

*The Chugach Baídarka,
The story of Chenega*

1933-2012

- Chugach Vocabulary
- Baidarka - Russian word for skin and frame kayaks
- - Qayaq – Chugach word for skin and frame kayaks
 - Qayanguaq – Chugach word for one man kayak
 - Qayarpak – Chugach word for two man kayak
 - Paitaalek – Chugach word for three man kayak

Anchorage at upper left, Chenega Island left center – Prince William Sound, Alaska



1778

John Webber, artist, Cook's third voyage



Snug Cove, near Tatitlek, Prince William Sound



Chugach bidarka model collected by Vancouver
Prince William Sound 1794

Frederica de Laguna and Kaj Birket-Smith, do an ethnological
study at Chenega, 1933
Chenega was the only village still building baidarkas



Frederica de Laguna paddling a baidarka in Chenega



Chenega 1933

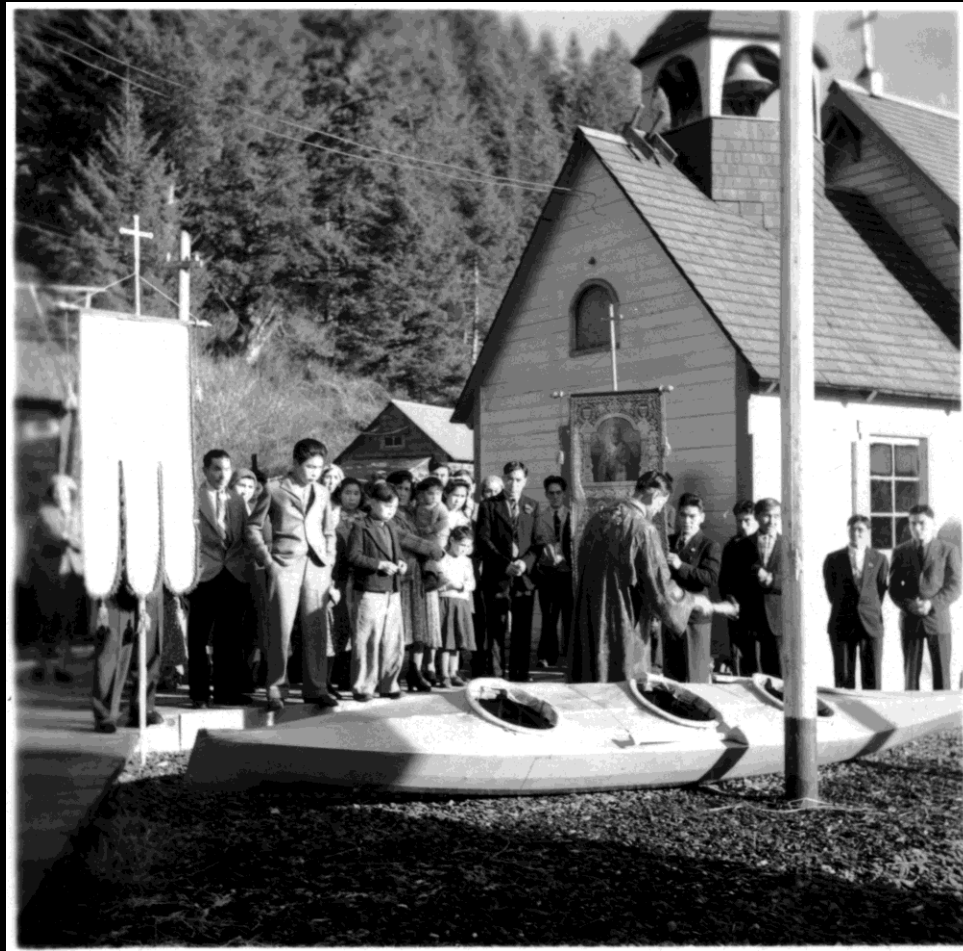


Blessing of the Baidarka 1933

Steve Vlasoff, Russian Orthodox lay reader



Blessing of the Baidarka 1933





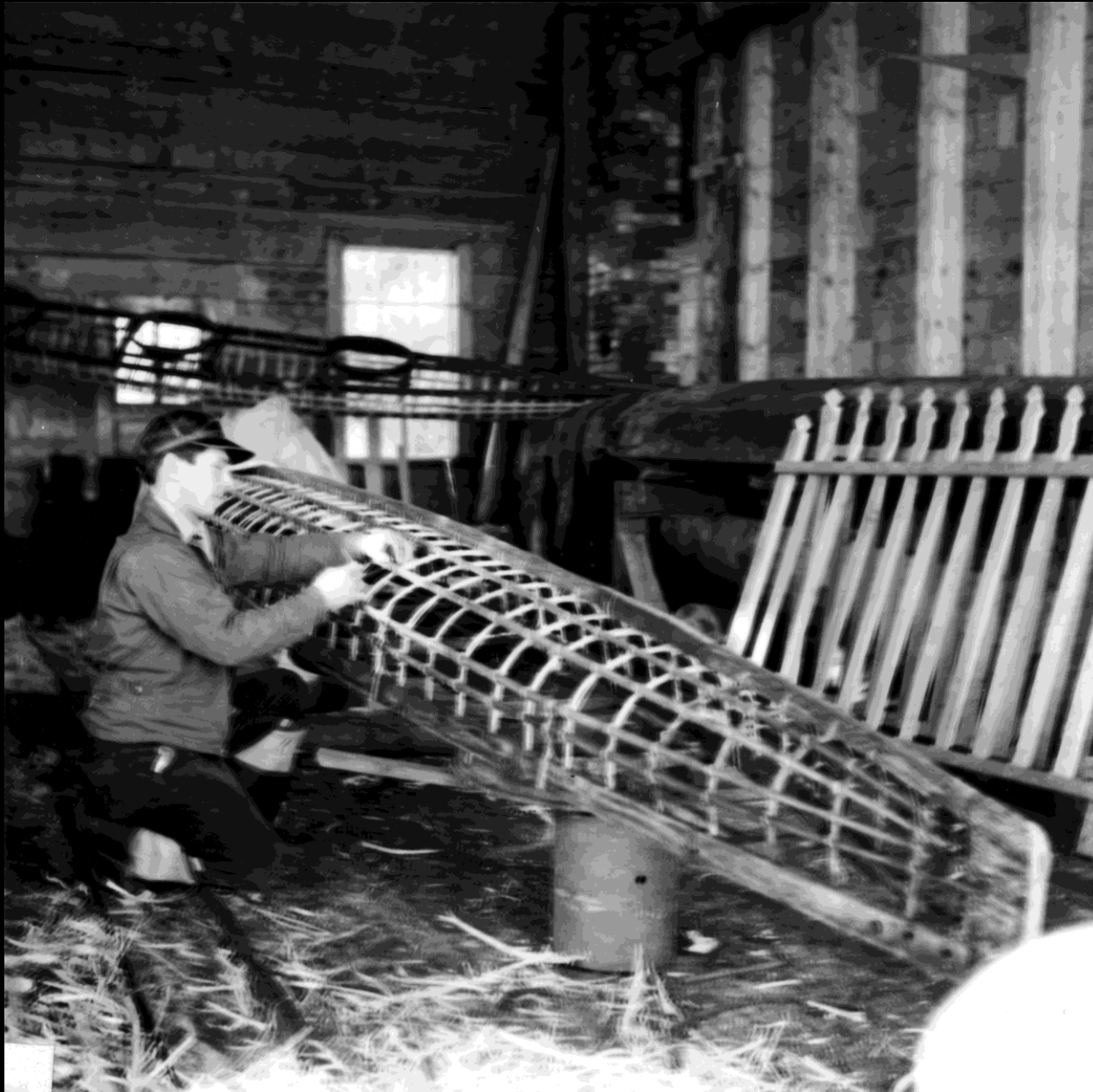


Steve Brizkaloff, master builder 1933





Boat Shop Chenega 1933



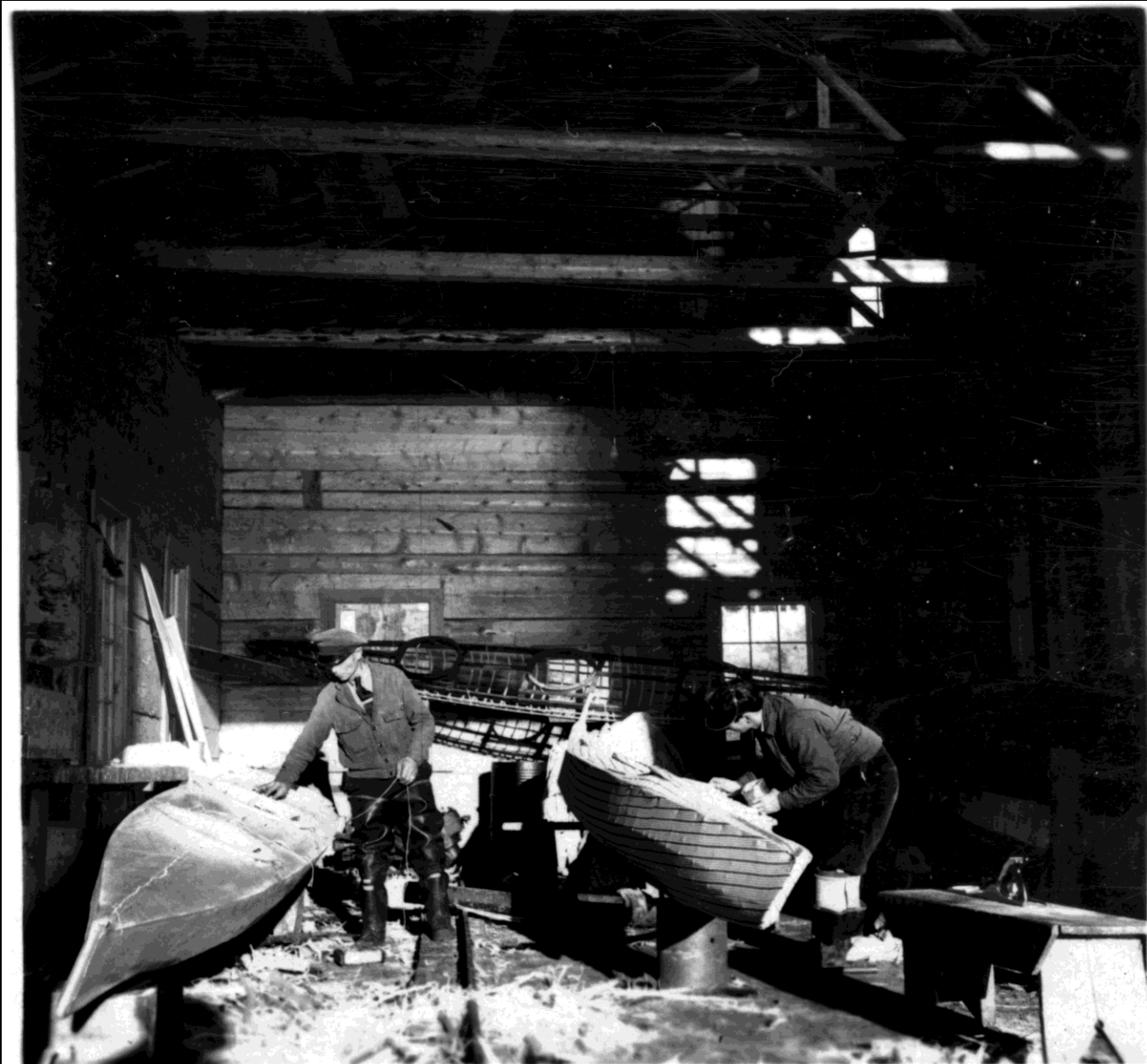
Alexi Steve paddle making 1933



Boat house and new baidarka 1933



Alexi Steve with new baidarkas using canvas covering
1933



Finishing the canvas covering 1933



Steve Vlasoff's baidarka in front of Steve's smokehouse 1933



Chenga bay 1933



Baidarkas were paddled in the kneeling position



Chenega 1944-48

- John M. Poling was assigned the teaching position in Chenega. He and his wife, Lucy Poling, and two sons, Mitch and Don Poling, were welcomed to the village by Steve Vlasoff, spiritual leader of Chenega.

Steve Vlasoff, Russian Orthodox lay reader and John M. Poling, schoolteacher
Chenega, 1944



Steve Vlasoff



Painting the church





The school 1946



Chenega panorama 1945 Mitch and Don Poling



Summer 1946 Chenega



Sam Riboloff with salmon



Bill Hjort launching his fishing career



Lucy Poling paddling our baidarka 1947



Lucy Poling with our baidarka 1947



Mitch and Don Poling 1947



Chasing icebergs 1947



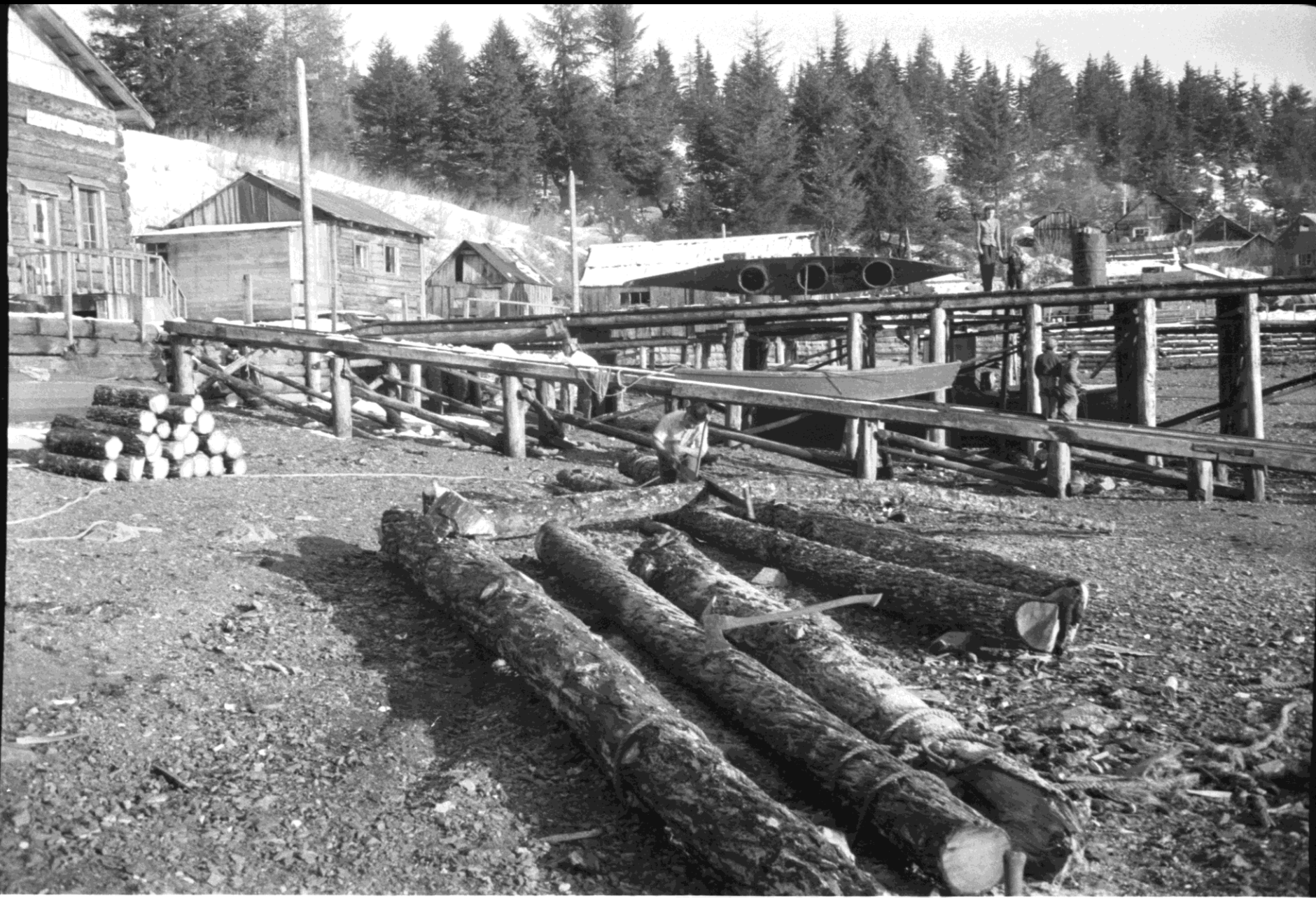
High tide at the boathouse 1947



Alexi Steve and Mitch at the boathouse



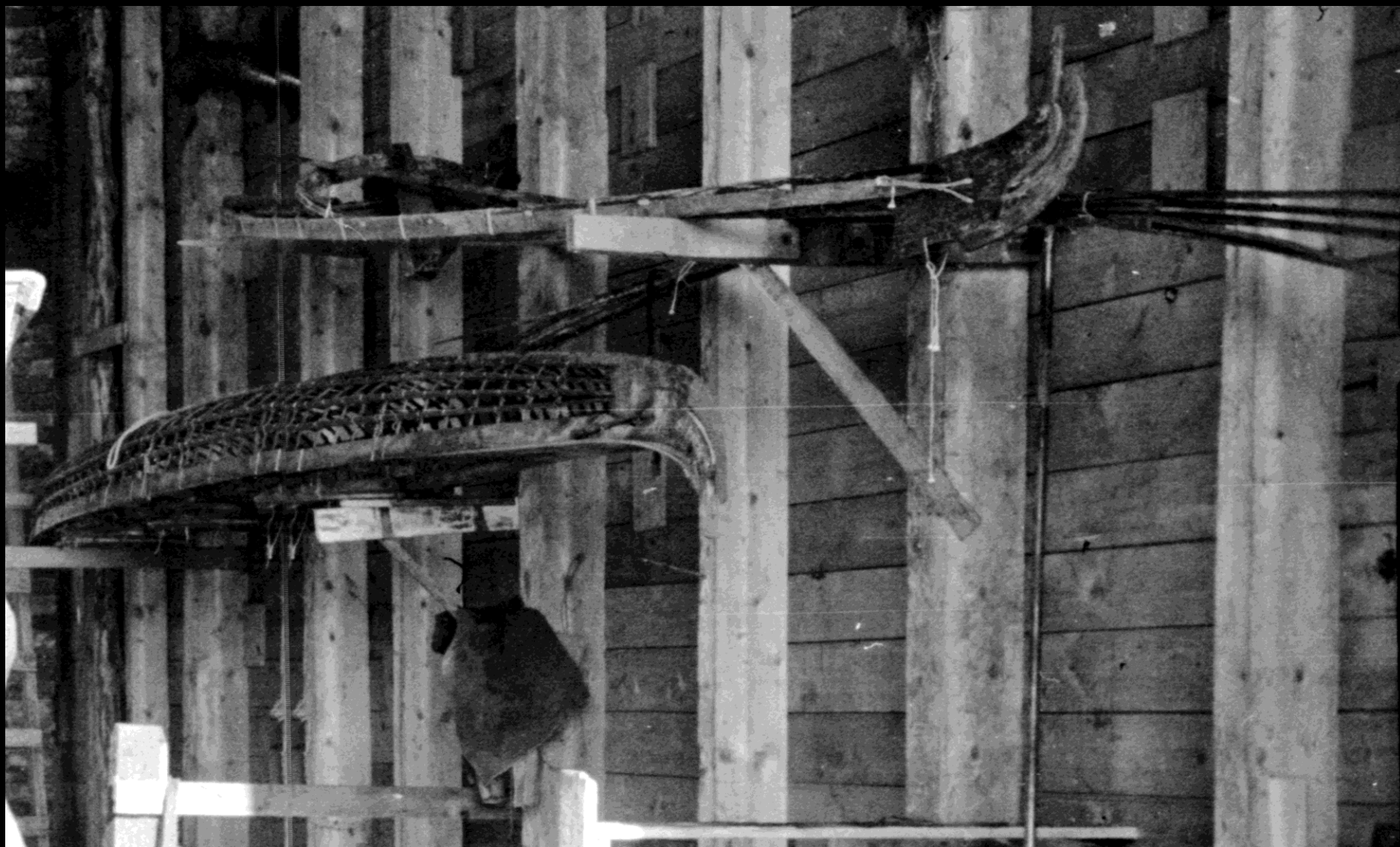
Baidarka on the dock



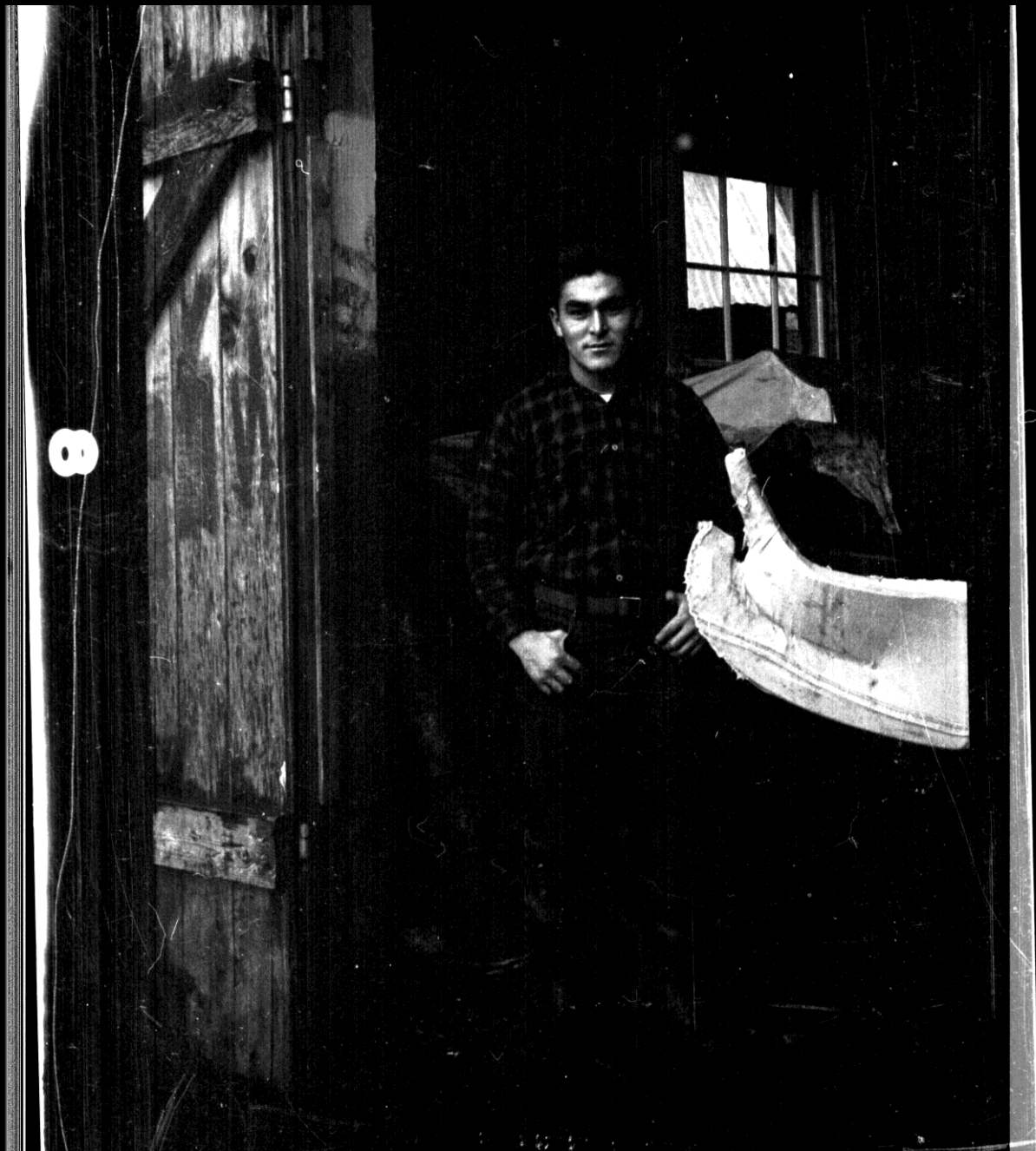
Baidarka frames in the boatshop



Baidarka frames



Charlie Selanoff with baidarka bow



Pete Selanoff with super sized paddle



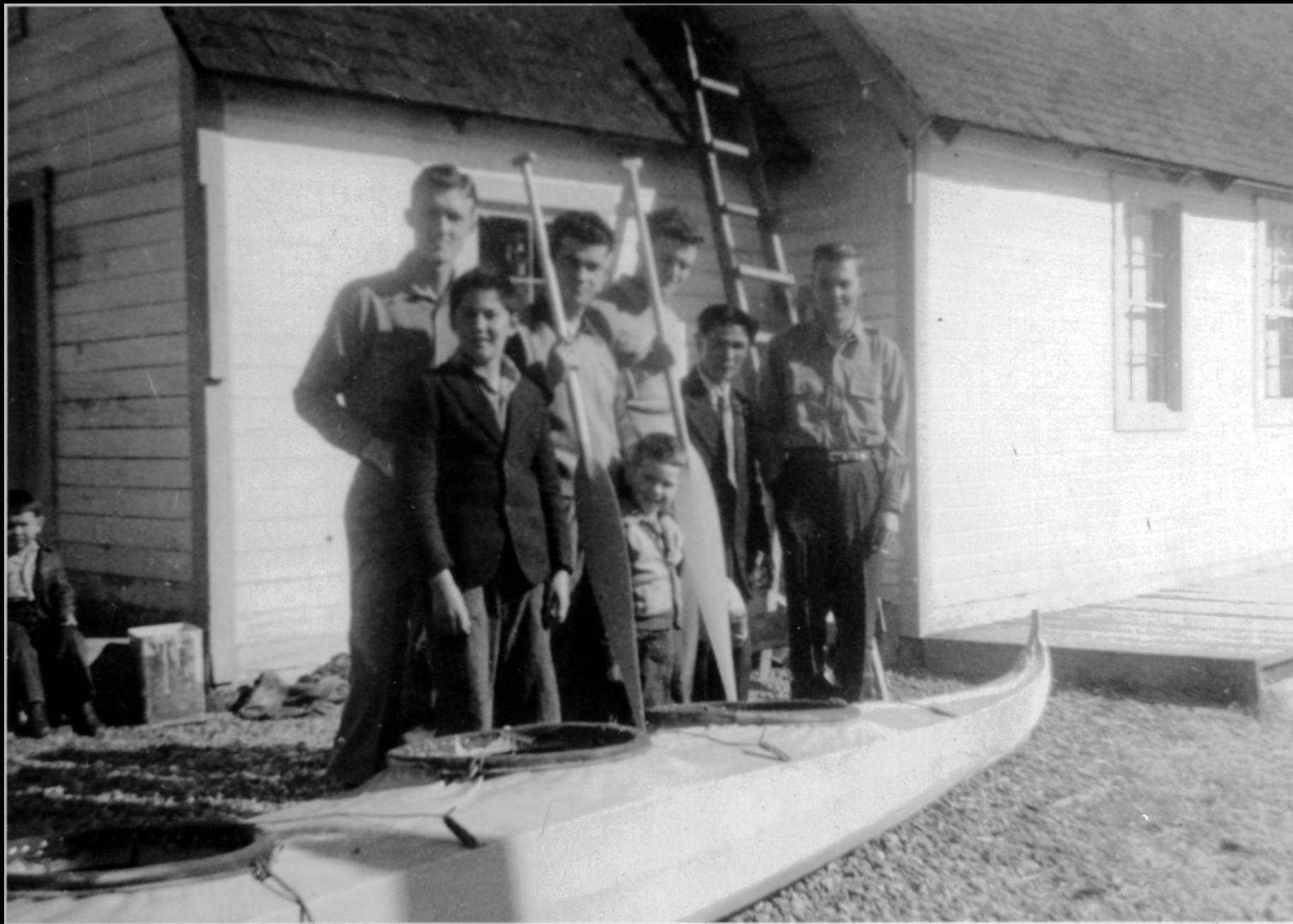
Nellie Evanoff and Mitch, in front of Nellies house



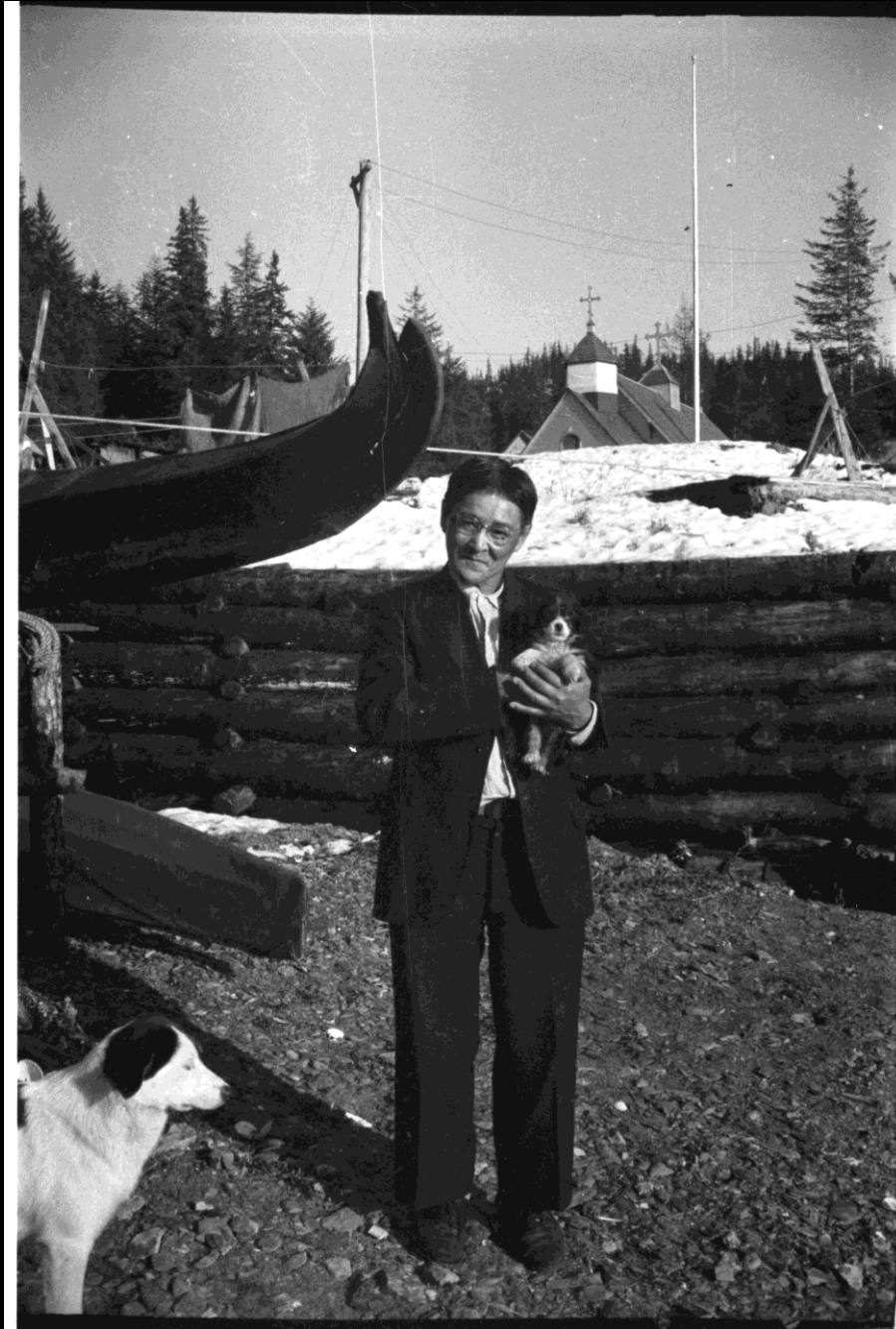
George Chernoff, Nick Kompkoff, and Don Kompkoff 1944



Bill and Leland Poling by the church 1946



Jack Evanoff with baidarkas and Bingo



Boys in baidarkas 1947



Willie Evanoff in foreground with his baidarka



Willie is off with his groceries



Charlie Selanoff 1946



Steve Vlasoff



Steve Vlasoff 1945



When Steve was 70, in 1953, he paddled to Valdez and back, which took several weeks.

In 1954 he loaned his baidarka to the son of the owner of the mailboat Siren. The baidarka was taken to Cordova. It was acquired by the Cordova Historical Museum in 1969.



Stitching detail



Interior bow lashing



Interior bow construction



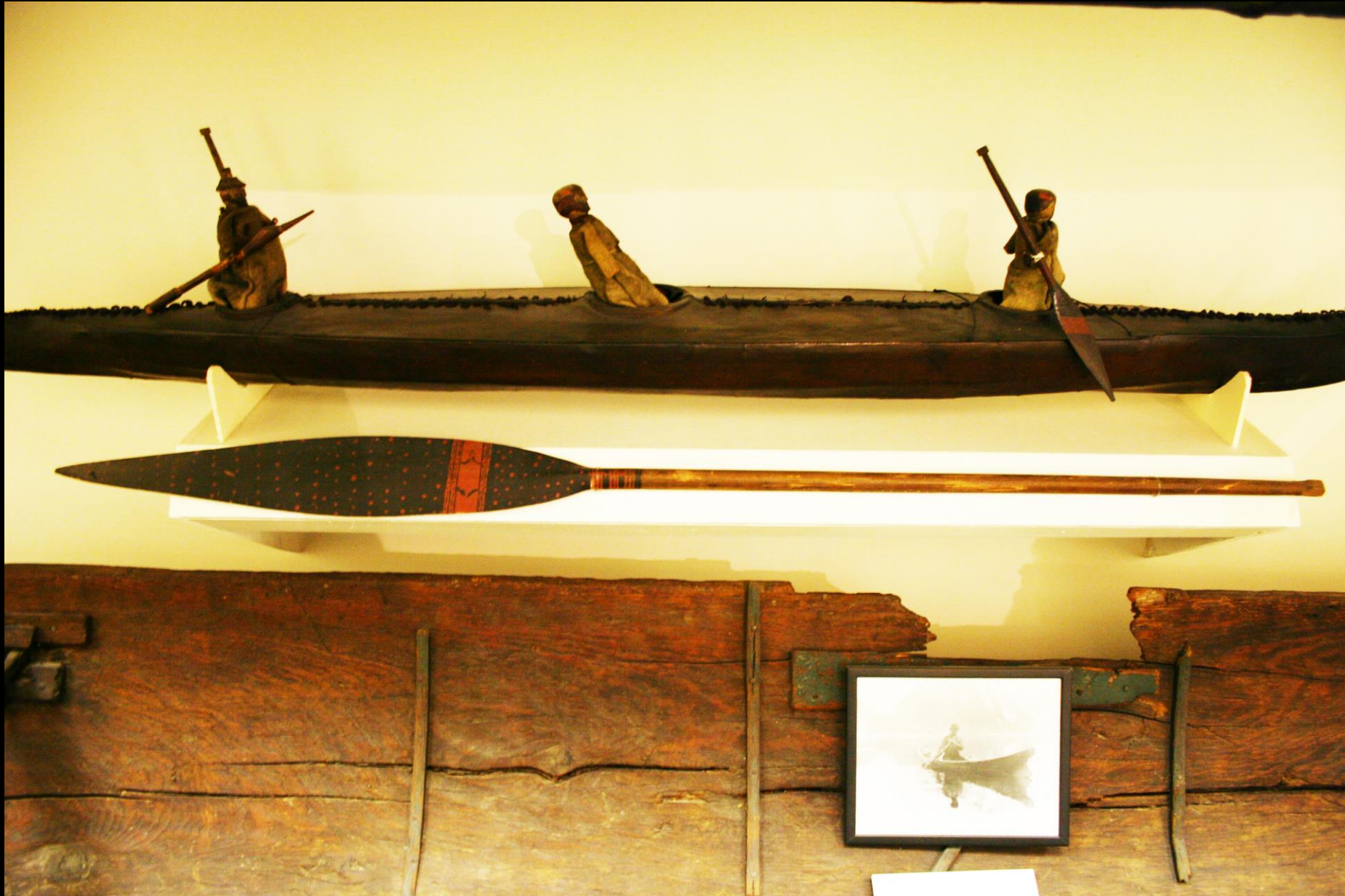
Gunwale, rib, beam, and side stringer construction



Top skin lashing



Traditional single paddle and model baidarka



The Good Friday earthquake in 1964 generated a tsunami that destroyed Chenega. The only building left standing was the schoolhouse on the hill.

The survivors established a new village, Chenega Bay, thirty miles away, on Evans Island in 1984.

Don and Mitch Poling in 2002 on the beach near the former location of Steve Vlasoff's smoke house. Nothing remains but the derelict schoolhouse



Nuchek Spirit Camp, Nuchek, Alaska

Nuchek Spirit Camp was established in the 1990's by John Johnson under the auspices of the Chugach Native Corporation. The Chugach culture, language, and arts are being passed to the younger generations.



The Russian Orthodox Church at Nuchek



Baidarka Renewal

- Baidarka building started at Nuchek Spirit Camp in 2003. The campers, lead by Mitch Poling, Walter Elisovisky, and Don Kompkoff, completed and paddled the first three man baidarka in Prince Wiliam Sound since the early fifties. The baidarka was dedicated to the spirit of Steve Vlasoff and to the memory of Charlie Selanoff in a blessing ceremony.

Blessing of the Baidarkas 2008 Nuchek Don Kompkoff and Father Sergei Active officiating



Baidarka at Nuchek 2009



The younger generation gets acquainted with its heritage.
Nuchek 2008



The fleet grows. Nuchek 2008
Don Kompkoff holds the upright paddle



The young men take to the water



And the girls too!









Even the elders get in the action!







Paddling the angyak (canoe)



John Johnson enjoying the angiaks





Looking for sea otters



Found them!



Nuchek Spirit Camp



Humpback whale at Nuchek



The lagoon at Nuchek



The beach at Nuchek



Baidarka Building

gunwales

bow

stern

keel

ribs, stringers

cockpits

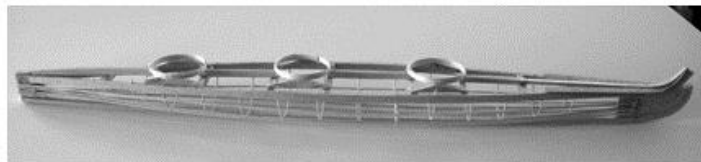
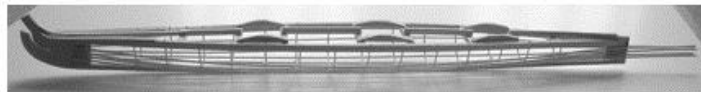
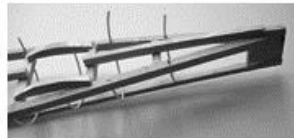
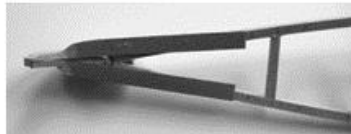
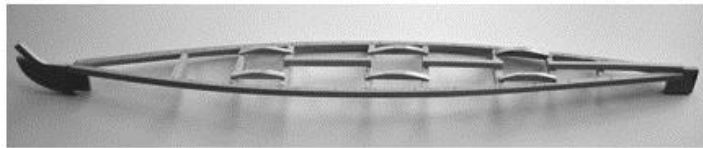
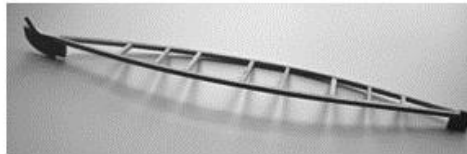
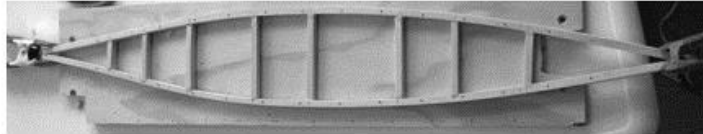
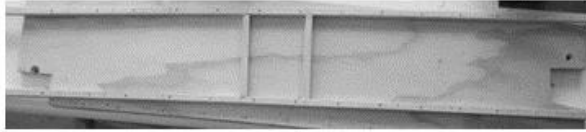
bow boards

covering

Model baidarkas



The construction sheet for the models



- Full size construction

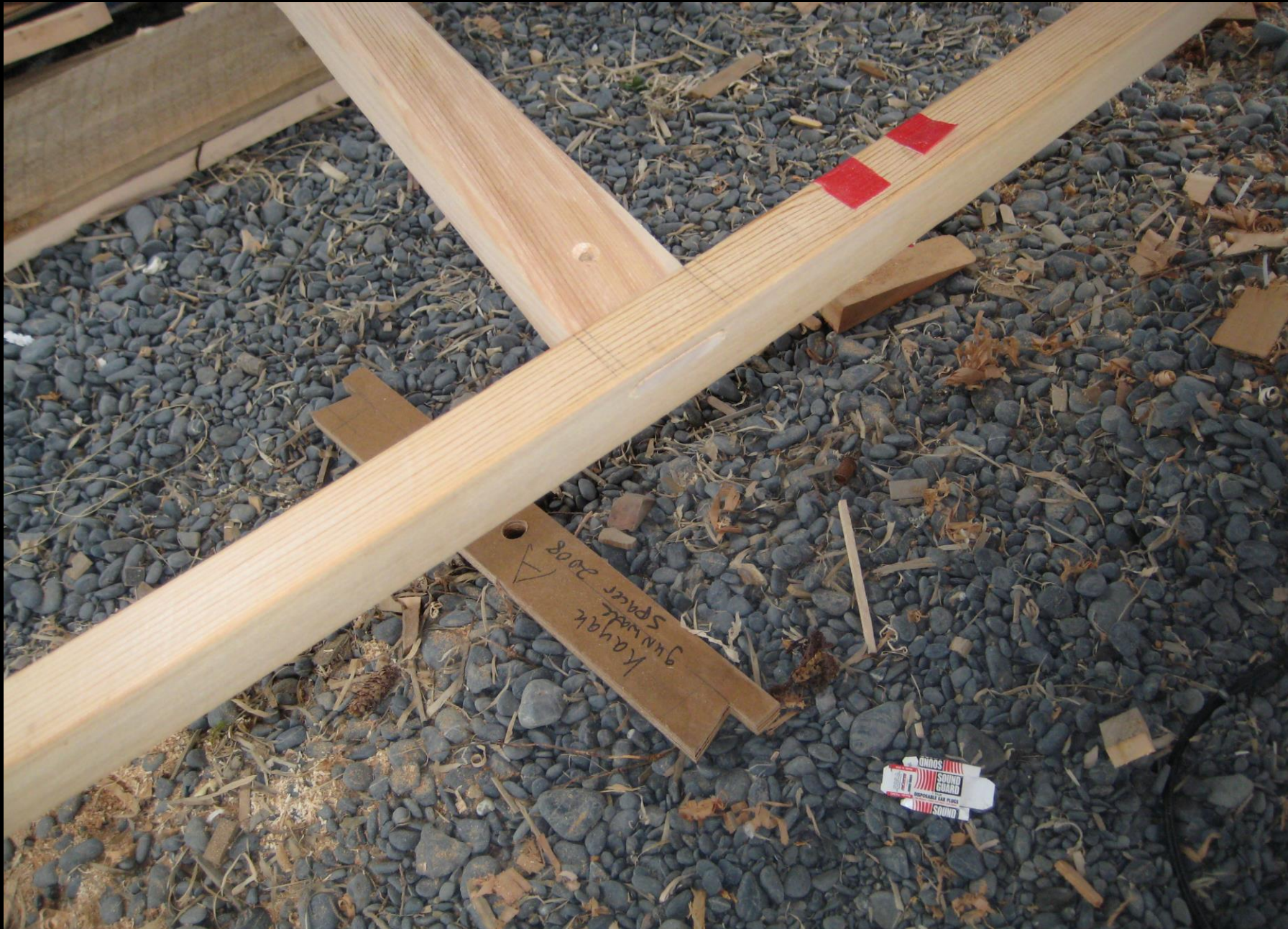
Start with the gunwales (Apamak)



The gunwales are cut, the rib pockets made, and initial bending



The cross pieces (ajage) are installed





The cross pieces can have a complex shape



There are six to eight cross pieces



Installing the bow (nucugvia) and
stern (aqua) is next

Pegs are cut to hold the stern piece



The stern piece is drilled to fit on the pegs



The keel (nanguna) is installed to complete the fastening of the bow and stern

Note the keel on the left frame





The bow is notched and lashed on



The bows were originally carved from a spruce stump





But now we take a shortcut and cut them and carve them from
2x12 lumber



Full carved bow from a 3" thick wood piece



Note the very special notching, scarfing, and lashings used to hold the bow



The Y lashing



The bow peg is characteristic of the Chugach kayak



The stern also uses a peg for the lashing. This is typical for the Chugach kayak



The ribs (atuna)

- The ribs are bent using boiling water. We use yellow cedar, traditionally hemlock was used. Often the ribs were chewed at the bends so that they would not break. We skip the chewing part in these modern times.

Well, most of us do - Martha Vlasoff shows how



Bending the ribs is an art. We do it by eye, no forms or templates, just like in the old days.



The ribs go into pockets (slots) cut in the gunwales. The stringers are lashed to the ribs with a continuous one piece side to side lashing.



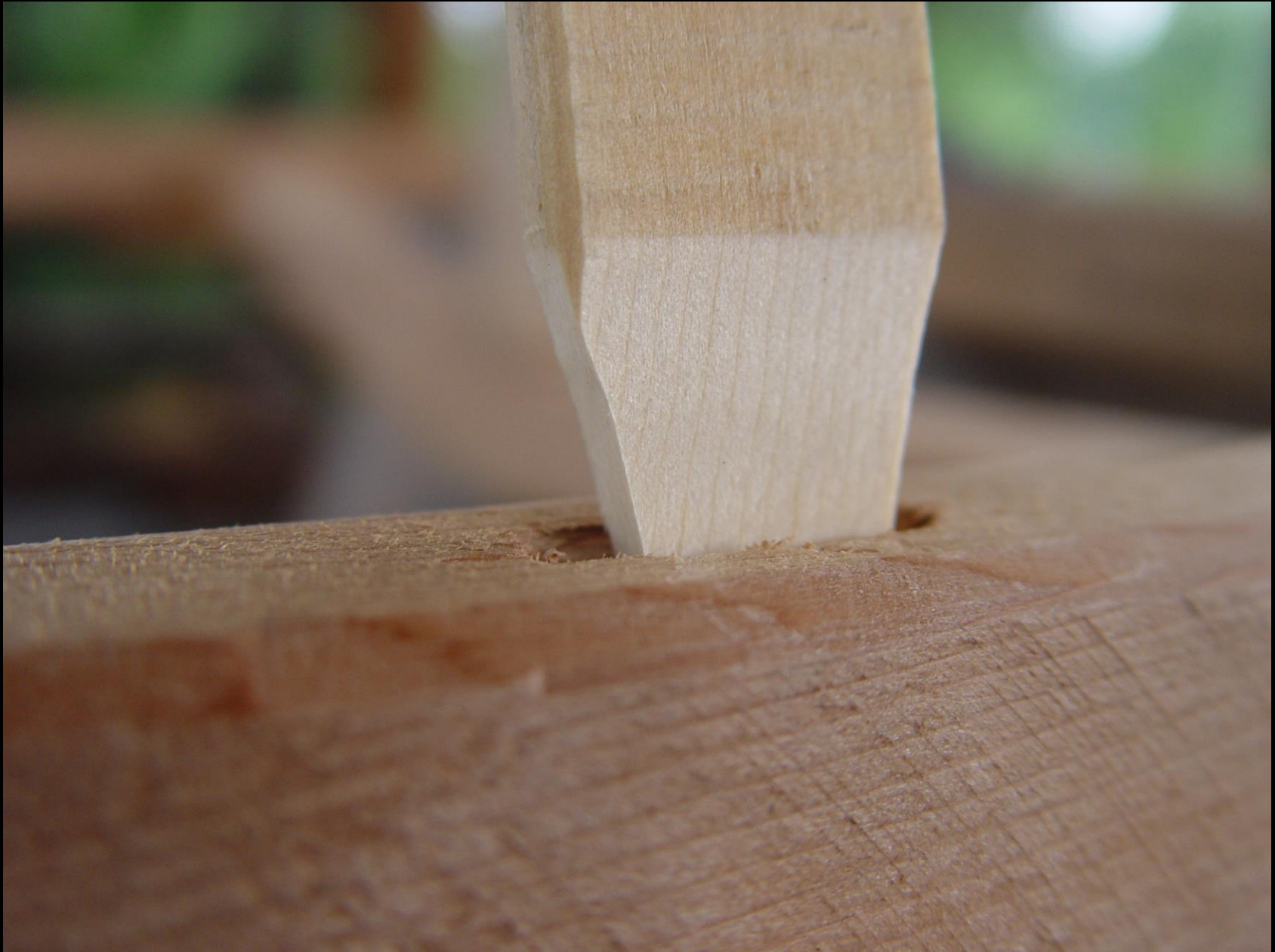
Henry shows how to bend the ribs into place after the hot water bath



Henry cuts the rib to length



The rib is in the pocket



Special tie down lashing at the rib ends



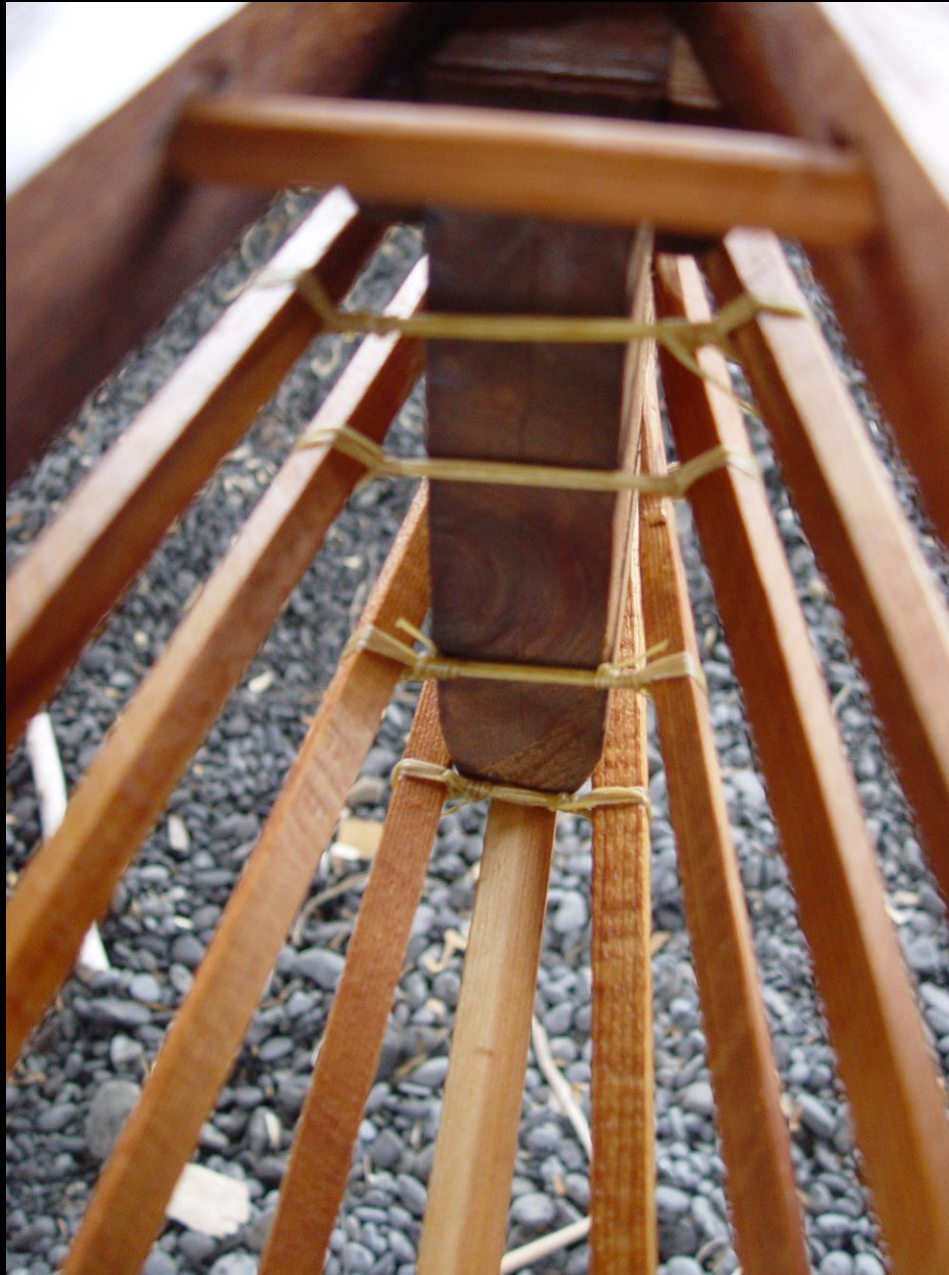
Stringers (unarat)

- There are about fifty lashings for the stringers, a big job

A view down the hull



Stringer cross ties at the stern, also at the bow



The little kids get to do this too!



Top deck

- Top deck stringers, cockpit hoops, and cockpit supports are next

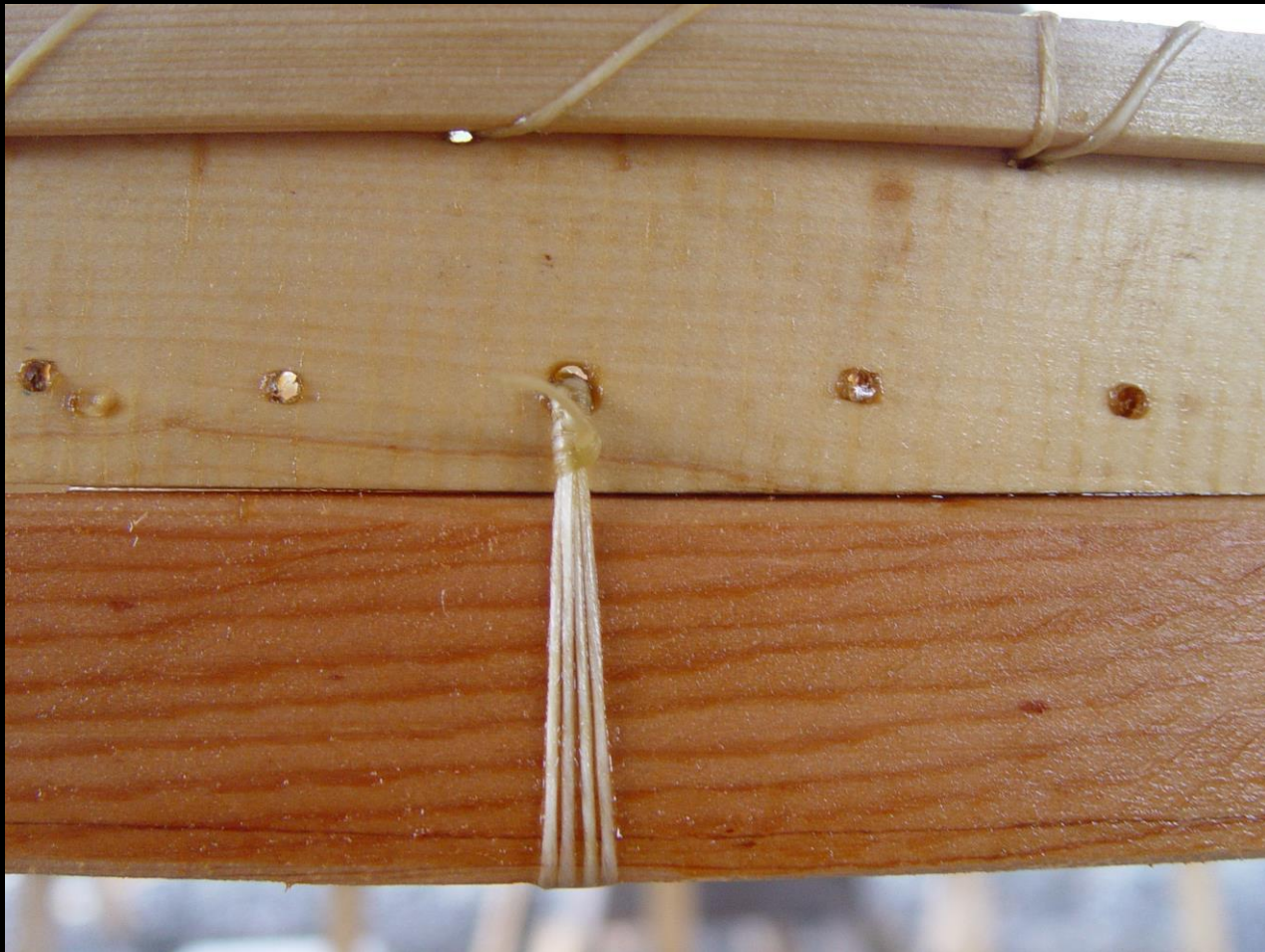
The top stringers are lashed on



The cockpit supports (ajapaqvik) are lashed in. Walter
Elisovisky at work



The cockpit hoops (painga) are lashed to the supports



Cockpit hoop scarf lashings





Bow boards (sinkaq)

- The bow plates are added

bow boards



The front deck stringer goes above the bow plates



The bow plates are carved to shape



The completed frame is painted with linseed oil to water proof it



At last the frame is done! Henry Makarka leads the drumming



The cover (ayahwak)

- We use ballistic nylon with a urethane water proofing. Formerly sea lion skins were used. These are now very expensive and require constant maintenance.

Sandra Smith-Poling is setting up the cover at the boathouse at Nuchek. Stretching the cover tightly with no wrinkles around the cockpit is a challenge.



Stretching the covering around the bow is also quite the challenge.



There is very little margin left to sew with down the bow curve/slot.



Bow sewing is complete. The wrinkles will come out with water shrinking, then heat shrinking.



Once the covering is on, we color the nylon with dye used for silk. Aztec Gold gives just the right color.



The boat house at Nuchek . The sewing is done! Sandra Smith-Poling is the chief sewer. This is very hard work – thank you!



It comes full circle
January, 2012
Chenega Bay, Alaska



High school students building three baidarkas at Chenega Bay



Village adults were an important part of the team
Larry (village mayor) and Gail Evanoff work on the covering



The grade school kids did a lot of sanding and planing on the frames, and built their own model baidarkas!



The high school kids also made the paddles



It snowed a lot, over 20 feet deep!



Finished at last! Middle of March!



Off to the school to be stored there



Chenega school study area



The Blessing Ceremony

June, 2012 at the original Chenega Village site on Chenega Island

The baidarkas were given spirit names and
paddling names

- The Spirit of James Angaiak Chenega Bay
- The Spirit of Willie Evanoff Old Chenega
- The Spirit of Don Kompkoff Chenega

The blessing ceremony at old Chenega June 2012



The blessing ceremony



Home at last



They are paddling what they built



Sweeney Selanoff, Joyce Kompkoff



Old Chenega bay



The old Chenega beach



My thanks to

Steve Vlasoff

John M. Poling

Frederica de Laguna

Their work made everything possible

John Johnson

Mike Livingston

in gratitude for their work in preserving the Aleut heritage

David Zimmerly

• Cordova Historical Museum	Cordova, Alaska
• Russian Orthodox Museum	Anchorage, Alaska
Anchorage Museum	Anchorage, Alaska
Alaska State Museum	Juneau, Alaska
• Kunstkamera Museum	St Petersburg, Russia
Museo de Americas	Madrid, Spain
Übersee Museum	Bremen, Germany
Canadian Canoe Museum	Peterborough, Ontario

Chugach seal hunting hat, 1794, Museum of the Americas,
Madrid, Spain



200 year old Chugach paddling hat made of spruce root, at the
Kunstkamera museum in St. Petersburg, Russia



Ceremonial paddles made by



Making paddles at Nuchek

