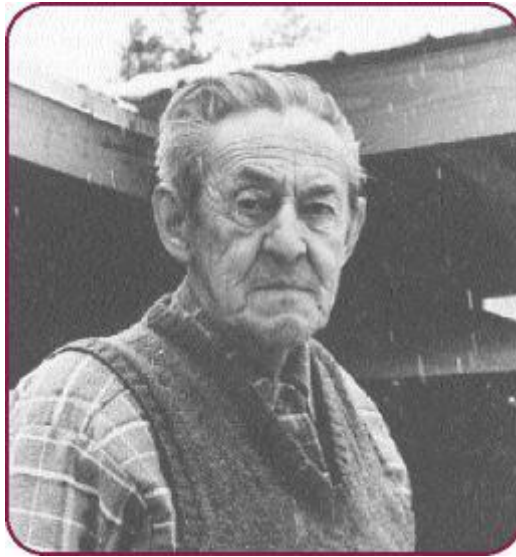


Biography: Nick Grienoff Elxnit



CIRI's oldest shareholder, **Nick Grienoff Elxnit**, died May 26, 2001. He was born Nov. 3, 1903. He was of Aleut, Russian and Finnish descent, and he lived in Seldovia for most of his life.

Mr. Elxnit was one of 23 Alaska Native elders featured in the book "Our Stories, Our Lives," published in 1986 by The CIRI Foundation. Following are excerpts of Mr. Elxnit's comments in the book. The full text of Mr. Elxnit's interview is available on the CIRI website. Copies of "Our Stories, Our Lives" are available from The CIRI Foundation for \$15.95 by calling (263-5582) or (800) 764-3382.

An interview with Nick G. Elxnit

"... We had to saw them by hand - six foot saw. Oh, work! But it was healthy job. Out in the fresh air, good stream of water."

My father was Harry Grienoff. He was a Finlander. My mother's dad was Russian. She was Alaskan. Her mother was Native-born, Native background. I still have pictures of my grandmother and my mother.

My mother was born in Kodiak. She used to tell us, she remembers when Russians sold Alaska to United States. She was around Kodiak when they hoisted the flag on the pole. She was there at the time.

My sister, she was born on the boat, they call Steamer Dora, used to carry mail and passengers to Unalaska along the Aleutian Chain. So the crew, the skipper named my sister. They acted as the nurse. They named her Dora after the boat. She goes by that name yet.

My mother used to speak Russian. Course we did. Pretty much at home used to speak Russian all the time.

(Mr. Elxnit recalls the eruption of Mt. Katmai in 1912.) I remember it was month of June (in Kodiak). It was nice sunny morning like today. But towards noon hour, clouded up. It got darkness. And by two or three o'clock it got dark. Of course, those days there was no such a thing as light plan. It was kerosene days. We had kerosene lamp. Ma had to light the kerosene lamp. Everybody wondered what was happening, what cause it. And then sometime we heard maybe concussion of the Katmai blowing up. Just like lightning, maybe kind of shake like earthquake. Course it got dark. People got jittery.

Lot of church bells - Russian church bells would ring. A lot of people went to church. They thought the world was coming to an end. Course nobody know. The only thing Army had was this wireless. That was on Woody Island, on that island where the Army had that communication. And nobody know till next day what happened, what caused it. And then the ash start to fall. Ash was coming down like snow. And that

was coming down for two, three days. And darkness.

Nick Elxnit

Anyhow in a day or two the Army knew what happened. They got it through wireless. And then three Coast Guards come to Kodiak. They awake you, and loaded all the people in town onto boats. We were on the biggest one that was there. And the name of it was Manning. Kept us couple days on that boat. Course they were anchored out.

And then that ash that fell in the ocean. You could see, look down as far as tide went down, it was just flat white laid on the bottom of the ground in the water on the beach. You could look down I guess ash went in the ground and things got normal again.

We lived in Kodiak permanently until 1912. And then we come to Seldovia in 1913 because my mother's folks lived in Seldovia. And then Ma remarried. We adopted the stepfather. Of course he went by Elxnit. That's why our names changed. All my records went by Elxnit.

In those days, salmon was plentiful there and coal on the beach, lot of game up in the woods. Moose, and winter months, ptarmigan. Of course, people in those days used to have gardens, and they had chickens and cow. They used to live pretty good.

I didn't go very far. I didn't go to high school - about eighth grade is as far as I got. It wasn't too important, anyhow. There wasn't no such a thing as high school in those days. Course we come out of poor family. Family couldn't afford to send kids out to school for good education.

And then we used to make our own skis out of barrel staves. You know, like herring barrels used to have - they're kind of rounded a little bit. And then we'd put rubber straps over them and use them just for sliding. The road would get kind of smooth on the ridge.

Those days there is no such a thing as - nobody dreamt of chain saws. We had to saw them by hand - six-foot saw. Oh, work! But it was healthy job. Out in the fresh air, good stream of water. I never forgot, way up at the head there we had a cabin we stayed there when we was logging. There was a little short grass grows on the flat. I counted 40 porkies (porcupines) all in one bunch - young ones and old ones feeding on that little grass. There was a lot of game those days. You very seldom see one nowadays.

I still think the old lifestyle was better than what it is today for people. We went a little too far with everything. Lot of guys I meet, like some politicians, they say "progress." But progress went a little too far for good things in my opinion.

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[Kenai Peninsula portion of the AKGenWeb](#)