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Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository

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DATE: June 7, 2022

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Sun'aq Tribe and Alutiiq Museum Lay Four Ancestors to Rest

Yesterday afternoon, the Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak laid to rest the remains of Alutiiq ancestors. As the sun shone over the city cemetery, community members gathered for a service commemorating the return of four people. Sun'aq Tribe staff member Randy Boskofsky made a large wooden cross to mark the grave and held it during a service led by the Father Innocent Dresdow of the Holy Resurrection Russian Orthodox Cathedral. The Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers sang three songs, including two ancestral pieces returned to the Alutiiq community by the Tlingit people of Sitka. Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Counciller spoke about the importance of repatriation and community members placed flowers in the grave.

Emily Jean Capjohn, the chair of the Sun'aq Tribal Council said, "We are deeply saddened that our ancestors' graves were disturbed, but also relieved that we were able to bring their remains home and return them to rest."

The Alutiiq Museum facilitated the return and reburial of the remains, working in partnership with the Sun'aq Tribe to ensure Alutiiq ancestors received respectful care. One individual was repatriated from Michigan State University (MSU) through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. A National Park Service grant to MSU paid for shipping and reburial costs. Two individuals were returned by the Alaska State Museum through a private process. The fourth individual was unearthed during recent construction on private lands. The Alutiiq Museum collected and stored the remains at the request of the tribe until they could be reburied.

"Our ancestors buried their dead in their settlements," said Counciller. "When these settlements are disturbed, graves are uncovered. For decades, people have been collecting the remains of our people despite laws that protect all graves. Recent research by the Alutiiq Museum illustrates that there are still over 160 ancestors held in institutions around the United States and Canada, and these are just the people we know about. Every year organizations reach out to us to discuss returning remains we were not aware of. Yesterday's reburial was an important event, but it wasn't the last. There will be many more."

The Alutiiq Museum is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the history and culture of the Alutiiq, an Alaska Native tribal people. Representatives of Kodiak Alutiiq organizations govern the museum with funding from charitable contributions, memberships, grants, contracts, and sales.

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