



Alaska History News

Volume 33, No. 1 Quarterly of the Alaska Historical Society Spring 2005

Notes from around the state



Luella Smith in her photo shop.
Photo courtesy the Sitka Historical Society.

When residents donate Granny's photo album or Great Uncle Harry's gold rush rucksack to the museum, they want to see these displayed. In fact, they can get rather testy if their precious objects are not out. But if there is no temperature, light, or humidity control, that's not taking proper care of the objects.

The **Valdez Museum** is working hard to make their storage and display areas safe for all the artifacts and documents they have. Then donations can be put in places of honor and everyone will be happy. Did I mention this takes money? All amounts happily and gratefully accepted.

The museum is very pleased with a \$9,258 grant to further integrate their local history program with the Valdez City School curriculum. This uses not only teachers but the Internet and other resources. Grants for work in progress truly validate the hard work that has gone into programs. Check out their spiffy Web site at www.valdezmuseum.org. The big exhibit until early April is the alaskaWILD display of nature photography. It will tour the state and then head Down South later.

The **Sitka Historical Society** reports a major photographic donation made by the family of Luella Smith, a local photography shop owner who owned the business from 1924 until

it closed in 1972. After the massive record of Sitka's people, buildings, and events for nearly half a century has been cataloged, it will be shared with the **Alaska State Museum**. For a look at some of the photographs, go to www.dangel.net and scroll down to "New Section on the Photo Shop."

Sitka was the site of a major Tlingit-Russian battle in October of 1804. The Kiks.adi warrior K'alyaan was the hero of the day. Two hundred years later his Raven helmet and blacksmith's hammer were put on exhibit at the **Sheldon Jackson Museum** where they are kept. A major grief and reconciliation ceremony was held, honoring all those killed in the battle and reconciling the clans and Russians today.

In 1904 the last great potlatch was held in Sitka in commemoration of the battle. Wonderful Tlingit regalia and photographs from the affair were not only brought out for the October 2004 event, but many were placed on long-term loan to the museum.

Nellie Neal, "known in every camp in the Territory" according to the news found by the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society**, bought the Roberts roadhouse at Roosevelt, Mile 23, on Lake Kenai in 1923. Later, as "Alaska Nellie" Lawing, she wrote of her life and the Alaska Railroad in a charming eponymous book. Roosevelt was renamed Lawing when she married Bill Lawing.

The same paper, the *Seward Gateway* reported in 1923 that the Seward fire department's clubroom was to be enhanced with a "shower bath." Old local papers can be a gold mine.

The society's obituary index is now up to 2,047 and they're still beavering away.

It takes energy to do more than look out at the blowing snow and decide to read quietly before going to bed early during the long, dark nights of winter. Fortunately, the **Palmer Historical Society** had all sorts of good ideas.

Message from the President

Voice your support for Alaska's history

In the next month (the sooner the better!), I encourage you to visit or contact your legislators in support of the Alaska Historical Society. The legislators need to hear from you (it really matters) and to know there is widespread support for Alaska's history and for the state's historical and cultural resource agencies and programs.

Our seven priorities are:

- Support the programs and services of the Division of Libraries, Archives & Museums and the Alaska Office of History & Archaeology.
- Maintain the Museums Grants-in-Aid Program at \$105,000.
- Request legislative review of budget items.
- Request design funds for expansion of the Alaska State Library, Archives, and Museums (\$1,400,000).
- Support \$50,000 in the General Fund Match budget for the Alaska Office of History & Archaeology.
- Support the funding of emergency building repairs to the Alaska State Museum and Archives.
- Support the restoration of the Wickersham House in Juneau and emergency stabilization of the Jesse Lee Home in Seward.

You will be receiving in the mail more detailed information about these priorities.

Stepping Stones to History: Islands in Alaska's Past is the theme for the annual meeting in Kodiak, October 5-8. The Program Committee is working on future projects. Some ideas include improving the society's Web page, selecting the best Alaska history books, developing a lecture series tied to the new Alaska history curriculum for high school students, and two possible publications on Russian America. This year promises to be an exciting and busy one for the society. I hope that you will participate in our programs, and, especially, help us by contacting your legislators.

Bruce Parham, President

Board of Directors

Bruce Parham, *President, Anchorage*
bruce.parham@nara.gov

Bruce Merrell, *Vice President, Anchorage*
merrellbd@ci.anchorage.ak.us

Karl Gurcke, *Treasurer, Skagway*
karl_gurcke@nps.gov

Phyllis Movius, *Secretary, Fairbanks*
pdmovius@gci.net

Rosemary Carlton, *Sitka*
rjcarlton@gci.net

Mike Dunning, *Ketchikan*
mike.dunning@uas.alaska.edu

Susan Grigg, *Fairbanks*
ffslg@uaf.edu

Steve Haycox, *Anchorage*
afswl1@uaa.alaska.edu

Katherine Johnson, *Anchorage*
katmaikate@aol.com

Jim King, *Juneau*
kingfarm@ptialaska.net

Marilyn Knapp, *Anchorage*
knappmr@muni.org

Dee Longenbaugh, *Juneau*
deelong@alaska.com

Dorothy Moore, *Valdez*
dmmoore@cvinternet.net

Frank Norris, *Anchorage*
frank_norris@nps.gov

Barbara Smith, *Anchorage*
barbarassmith@gci.net

Jo Antonson, *Assistant to the President*
joa@alaska.com

Judy Bittner, *Office of History and Archaeology*

Kay Shelton, *Libraries, Archives and Museums*

Jim Ducker, *Editor, Alaska History, Webmaster*

P.O. Box 100299 Anchorage, AK 99510-0299
Tel: 907/276-1596; E-mail: akhist@gci.net



Become a member... or if you're already a member, sign up a friend or relative. Join the hundreds who want to stay in touch with historic Alaska by sending \$30.00 per member (\$20.00 for students; \$40.00 per family.)

It's quick, it's easy, and you receive the semiannual *Alaska History*, the quarterly newsletter *Alaska History News*, and discounts on publications.

Right now a number of back issues of *Alaska History* are on sale; \$6.00 each to non-members, \$4.00 to members. As interest and writing on Alaska history seem to be sprouting like fireweed in the spring, a useful and popular feature is the listing of new books and publications found in each issue. Send your application to Alaska Historical Society, PO Box 100299, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-0299; remember to include your address and occupation or school you're attending.

Notes from around the state



Kaktovik Whaling Tool Sharpeners, a photograph by Joel Bennet of Juneau, is Alaska Positive 2004 Juror's Choice Award winner. The exhibit is touring the state through May of 2005.

Photo courtesy Alaska State Museum.

They presented their 12th annual historical preservation awards, held an "identify the antiques" evening, and hosted a program on the Alcan Highway as well as their usual all-out efforts for Christmas at Colony House. Thanks to all the energetic societies across Alaska who make the dull winter speed past.



As Sitka knows, there is simply nothing better than a local photographer who sticks around for fifty years and then donates the resulting photographs and negatives to the historical society. The **Ketchikan Historical Society** is also fortunate in that respect. Thousands of pictures by Paulu Saari have just been documented and the recorded history of the town is enriched immeasurably.

On an entirely different level, the artistic side of photography, a juried, statewide show was recently in Ketchikan. Go to: www.museums.state.ak.us/temporaryexhibits/akpos2004/akpos2004main.htm and take the tour if you haven't seen it before.

The spring display will be *New Acquisitions*, showing their great new, well, acquisitions.



No one enjoys seeing Alaska wildlife and then talking about it more than Alaskans. Moose and moose stories are a Kenai staple, so the **Kenai Historical Society** devoted its February meeting to the animal that's said to have been put together by a committee. They also noted the celebration of Kenai's Chamber of Commerce's 50th anniversary. Seems the first president, according to his wife, brought her to a two-room house sited between a muddy alley and the back of a garage. The main room, she said, "...held a

cook stove, a space heater, a sink, a washing machine, a huge butcher-type table, a small couch, and one easy chair that had been an airplane seat." Shelves and other wooden structures were ex-Blazo boxes.

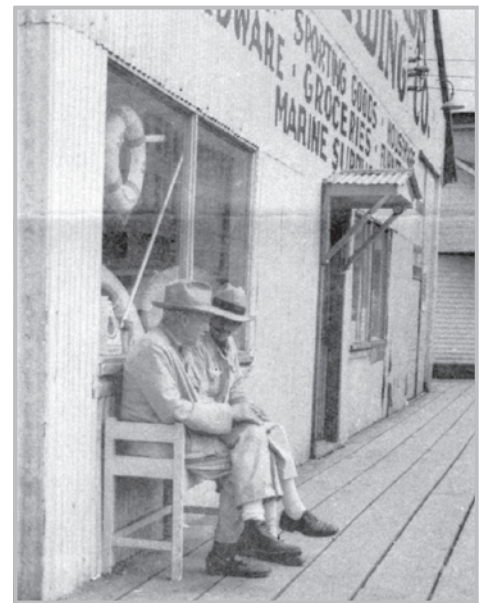
Little tiny historians can be amazing. A Kenai school's fourth-grade class wrote and produced a movie "A Kid's Guide to Kenai" in 2003. Now they're working on an oral history project.



One of the best parts of starting a new historical society-cum-museum is the interest visitors show. They not only visit, they donate photographs, letters, artifacts; all those things that normally are scattered. The **McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum** is delighted to report not only 1,543 visitors last summer, but items are coming in. One of the most poignant was a collection, 1933-1937, the depths of the Depression, of letters of Tom Driscoll, who continued to work and send money home even as he was dying. If you have anything to give, even in photocopied form, send it to the museum at Post Office Box MXY, Glennallen, Alaska, 99588-8998.

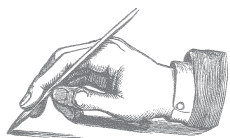


Douglas has always been independent. This extends to cemeteries. After an argument with Juneau, they finally bought land and divided it



Dock Loafers, June 1955, a photograph by Paulu Saari, is part of a collection he donated to the Tongass Historical Museum in Ketchikan.

Photo courtesy Tongass Historical Museum, KM 2003.2.63.173.



Letters & News

We welcome your letters, news and pictures. Please send them to the editor:

Dee Longenbaugh
The Observatory, ABAA
200 N. Franklin St.,
Juneau, AK 99801
Tel: 907/586-9676
Fax: 586-9606
Email: deelong@alaska.com

Notes from around the state

into sections for Masons, Catholics, Serbs, etc. There was said to be separate areas for prostitutes and suicides. A developer tried to renege on his promise to donate the land, but his “No Trespassing” signs mysteriously disappeared.



We've mentioned before the big blowout the **Kodiak Historical Society** had to celebrate their 50th anniversary, but just discovered they had commemorative flags flying around town. An excellent way to remind residents and visitors that the society had its Big 5-Oh. Others might want to take note if a special day or year is coming.

Sitka is not the only place that's scanning important photographs. Kodiak is working away as well. Some of the pictures that are already on their excellent Web site are of the wreck of the *Kad'yak* in 1860, the oldest shipwreck found in Alaska and the only one of a Russian vessel. The wreck was located in 2003, but last summer a metal cylinder with the name of the ship on it located in situ confirmed its identity. Go to www.baranov.us and paddle around.



The **Totem Heritage Center's** valuable classes continue. Spring offerings there will be Northwest Coast spoon designs, cedar bark weaving, and bentwood boxes. There are some special programs as well. For more information on any of Ketchikan's history activities, write them at 629 Dock Street, or phone 907/225-5600 or wield your trusty mouse and go to www.city.ketchikan.ak.us and follow the link to City Departments.



The Kenai Totem Tracers Genealogical Society has published a 433-page book, *Cemetery Inscriptions and Area Memorials in Alaska's Kenai Peninsula Borough*, a four year project updating and expanding the work published in 1983,

reports the **Kenai Historical Society**. The book is \$40.00 and can be ordered from the Totem Tracers, 163 Main Street, Kenai, Alaska, 99611 or on-line at totemtracers@hotmail.com.

A local road, Halbouty, is named for a Texas oilman who drilled a couple of dry holes there in the 1950s. He just died at age 95, after apparently making high profits elsewhere. Locally it seems people think the fish is indicated, so Halibouty it is to many.

At Christmas the society had a great time telling and listening about first Christmases members had spent in Alaska. One of the best was told by president Joanna Hollier. She was 20 in 1945, was in Talkeetna, completely alone, and had no mail. She put a box of stationery under her tiny tree so she'd have one present. She explained the problem. “This was near the end of World War II. There were 3-cent stamps and 8-cent airmail stamps. Well, old farmers in Wisconsin would never spend 8 cents on a stamp.” The next month she was overwhelmed with cards and packages.



Pictures of past heavy snows are on the front page of the *Store Door*, the newsletter of the **Tenakee Historical Collection** and memories of past years; a student working in the cannery in 1921, a rather boring visit to relatives in 1936-1937, and some of the finds in old attics fill the pages. There's also a story that W. D. Gross, owner of movie theaters around Southeast Alaska, wanted to marry the author's mother when they were both young and in the Klondike. She turned him down, but he sent movies over to Tenakee for years for the theater the author's parents ran. To get this lively publication and become a member of the society, write them at Post Office Box 633, Tenakee Springs, Alaska 99841, phone 907/736-2243, or e-mail wisentenakee@juno.com/



Panoramic view of Fort Egbert at Eagle, Alaska.

Photo courtesy Alaska State Library-Historical Collections; ASL-P277-004-014.





Swimsuit fashioned out of sealskin is on view at the Alaska State Museum in the exhibit, *Baby, It's Cold Outside*.

Photo courtesy Alaska State Museum; 84-21-6a,b.

As usual, the **Anchorage Museum of History and Art** has all sorts of things going on, from concerts to art displays to the new *Earth, Fire, and Fibre XXV* exhibit, but the **Cook Inlet Historical Society** is in the spotlight now. *The Adventure of Anchorage* celebrates the 50th anniversary of the group, and usual Brown Bag Lunch programs at the museum are concentrating on the hometown. The Alaska Railroad, interactions between Natives and settlers, the school district, and the military are among the topics. April 3 will be the big anniversary celebratory brunch. (Hmm, wonder how many cases of champagne have been ordered.) Congratulations to all who founded and continue to record the history of old Ship Creek.

The AT&T Foundation has announced a \$5,000 addition to their grant to the society for a book on the history of telecommunications in Alaska from the mid-1800s to the 1990s. This makes a total of \$15,000 for the project, which has been in progress since 2000. Publication is planned for 2006.



Making the transition into the twenty-first century can be difficult in small towns. For example, the **Eagle Historical Society and Museums** not only needs a new computer, but has to first borrow a generator when the six museum buildings need vacuuming, as there is no electricity in the buildings. Their current newsletter has an interesting explanation of the research necessary when queries about ancestors or relatives are received. The big projects of the moment are upgrading conservation of artifacts and recovering the early 1900s generators from the old Army Wireless station nearby. Donations can be sent to the society at Post Office Box 23, Eagle, Alaska, 99738, or send an e-mail to ehsmus@aptalaska.net. Go to www.eagleak.org to see what they're up to.

In general news, there's a good explanation of freeze-up and its effect on the town. This winter it has been especially good to be able to get out and see the devastation the wildfires caused last summer. There's a lot of good firewood out there, apparently.



All sorts of exhibitions beginning at the **Alaska State Museum** this spring. *Baby It's Cold Outside*, ends in April, draws on images and objects from the museum's permanent collection that feature, ice, snow, glaciers and

cold weather activities. Included are paintings, photographs and a variety of outdoor gear (including a sealskin bathing suit).

Rarefied Light 2004, ends in April. This annual statewide juried photographic exhibition features 52 photographs by 35 Alaska photographers.

Ocean Home also ends in April. This is a documentary project of the Alaska Marine Conservation Council that explores the values, traditions and visions of coastal Alaskans whose ways of life and livelihoods depend on a healthy ocean.

A Northern Adventure: The Art of Fred Machetanz is up from May through September. Fred Machetanz, whose paintings celebrated life in the Arctic wilderness, was one of Alaska's most beloved artists. This retrospective exhibition chronicles his life's work.

Sharkabet, mid-May to mid-October. Based on Ketchikan artist Ray Troll's recently published children's book by the same name, *Sharkabet* features around 40 original illustrations ranging from Angel Sharks to Zebra Sharks, as well as other shark-related materials.



Personal Notes

Our society board member, **Steve Haycox**, was recently elected to the governing council of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association.



On a sad note, nearly life-long Anchorage resident and community activist as well as the executive director of **Anchorage Historic Properties** has died at the age of 48. The group is planning a garden and outdoor gathering and

music place as well as a view area as a memorial to **Craig Harpel**. Donations can be sent to them at 645 West Third Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99501, or call 907/274-3600. See www.anchoragehistoric.org for more about the organization.

News & Information

HISTORIC BUILDINGS FOR ADOPTION

The **Alaska Association for Historic Preservation** (AAHP) has published its annual list of the ten most endangered historic properties in Alaska. There are some matching grants available for these, should you want to adopt a forlorn old building.

Juneau – the Alaska Juneau Gold Mining Company Locomotive Repair Shop

Skagway - Arctic Brotherhood Hall

Unalakleet – Bureau of Indian Affairs School

Arctic Village – Bishop Rowe Chapel

Ketchikan – Clover Pass Community School

Sitka – Japonski Island Boathouse

Flat – Flat City Historic District

Seward – Jesse Lee Home

Kake – Kake Cannery National Historic Landmark

Kasilof – Kasilof Winter Watchman's House

Have a candidate yourself? Want to donate or check on current status? Contact the AAHP at 200 West 34th Avenue, #1184, Anchorage, Alaska 99503, phone 907/929-9870, fax 907/929-9872, or e-mail preservation@gci.net, or point your trusty mouse to www.AlaskaAHP.org.

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IDITAROD HISTORIC TRAIL

People can be surprised to find the Iditarod trail, famous worldwide for the great race, has a group dedicated to preserving and promoting the Seward to Nome trail year round. For an education, write the **Iditarod National Historic Trail, Inc.** at Post Office Box 2323, Seward, Alaska 99664-0055 or bring up www.iditarod-historictrail.org and enjoy the words and pictures.

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Dog teams from the Iditarod mining area in downtown Seward in 1917.

Photo courtesy Alaska State Library-Historical Collections; AMHA-b81-19-2.

PIONEER CONTACTS

For some personal reminiscences and all sorts of contacts for **Alaska Yukon Pioneers** write them at 2725-71 East Fir, Mount Vernon, Washington, 98273, phone 360/428-1912 or e-mail aypvera@isomedia.com.

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Arctic Brotherhood Hall, Skagway.

Photo courtesy Alaska State Library-Historical Collections; ASL PCA 39.50.

CREATINGALASKA

CreatingAlaska, the project to celebrate the 50th anniversary of statehood and the Alaska constitution, is moving along. If you'd like to know more about it, visit www.alaska.edu/creatingalaska. Send an e-mail to creatingalaska@alaska.edu, or you can phone Joseph Hardenbrook at 907/450-8599. They have just received a \$250,000 federal grant.

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NEW WRANGELL MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

Pat Roppel, noted Alaskan historian, has a neat idea. She is putting out a monthly (mostly, she says) newsletter for the **Wrangell Museum**. The \$20.00 subscription will go to the museum. If subsequent newsletters are as lively as the first one, readers will learn of Wrangell history, news around town, and the latest doings of the museum. Write wrghistory@hotmail.com or send your money to Friends of the Wrangell Museum, Post Office Box 2019, Wrangell, Alaska 99929. Copies can also be purchased from the museum for \$2.00 each.

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THE GREAT AUTO RACE

What! Valdez was part of the New York-to-Paris Automobile Race in 1908? Yep, and there's a group that's set to celebrate its centennial. They're bringing race memorabilia to the city schools April 7 to April 9. They'd also love to see any contemporary photographs or articles about the Thomas Flyer. Please contact them by April 1 at www.TheGreatAutoRace.com, e-mail DkoSgo@aol.com, or write the **New York-Paris Great Race Centennial Committee**, Concord Historical Society, Post Office Box 425, Springville, New York 14141. Gentlemen, crank your engines!

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GEOPHYSICAL INSTITUTE

Scientists are not like you and me. When Fairbanks was in a haze of smoke last summer from the worst wildfires in the Interior ever (see Eagle for reference), some of the **Geophysical Institute** people had a lovely time measuring particulates inside and outside buildings, and did experiments on themselves. Everyone else just coughed.

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GLACIER VOLCANO INTERACTIONS

For 50 years Mount Wrangell in the Copper River Valley has hosted researchers seeking information on cosmic rays and glacier-volcano interactions. Last year they took a 216-meter ice core and will compare it to one from a sister volcano in Siberia. These will be studied in Japan. The idea is to reconstruct past Pacific Rim climates.



ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS

In case you missed it, the **Alaska State Museums** in Juneau and Sitka have placed 32,000 objects so far on their site at www.museums.state.ak.us. Just click and follow the links to see the goodies.

Probably the best use of small amounts of money is found in the Grants-in-Aid Awards to Alaska's museums. Last summer 19 institutions of the 23 that applied received a total of \$105,232.



JUDY BITTNER RECEIVES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FROM THE NCSHPO

Judy Bittner is being honored by the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers with its 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award. The award recognizes someone who has worked in a state office for more than 20 years and contributed significantly to building a state's historic preservation program.

Judy became Alaska's State Historic Preservation Officer in 1984. She has led the office through consolidations, budget tightening and the oil spill. She has found new partnerships for the program with local communities, getting the Certified Local Government Program underway. She has worked with groups such as the tourist industry through the World War II and gold rush centennial commemorations. Judy has partnered with other state agencies such as the Department of Transportation to get highway road signs. She has promoted teaching Alaska history in the schools, archaeological research, and most recently, shipwrecks. She has encouraged statewide and local societies and museums. The award will be presented to Judy on March 2 at the NCSHPO annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

Congratulations!



AASLH SEEKS AWARD NOMINATIONS

It is time to submit nominations for the American Association for State and Local History awards. Among the eligible activities are exhibits, public programs, special projects, publications, and individual achievement. Special consideration is given to new

and promising ideas, approaches and innovations. Nominations are due by April 1 to state awards chair, Joan (Jo) Antonson. For more information contact her at 907-269-8714 or e-mail joa@alaska.com. Nominations will be reviewed by the Awards Committee with representatives from around the country in June, and are presented at the association's annual meeting in September, this year in Pittsburgh.



PLANNING UNDERWAY FOR AHS ANNUAL MEETING

The **Alaska Historical Society** annual meeting, in association with **Museums Alaska**, will be at Kodiak, October 5-8, 2005. The society's theme for the meeting is *Stepping Stones to History: Islands in Alaska's Past*.

One cannot think of Alaska without reference to its islands. The Tsimshian moved to Annette Island in 1887. The Pribilof Islands did not have human inhabitants until the Russians brought Aleuts there to hunt the fur seals in the early 1800s. St. Lawrence Island was home to Siberian Yup'ik. Some islands have served as experiments for wildlife management and atomic testing. Others have been the ground of battles, as on Kodiak, Adak, Sitka, and Attu. There are "virtual islands"; isolated peoples — communities of immigrants such as the Filipinos and Old Believers. The islands theme offers opportunities to think in new ways about the Alaska landscape, its people, and its history.

The deadline for proposals for papers, presentations, panels, and poster sessions is April 30. Proposals should be sent to Barbara Smith, 6751 Round Tree Drive, Anchorage, Alaska, 99507, barbarassmith@gci.net.



Canoeing on pond, Kodiak Island, 1917.

Photo courtesy University of Alaska Anchorage, Archives and Manuscripts.

Visit our website:
www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org



Two boys pose in front of a classroom map in Seward, Alaska, ca. 1950.

Photo courtesy Seward Community Library Association, SCL-7-22.

Editor's Comments

It had seemed such a mom-and-apple-pie issue. Who could possibly object to one little semester of Alaska history in the state's high schools? Large numbers of students, especially in urban areas, do not have parents who grew up in Alaska, so have no family memories to share. Nor do they have the slightest idea of life in the Bush, how Alaska came to be owned by the United States and finally became a state itself. Do they know the names of Baranov, Seward, Bartlett, Peratrovich, or Gruening? What about the Native Land Claims?

Those who were against it said it could limit elective courses. How much difference will *one semester* make? There were those who simply were irked at control imposed from above. But how can a school system be run if every district does as it pleases? Alaskans like to say, "We don't care how they do it Outside." But how can we know how we do it here if we don't know our own history?

Several years and a number of objections later, the Alaska Board of Education finally voted in early December, 2004, to make this mandatory. The Humanities Forum is developing a free curriculum that is being tested across the state right now.

I've been told there was a huge furor in the 1950s when it was decreed that Native and non-Native students would be taught together. The students wouldn't get along, traditions of learning were too different, etc. Within five years, I was also told, everyone had forgotten all about it.

In five years everyone will be glad Alaska is one of 48 states that requires some knowledge of what makes us a community across our mountains and tundra, our islands and our rivers. Alaska will remain the biggest small town in the world.

Dee Longenbaugh