



Alaska History News

Volume 34, No. 1 Quarterly of the Alaska Historical Society Spring 2006



Notes from around the state

(above)
Soap Box Derby racers on
Main Street, Ketchikan.
Ketchikan Museums, 2003.2.63.691.

The decade of the 1950s was a time of enormous change in Ketchikan as the pulp mill opened and fishing was no longer the largest industry. The **Tongass Historical Museum** has a new display, *Boom Town: Ketchikan in the 1950s*. Historic photographs of the sudden growth of the town and how the people viewed that as well as found their amusements. Yes, no television, no Internet, but Soap Box Derby race, music, dances, and lots of other homemade fun. The exhibit will be open until April 16.

How bored were the Episcopalians of Seward in the winter of 1906? According to the news from the *Seward Gateway* of that date, brought to us by the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society**, very. They had started building a church, but by the time enough material arrived from Seattle, the cold weather had set in. In spite of that, by the end of January the men decided to start on it anyway.

Sadly, today the building is listed as one of the 10 Most Endangered Historic Properties in the state. Among the problems is the detachment of the basement entrance enclosure from the main church, due to ground subsidence. Sounds as though other problems are well in hand. New electrical system and windows are in, and an exterior paint job is planned for the summer. Can you help?

Love whodunits? How about real crime? Really, really bored with winter? Go to the **Alaska Trooper Museum** at 245 West Fifth Avenue, Anchorage, or call 907/279-5050 if you want to attend the four presentations given by real crime experts during February and early March. \$100.00 gets you all four. If you miss it this year, whine to them about next year.

As they have done for some time, the **Gastineau Channel Historical Society** devotes most of its newsletter to a single topic, in this case Dzanitik'i Heeni, the original Juneau Indian village. The name for Gold Creek, which in Tlingit means "gathering place of the flatfish", the major salmon stream of the area, was the site of the summer village. As with all Tlingit communities, the winter houses were left vacant when warm weather and the salmon arrived. Everyone moved out to fish camp, where life was dictated by the tides and the children played until they were exhausted. Smokehouses dotted the beaches, seaweed and berries were picked; everything was done to ensure enough food for winter was prepared.

Then gold was discovered in 1880 a mile or so to the north on the eponymous stream, and that led to massive dislocations over the years. By 1911 Juneau had grown around the summer village; by the 1930s beach access had been totally blocked. Today it forms only a small part of the downtown area. However, plans are well underway to rejuvenate the Village as the renewed interest in language and culture continues.

Longtime volunteer and local historian **Willette Janes** was honored by the society with its Lifetime Achievement Award. She is especially noted for her help with people who wish to know more about their families.



June Hall with Juneau historian Willette Janes.



Miss Miriam Dickey and Captain Lathrop of the Midnight Sun Broadcasting Company.

Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives, AMHA b25-29.

Message from the President

So Many Books, So Little Time

The Alaska Historical Society has embarked on a project to develop a list of the 67 most important books about our state's past — the books that do the best job of explaining Alaska's roots. Other states already have such lists (Basic Texas Books, The Washington 89) and our board of directors feels it is time for the Society to come up with one of our own.

Why 67 books? We thought about 49 (the 49th state in the union) and 59 (the year of statehood), but decided these numbers would leave out too many worthy titles. We somewhat arbitrarily settled on 67 (the Purchase was in 1867) and have been explaining the number ever since.

Not that numerological confusion kept folks from responding: the Alaska 67 editorial advisors received an avalanche of nominations, some 600 titles suggested by more than 140 individuals scattered from Key West to Kotzebue. Many lists included comments on the importance of particular titles with comments such as "essential for understanding the Russian-American period," or "This is THE book on the gold rush." A few of the responses were perplexing: one writer prefaced her list by identifying herself as a "life-long bibliophobe." I sincerely hope she means that she loves books rather than being scared of them.

With thousands of Alaskan books to consider, it was hard work panning for the nuggets. The editorial advisors have decided that our list should be aimed at the general public — not at book collectors or historians — and that it cover a broad range of periods, places and topics. There may be a second list in the future that recognizes classic titles not read much anymore but valuable in their time. After all, doesn't each generation stand on the shoulders of those who went before?

The process continues as this newsletter goes to press. For latest developments check the Society's website at www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org. The Alaska 67 list will also appear in a future issue of the newsletter and there are plans for an annotated booklet with wide distribution.

Bruce Merrell, President

Visit our Website:
www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org

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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, P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-0299; remember to include your address and students, the school you're attending.

Notes from around the state



People at the Christ Church Mission in Anvik greet the first mail of the season.

Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, UAF-1985-72-148.



Until April the Wrangell Museum has an exhibit of salmon can labels, curated by local resident Patricia Roppel. The exhibit is based on Petersburg resident Karen Hofstad's collection. Karen started collecting Alaska and Pacific Northwest salmon can labels, circa-1900 labeled cans, wood shipping boxes, and box-end stencils pre-eBay.

The **Anvik Historical Society** reports that although the ranks of the traditional elderly speakers of the local dialect, Deg Xinag, are thinning, and the University of Alaska decided this past year the expense of continuing the class in the language was prohibitive, the classes continue. Volunteers teach and the students pay for their phone lines and share the cost of

telephone lines for the elders. Anvik contains some very stubborn people.

The Anvik airstrip is being improved; no longer will the ends be higher than the middle. However, that is the end of the hill called *Deloy Ges*. If you want to read the delightful story of Raven and the hill, send \$10.00 to the society at Post Office Box 110, Anvik, Alaska, 99558. That will also give you a year's subscription to the newsletter.



Ah, the great Kodiak Gold Rush. Men maddened by the lust for gold came from all corners of the globe – wait – that was the Klondike. Well, Kodiak did have some gold mining claims filed in 1898, as reported by the **Kodiak Historical Society**. The Uyak Bay Mining Company set up shop then and in 1906 the Amok Bay mines began. Amok Bay had two mills totaling 15 stamps and around \$8,000.00 of gold was produced, a good amount at the time. From time to time other prospects were looked into. As late as 1954 a local company, KECO, was formed. So don't count out Kodiak, as it is said gold can be found in every stream in Alaska.

The origin of a couple of local place names is also in the newsletter, a very good idea. Who isn't charmed by the thought of *Ostrov Prazdnichnoi* which translates as *Holiday Island*. I want it!



Pat Roppel continues her Wrangell History newsletter with an excerpt from the memoirs of "Crib-Board Mary" Reynolds, wife of the first hand-logger in Alaska. She has stories of going to sleep on a stump while filling in as hook tender during her husband's absence, and forgetting the time while playing poker all night in Port Alexander. Her pets, which she took with her, were a pair of porcupines, a baby bear, a fawn, St. Bernard, fox terrier, and three cats. Colorful is scarcely the word.

The memories of a Canadian who spent the winter of 1867 in Wrangell are related as well, as are other tasty items. For your own copy, send \$20.00 for a year's subscription to the **Friends of the Wrangell Museum**, Post Office Box 2019, Wrangell, Alaska 99929 or visit their Website at www.wrangell.com.



Termination Dust Dinner, 1905 has nothing to do with the desert. It is what the miners called the first heavy snows that meant the season was over and it was time to head to town. The Valdez Museum put on its fourth annual dinner and raised an amazing amount of money. It also provided skits, music, a silent auction, honored a longtime contributor, and a great turkey dinner. A great way to celebrate October, that time of year when Alaskans become very grumpy at the thought of the long winter ahead.



Two interesting items from the newsletter of the **Iditarod National Historic Trail, Inc.** at Post Office Box 2323, Seward, Alaska, 99664-0055. New York City has a race inspired by the Iditarod race. It is called the Idiotarod, and has a five mile run from the wilds of Brooklyn to the cold coast of Manhattan. Shopping carts are sleds and people the dogs. No names of winners released as yet, but 500 participated this January.

Gripping about mail service is an ancient Alaska pastime, but there's a heartfelt plea in the 1895 "Eskimo Bulletin" of Cape Prince of Wales for better service now instead of waiting for the reindeer to be domesticated. After all, Southeast had bi-monthly postal service; why not a mid-winter overland route?



The **Kenai Historical Society** took advantage of local residents and their family photographs for the last two newsletters. Great fun to read of the reluctant first postmasters of **Soldotna** (their cabins were really too small to share with the office but those checking their mail were offered a cup of coffee and a piece of pie). The account of the 1944 homesteaders will stir some good memories for various old Bush dwellers as well. These stories illustrate the enjoyment the whole community can have in knowing more about some longtime inhabitants.

It also reports on the **Kasilof Regional Historical Association**, which is busy accumulating donations while searching for a building, and the **Cooper Landing Historical Society**, which does have a museum site for their historic items.



There's a familiar pattern to the visit of dignitaries to a community. The best suite at the local most distinguished hotel is booked, a dinner is arranged at the finest restaurant, the local press is alerted, the Great and the Good of the town form a welcoming committee; yada, yada, we all know the drill.

However, when you have the Royal Norwegian Consul visit a community of around 35 winter residents and the temperature is -40°, it is rather different. No hotel, no restaurant, no local press

Notes from around the state



Captain Amundsen and his crew on the ship GJOA in Nome.

Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, UAF-1973-203-12.

except the reporter of the **Eagle Historical Society and Museums** (she doesn't claim that — this editor promoted her), everyone in town had to help out. Judging from accounts the visit by Consul Anton Zahl Myer was completely successful. The visit of December 5, 2005, was to celebrate the centennial of the arrival in Eagle of **Roald Amundsen**. The famed explorer traveled by dog team 500 miles from the Arctic Ocean to the

closest telegraph line. That was Eagle. There is a story that the telegraph operators were startled, to put it mildly, to have a knock on the door in the December dark and asked if the telegraph was in operation. That was Amundsen, needing to notify the world that the Northwest Passage, sought for centuries, had been attained. He spent two months in the community, waiting for the ice to go out in the Arctic Ocean, receiving congratulatory telegrams, and visiting around the area before returning to his ship and finishing the voyage to Nome, August 31, 1906.

Consul Myer brought various memorabilia for the Eagle museum and even went for a stroll around town. Being accustomed to winter, he borrowed a pair of insulated coveralls for the walk.



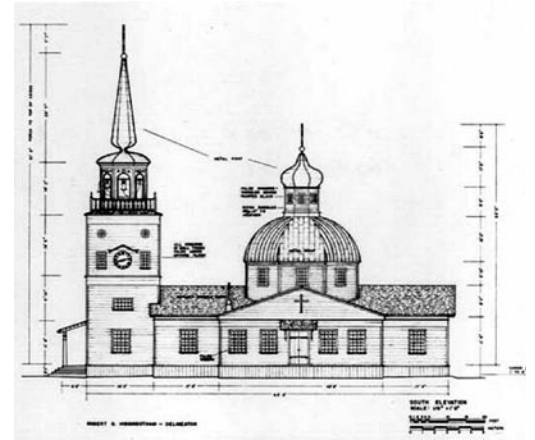
The **Palmer Historical Society** refuses to be overwhelmed by the 67,000 new inhabitants of the Matanuska Valley. They are touting their historical film collection and busy planning for a new museum. Way to go, guys!



Bob DeArmond, source of **Digital Bob**, the on-line compilation the **Juneau-Douglas City Museum** is working on, contributed a delightful piece on Christmas long ago in Sitka to the **Sitka Historical Society**. He also tossed in some excerpts from the **Goddard Hot Springs** guest-book. A favorite is the group of seven in March of 1902 who claimed to have lived on clams for seven days so they could have the title

of "Champion Clam Eaters of Alaska." Even for breakfast? Any contenders out there today?

There's also a reminder to check the "Meeting of Frontiers" Website, honoring Russia in Alaska



South elevation, St. Michael's Cathedral, Sitka [Novoarkhangelsk], Alaska.

Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, DC 20540.

among other items. Go to Google and put in the name for a wonderful experience in both Russian and English.



The art part of their name is the emphasis of the **Anchorage Museum of History and Art** this winter. The famed *All Alaska Juried Art Exhibition XXXI* was kicked off in January with 80 pieces from 55 artists around the state. It will begin its travels around Alaska in March. A solo display by **Susan Joy Share**, a retrospective tribute to architect **Ed Crittenden**, and an exhibit of the new acquisitions of 2005 supply plenty of reasons to visit the museum if you're in town. All sorts of displays and classes are going on, of course, at this perpetually busy place. For more information, direct your keyboard taps to www.anchagemuseum.org or call 907/343-4326. Or just stop in.

Caves, Father Hubbard, astronomy, and wolves are typical subjects of the popular *Brown Bag Lunch* programs hosted at the museum by the **Cook Inlet Historical Society**.



The Goddard Hotel, Sitka Hot Springs.

Alaska State Library Historical Collections, ASL-Goddard-9.

Editor's Comments

January comes, of course, from the Roman god Janus, the one that looked both forward and backward. That is an excellent metaphor for history, as we reflect on life before and what the future might bring. History is a thousand years ago or a second ago.

We find our family's history endlessly fascinating, even if others don't see the charm. (Perversely, of course, we are all more attracted by the black sheep than the worthy members, preferably long-ish ago black sheep.) There is also the eccentric uncle we remember fondly.

This applies to old buildings in our communities. Whatever its use, when we lose a building, we have lost something from our communal history. We will never be able to show our children or grandchildren the house where the family lived, or the school our grandparents attended, or the old courthouse. We have to substitute personal stories and photographs, which are not the same.

Thousands of us go to Europe or Asia or wherever our ancestors lived, simply to see their cities or villages, yet so many have no regrets about an old building being obliterated in our present towns. "It's only an old wooden thing, about to fall down anyway," makes a good excuse for not trying to preserve it.

Serious harm has been done to efforts to save our heritage buildings by regular budget cuts on a national level the past few years. It is ironic that the 40th anniversary of the Historic Preservation Act and the centennial of the Antiquities Act are being celebrated by more loss of funds. With the vastly increased oil revenues this year, there is, of course, no reason for the State of Alaska to not step in and legislate funds to help close the gap.

Not all our legislators think losing our history to age and development is a good idea. If your representatives might help, let them know. If they're opposed, let them know elections do occur. Our politicians need to hear from us.

Go get 'em, Tiger!

Dee Longenbaugh

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

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"4th Avenue", oil painting by Marianne Elson Griffith, is the Juror's Choice Award in the *All Alaska Juried Art Exhibition XXXI*.

News & Information

2006 ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY CONFERENCE THEME

"Passages: What Were They Seeking?" is the theme of the 2006 conference to be held in Juneau October 4-7, hosted by the Gastineau Channel Historical Society and the Juneau-Douglas City Museum. The call for papers will be sent out soon. In the meantime, ponder the theme and see what you can do.



OFFICE OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY BUDGET CUT

The Office of History and Archaeology had to announce all states have had 10% of their budgets held, ostensibly to pay for repairing the damage done by hurricane Katrina last summer. To subscribe to their on-line newsletter go to oba@alaska.net. To check out the Website, take a deep breath and tap in www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/. You'll be glad you did.



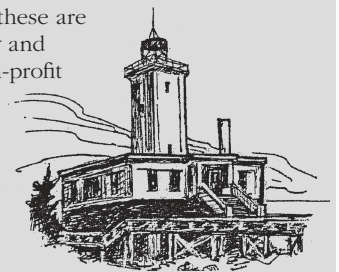
ALASKA YUKON PIONEERS NEWSLETTER

Once more we tout the AYP (**Alaska Yukon Pioneers**) newsletter. It costs a very modest \$10.00 per year and is devoted to keeping those who lived in Alaska and the Yukon in touch with one another. They also offer scholarships. Write 2725-71 East Fir, Mount Vernon, Washington, 98273, phone 360/428-1912 or e-mail aypvera@isomedia.com.



ALASKA LIGHTHOUSE SOCIETIES

No one is sure why lighthouses charm us all, but they do. Since the Coast Guard automated the lights in Alaska and offered some of the former lighthouses for sale, various groups have taken them over and are working on their restoration. Among these are the **Sentinel Island Lighthouse Society** and the **Cape Decision** society. All these non-profit groups richly deserve your support. Get on the Internet for much more information on all the Alaska lighthouse societies.




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Which do you think
are the **67** most important books
about Alaska's history?
(See president's message , p. 2.)



(above) A rainy day in the Ten Thousand Smokes.
University of Alaska Anchorage Consortium Library, UAA-hmc-0186.

ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2006 Conference Travel Awards

The Alaska Historical Society is offering two travel awards of \$500 each to encourage students and new professionals to attend its annual meeting in Juneau on October 4-7, 2006. Each recipient will be introduced at the closing banquet and will be asked to submit a short article for the AHS newsletter. The award will be in the form of reimbursement for documented expenses up to \$500.

Eligibility: Each applicant must be a 2006 member of the Alaska Historical Society at the time of applying. Each applicant for the student award must be a graduate student or upper-division undergraduate in spring or fall 2006 with a course of study related to Alaska history and cultures. Each applicant for the professional award must be currently employed in Alaska historical or cultural work and have been so employed for less than 36 months at the time of applying. Applicants are encouraged to propose presentations for the meeting. The call for papers is at <http://www.alaskahistoricalociety.org/abs.htm>

Application process: Each applicant must submit 1) a letter of application with a statement of eligibility and an explanation of how attendance at the annual meeting will enhance his or her professional development and 2) a current résumé or c.v. Applications will be judged on the applicant's achievement in Alaska history relative to current status and the likely contribution of the meeting to academic or professional development.

Send letter plus résumé or c.v. as attachments to ffslg@uaf.edu or mail three copies to:
Susan Grigg, Chair, AHS Awards Committee
Rasmuson Library
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, AK 99775-6808
Applications must be sent by May 8. Electronic submission is preferred.



Rowland and Mary Cox with a dogsled, 1950s.
Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, UAF-2001-129-12.