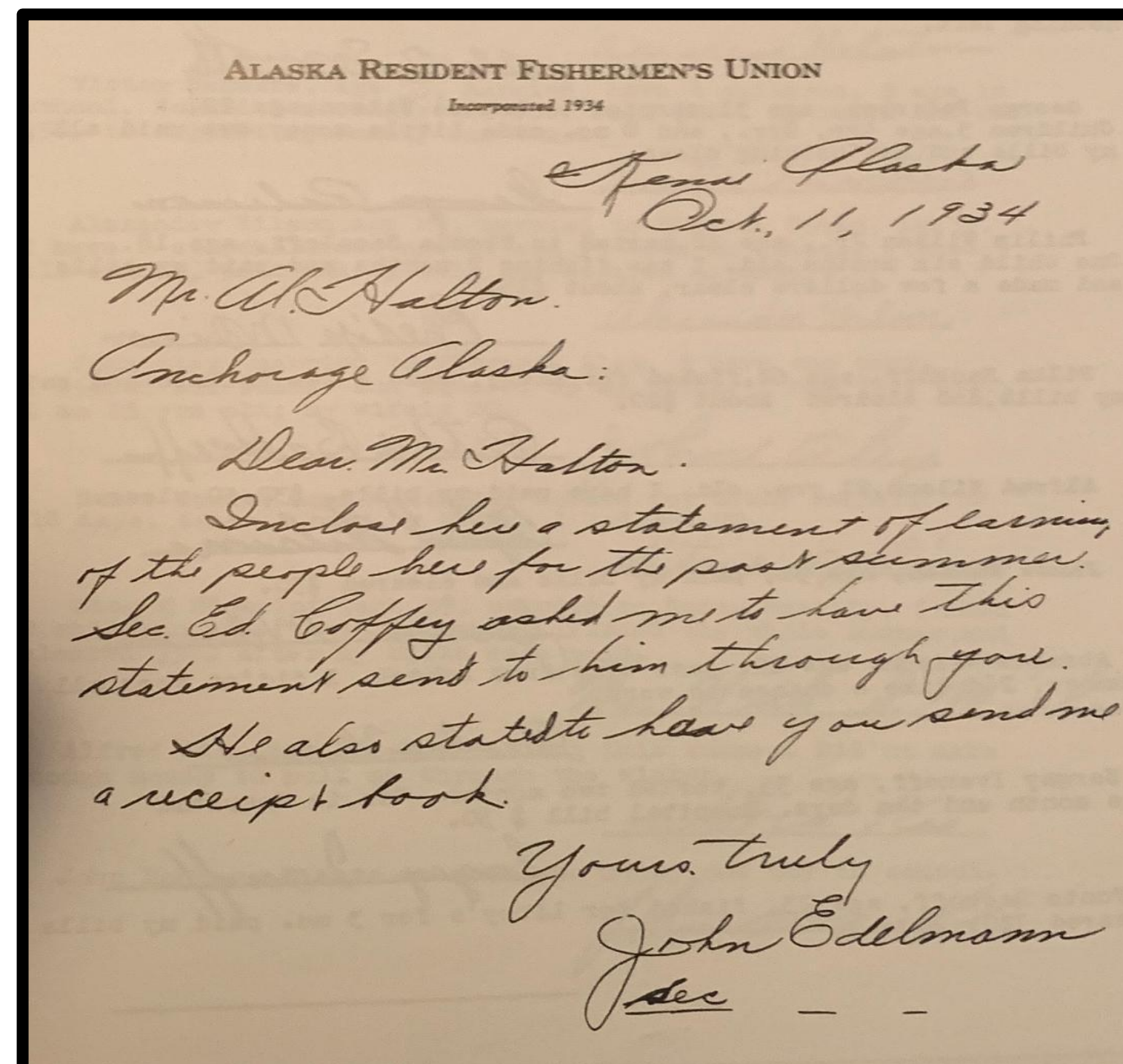
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## The Settlement of Kenai – “Village with a Past, City with a Future”

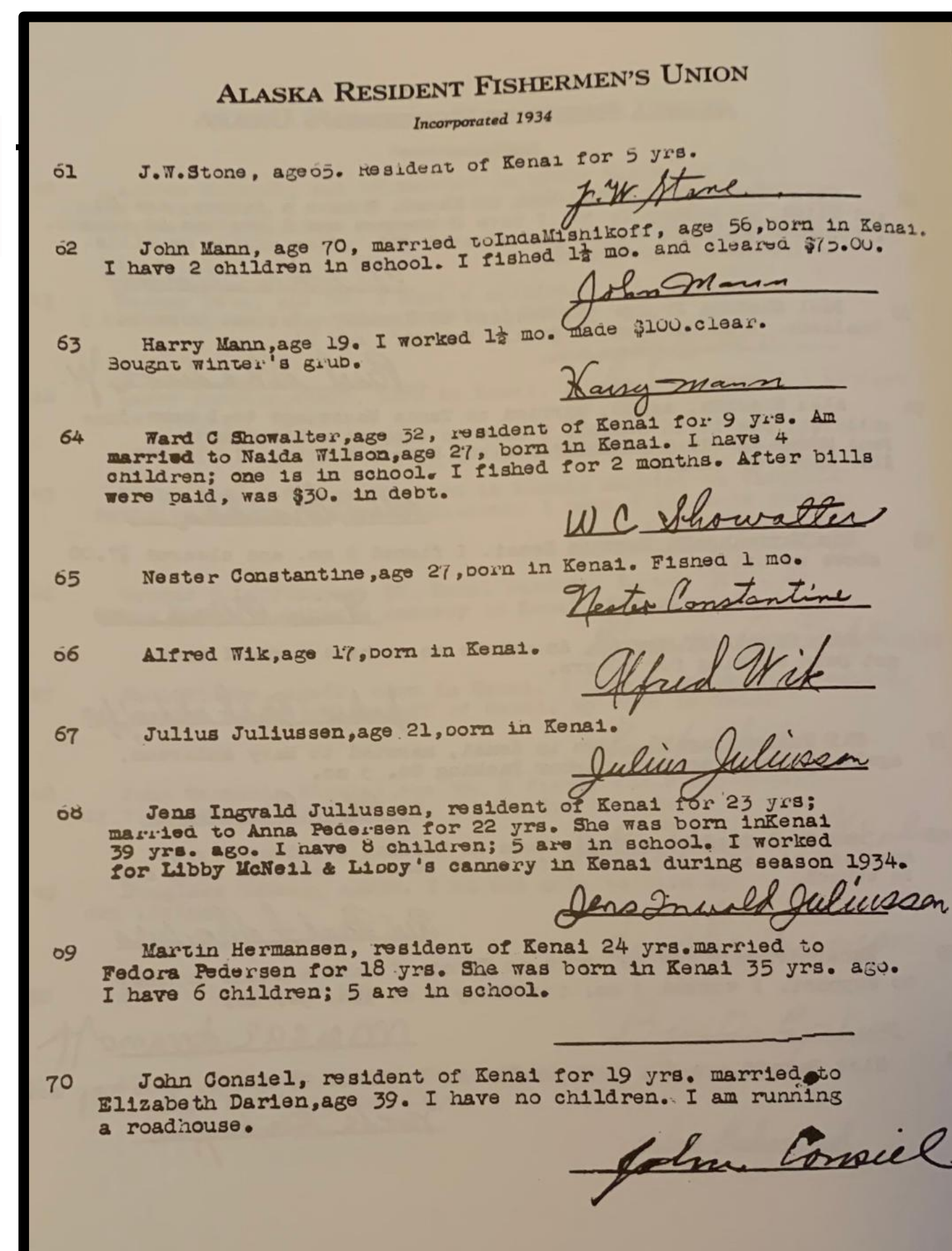
- In 1741, Russian explorers landed in Alaska – The Dena'ina people of the Kenai region, however, had been living there for as long as they could remember. Before they were given the name “Kenaitze” by the Russians, they once called themselves Kahtnuht'ana, or “People of the Kenai River,” and claimed to have lived in the region “since time immemorial” (Kenai Chamber of Commerce 3-5).
- Fishing had always been a part of the everyday lives and survival of the Alaska Native peoples, but upon the arrival of the Russians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, furs and fish became the main objects of sale and trade in the 1790s (Kenai Chamber of Commerce 5).
- October 18, 1867 – The Alaska Purchase
- Commercial salmon canneries enter Alaska in the late 1800s. Established in 1888 was the Northern Packing Company. This would be the first of many canneries to be established in Kenai. In the 131 years since, there would be at least one to three canneries operating at the Kenai River mouth (Kenai Chamber of Commerce 7).
- For over half a century, fishing was Kenai's greatest trade. It was how the majority of households earned a living and was “the primary use for the area's resources” (Kenai Peninsula Historical Association 126).
- World War II – 1939-1945
- 1957 – Discovery of oil at Swanson River. A new economy emerges. Kenai begins to shift from a fishing village to an industrial community (Pedersen 25).
- In 1960 the City of Kenai is incorporated. Five years later, oil is discovered in Cook Inlet (Kenai Chamber of Commerce 9).



Low tide at Kenai cannery, 1895-1903.  
(Alaska State Library, Kate R. Gompertz Photograph Collection).



Once Upon the Kenai. Kenai Historical Society, 1984, pp. 435-434.



Once Upon the Kenai. Kenai Historical Society, 1984, pp. 435-434.

## Commercial Fishing on the Kenai Peninsula

- Since the late 1880s, commercial fishing has been a critical part of Alaska economy and culture (Sechrist 2014).
- Upon the discovery of the Kenai Peninsula's salmon abundance, settlers rushed to build fish camps. Some of the first canneries were built in Kenai, Kasilof, Chisik Island, Homer, and Tyonek in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sechrist 2014).
- Commercial fishing thrived for decades – Then came the 1940s. Between the invention of the fish trap and the demands of World War II, fisheries would begin to see a rapid decline (Sechrist 2014).
- At this point, the discussion of statehood had been tossed around for many years, but as Alaskans came to the realization that poor management was at fault for the salmon crisis, this became one of the main catalysts for Alaska becoming a state (Sechrist, 2014).
- In 1959, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game was founded. As a result, the fishing industry would gain proper regulations for both fishing and employment (Sechrist 2014).

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ENGL A476: English in Alaska  
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