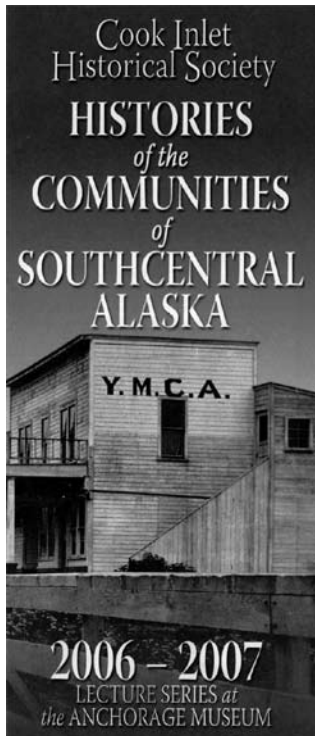




Alaska History News

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Lecture series of the Cook Inlet Historical Society at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.



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

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Notes from around the state

The **Cook Inlet Historical Society** has begun its year-long lecture series on "A History of the Communities of Southcentral Alaska", free evening presentations, begun with "Iydlughet Ht'ana Elena: Eklutna People Land". Should be informative and entertaining as far too little attention has been paid to those who were enjoying the Anchorage area when it was trails, not rails. Give a call at 907/346-2755 or write C.I.H.S., 121 West Seventh Avenue, Anchorage, 99501-3696 for details. They meet at the **Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center**, where the usual topics ranging from art to films to history exhibits are now in full winter mode, with a special emphasis on children's activities. They're currently excited about the soon-to-open interactive installation on early Anchorage, 1910-1935.



Anyone who has ever lived in an old house knows the joys of reveling in the history of the place and the misery of the seemingly endless repairs. The Walter Trench Cabin and Shorty's Barn have worried the **Wasilla-Knik Historical Society** for some time, but the city has galloped to the rescue and both are now being restored. They're also proud to announce the **Dorothy Page Museum** will now be open all winter, with Fridays offering free admission for residents. The museum building and Wasilla's first school house are on the National Register, so there's lots to keep in shape and a big boost to educating the many newcomers to the valley about the town's history.

They also report the best Farmers' Market ever over the summer, a great July picnic, and excellent visitor turn out on the Old Town Site. This year they added "Self-Guide Walking Tour" brochures, meant to be returned later, but found people loved them as souvenirs. There's a dilemma.



If there's one characteristic of Sitka, it's the love of a good community party. A dandy one was held for the raising of the first totem

pole in years. The *Yei Eck Kwa Neix* pole was raised in mid-October to the plaudits of several hundred people, some of whom got to help with the tricky business of raising a very tall, valuable, and fragile piece of wood and securing it upright.

A relatively new (founded in 1999) group in Sitka is the **Sitka Maritime Heritage Society**, but it has also become a part of the community. The first goal was to restore the old boathouse on Mt. Edgecumbe, Japonski Island. As their newsletter says of the workshop wing, "That side started out so full of materials, dating back to World War II and augmented by wildlife, you could not even see the floor." That has been remedied and work continues on the rest of the historic building.

Started during the war when the island was a major staging area for the Aleutian campaign, in 1947 Japonski was the home of the community of Mt. Edgecumbe and various federal agencies, the largest of which were the boarding school for Alaska Natives (the only one sited in Alaska) and the Mt. Edgecumbe hospital, primarily for treating the victims of the tuberculosis plague that was devastating Natives all over the Territory. More people lived on the island than in Sitka, but there was no bridge, so shoreboats, begun by the Navy and continued by Mt. Edgecumbe, regularly plied the short distance between the two communities until the bridge was completed in 1972.

The shoreboats had to be built, and the boathouse was where it happened. There was also a program in boatbuilding for the school for some years, so there's lots of local history. Check out the whippy Web site at www.sitka-maritime.org and pick up a tee-shirt. Anyone who remembers the boating days is also encouraged to contact the society and share some yarns, embellished or not.



(Continued on page 3)

Stealing Wickersham's Raspberries



As cold October rain beats down on the roof, I pick my way up the unlighted stairway of a large, empty house at the top of Juneau's Chicken Ridge. Nobody has lived here recently, the heat is off, and demolition debris and dust cover the floors. On the top floor, I see where workers have stripped away wall coverings to reveal rough cut boards with the name of Judge James Wickersham on them, boards re-used to build room dividers. They were taken from packing crates that held his books when he moved into this house towards the end of his long political career in the 1920s. Restoration of the

house, with its commanding view of the city of Juneau and Gastineau Channel beyond, is now underway.

I have been in the house before, some fifty years earlier. At that time Judge Wickersham's niece, Ruth Allman, lived in "The House of Wickersham" and made it famous by serving flaming sourdough pancakes to tourists as she regaled them with stories about the judge. Although starting to unravel and chip around the edges, the house was still in its glory, stuffed to the rafters with thousands of the judge's books, diaries, and paintings—a lifetime's accumulation of Alaskana.

I got to know Ruth Allman and the house because my parents rented the house next door, or rather, down the hill. I met her when she caught me raiding the raspberry bushes on her side of the fence that separated our yards. She was pleasant enough, but she let me know that the raspberries were hers.

As I worked my way up the stairs of the cold, musty house last fall, I wouldn't have been at all surprised to feel a hand on the back of my neck, and to hear the voice of a ghost, the ghost of Ruth Allman or even of Judge Wickersham himself, moaning, "So, have you come looking for more raspberries, you thieving little rascal?"

All of what I've written here is firmly locked in my memory. Some of it is even true.

Certainly, the house was, and is, there. My family and I lived next door, and the adjoining yards were filled with berry bushes. But did Allman really catch me stealing the judge's raspberries? Was she really a pleasant lady, or an old witch, or something in between? Did I ever even eat any sourdough pancakes, or have I merely seen enough historic photos of her presiding over them that I now believe I was sitting at the table? I can almost taste the berries and whipped cream.

In my memories of 1950s Juneau, the sun is usually shining, I've been playing outside all day, and the five o'clock whistle at the sawmill on South Franklin Street has just blown, calling me home to wash up and sit down for supper. We tend to pick out what we want to remember, and to minimize the rest. This is human nature, and nostalgia, but it isn't history.

We can't do history, we can't interpret and then re-interpret the past, unless we have some basic facts to work with. Primary documents, photographs, artifacts, books, the collected thoughts of those who have gone before us, are the tools we need at hand. Memories of incidents, especially those dredged up years later and without documentary support, are notoriously inaccurate. This is why we need to preserve and protect these building blocks of history.

This year, one of the Alaska Historical Society's top priorities is to support legislative funding for a new State Libraries, Archives, and Museums (SLAM) building in Juneau. The proposed facility will combine collections and administration in one location, providing better preservation and access for books, documents, and artifacts and freeing up valuable office space in the State Office Building and downtown archives. I urge members of the Society to stay alert for news about this project, and to contact your legislators to tell them how you feel about it.

Did I really steal Wickersham's raspberries? Who knows?—there aren't any photographs, diaries, newspaper accounts, or court cases documenting the event. And that's lucky for me.

Bruce Merrell, *President*

(left) James Wickersham outside of his home in Juneau.

Alaska State Library Historical Collections, PCA 277-021-005.

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Notes from around the state



George and Jean Rogers (center) with their Evergreen Ave. neighbors in Juneau.

Photo by Phil Smith.

Have you lived a long time in your neighborhood, or know someone who has? Why not do a history of the area; when the houses were built and who built them; who lived in them then and now? How about events of note? It can be fascinating even if your area hasn't experienced robbers or a mental patient shooting at the neighbors, as the Upper Evergreen Avenue folks in Juneau reminisce in the latest issue of the **Gastineau Channel Historical Society** newsletter. They also report a successful season for the **Last Chance Mining Museum**, dedicated to preserving some actual mining equipment instead of having to make-do with plastic replicas, as well as continuing work on the Sentinel Island Lighthouse.

2008 will see the celebration of 150 years of the order of the Sisters of St. Ann in the Pacific Northwest. They were in Juneau; see www.friendsofstannacademy.com for pictures and history.

Fairbanks may have its Midnight Sun baseball game at the summer solstice, but the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society** gave an historical tour of the Seward Community Cemetery from 10:30 p.m. to midnight.

Their newsletter also reported the Seward fire department was tired of hauling all the equipment themselves in 1917, and asked for a horse to be kept at the fire hall.

There was also a note that the handsome new Bank of Seward would have been opened sooner in 1906 if the steamer *Oregon* hadn't wrecked with the steam heating plant aboard. Fortunately, today there are never any delays with goods ordered from Down South—well, they usually don't involve shipwrecks.

For Christmas, the group is having its annual Christmas Train. Sounds fascinating; next time explain, please. We would love to hear more about the 12 days in 1919 when the town provided Christmas presents for all local children.

Restoring old boats is just one of the many projects of the always busy **Kenai Historical Society**. They also noted the establishment of a private Inupiat Eskimo museum showing northern artifacts, the appearance of *Salmo Rusticas*, otherwise known as fabricated metal salmon above the city's flower beds, other artificial salmon adorning a new town clock, and the beginning of a local history column in the newspaper. Oral history was delivered with a talk by Peggy Arness, Kenai resident and life-long Alaskan who moved with her family into a log cabin in 1948.

There must be something about the Kenai area and history; perhaps it's the racing moon, but the **Seward Historical Society** hosted the September meeting of the **Kenai Peninsula Historical Association**, and the **Kenai Vistors and Cultural Center** will be displaying first editions of Captain James Cook's Second and Third Voyages. The Third was when the discovery of Cook Inlet was made by the English.

Probably the most geographical diverse historical group in Alaska is the **Iditarod National Historic Trail** group. They have a representative for each region respectively of Kenai, Yukon, Wasilla, and Norton Sound as well as at large, showing just how far the trail runs.

One of the charms of any historical collection is having a visitor recognize a display. The **Kodiak Historical Society** had two instances this past summer. A charming antique highchair, circa 1900, enchanted a woman who remembered sitting in it as a child. Then there was the woman who had never before seen pictures of her wedding in 1943. These were from a recently donated photograph collection of World War II in Kodiak.

Old photographs are also being solicited by the **Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society**. They especially desire those of old local businesses. They're also putting out their eleventh calendar of old pictures of early settlers. Donations will be returned to the owners. They've also been given a complete set of an early Chugiak newspapers and would like some volunteers; they sound a bit overwhelmed, so pitch in if you can.

Another busy, busy group is the **Eagle Historical Society**. Every summer they not only run their museum but have other projects going. This year they installed a memorial plaque, arranged for the loan of two freezers to keep their fur collection from insects, had two early pianos reconditioned, and still managed to collect a more historically correct version of Mr. Whitekeys's musical homage to Nimrod, the man who made his false teeth from



The steamer *Oregon* at Valdez.

Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Rasmuson Library, UAF-1975-84-306.



Antique high chair first used by Kodiak children in the early 1900s.

Baranov Museum, 71-202-1.

Notes from around the state

bear teeth. They also printed the reminiscences of a young geologist who surveyed the area in 1948 (he admits he was a terrible camp cook) and gave us the news of the town. Oh, and don't forget to click on www.klondikespirit.com for a great slide show of the inaugural voyage of the boat to Dawson. Glad to hear the summer had no smoke and few mosquitos as well, although the caribou hunting was not good.



Strong backs would seem to continue to be a prerequisite for the hard workers at the **McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum**. Labor Day they moved a tram car to the museum deck, then cleared all the furniture and displays out of the museum so interior refurbishing could begin. They also had a bang-up celebration on July Fourth in honor of the McCarthy Centennial.



No one, including the author, Pat Roppel, was sure just how long the **Wrangell History** newsletter would last. It's now completed issue No.11 of Vol.2 and shows no sign of demise. Recent issues talk of the ill-fated steam launch *Iris*, more about the tough old Buck Choquette and the Sitkine, the attempt to find the real Anan Bay, and a medical bill for a prisoner denied, among other items of interest. \$20.00 per annum and all proceeds go to the **Friends of the Wrangell Museum**. To get in on the fun, send your check to the Friends at Post Office Box 2019, Wrangell, Alaska, 99929.



Photographs seem to be on the mind of many societies this winter. True, there's nothing more fun than perusing old pictures when the winter winds are blowing, particularly if they show summer scenes. The **Tongass Historical Museum and Totem Heritage Center** are showing off 250 photographs of the first forty years of Metlakatla, thus covering the arrival of the colony on the steamer *Ancon* in 1887 to community life in the late 1920s.



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.



(above top) Wendy and Bea Meluch visit the Sentinel Island Lighthouse during the Museums Alaska/Alaska Historical Society Conference.

(above) Virginia Breeze receives award for the Gastineau Heritage News.

Photos by Paula Johnson.

Juneau meeting

As usual, the annual meeting was a delightful mix of Alaska's historians greeting each other, an extended family feeling, good food, and oh, yes, papers presented. What other group would have an m.c. who reminded a distinguished guest speaker of old days at a Bristol Bay cannery and teased him about the day he foolishly tried to walk through an incoming tide?

Several years ago a very nervous speaker asked about the possible reception of her paper. Assured the AHS is more of a club than an assembly of severe historians, she went on to give a superb presentation. In fact, she was so excited she is expanding the paper into a book at last report.

A report on highlights of the October annual meeting at Juneau with recognition of the recipients of the Alaska Historical Society's annual awards will be in the next newsletter.

News & Information

THE ALASKA PEN

Unga Island, just south of the Alaska Peninsula, contained the town of Unga, now deserted. Now there's a book about the old village, complete with photographs. *The Alaska Pen*, the title, is taken from the school newspaper of which the author, Peggy Petersen Arness, was a staff member in 1941-1942. The paper also gave the news of Unga and surrounding villages, so offers a sketch of the area from 1934 to 1951. It's \$24.95 — visit www.thealaskapen.com for details.



WOMEN'S BANDS

Wine, Women, and Song conjures up a good time; how about Fine Women and Musical Instruments? It doesn't exactly, er, um, sing, but Jill Sullivan of Arizona State University is doing research on women's bands in the United States. If you have any photographs, news stories, or personal memoirs of women who marched together, making music for whatever reason, contact her at Jill.Sullivan@asu.edu or 480/965-7369. See what it's all about at www.public.asu.edu/~jmsulli/womens_bands.htm. All together now!



THE MASCOT SALOON

Our AHS treasurer, Karl Gurcke, sent this along. Copies are free for the asking. Write Karl at Karl_Gurcke@nps.gov. or set pen to paper and write the National Park Service, Skagway, Alaska, 99840.

The Mascot Saloon: Archeological Investigations in Skagway, Alaska, Volume 10, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, by Catherine Holder Spude with contributions by Karl Gurcke, David R. Huelsbeck and Gwen Hurst.

A group of buildings built between 1898 and 1904 cover a series of archeological deposits associated with the Mascot Saloon, the longest lived saloon operated by the same owner at the same location in the gold rush town of Skagway, Alaska. Built during the Klondike Gold Rush, and then continuing to cater to the working class men of this railroad and shipping port until local prohibition in July 1916, the Mascot Saloon witnessed all phases of saloon life.

A thorough contextual history explores the multitude and types of saloons in Skagway throughout its pre-Prohibition years; the effects of reform movements throughout Southeast Alaska on liquor licensing, pricing, gambling, and women in saloons; the influence of the declining economy on the saloons; and the incidence of crimes in the saloons. Once the context is set, a detailed history of the Mascot Saloon follows. Special attention is paid to correlating historic photographs of known dates to maps of the archeological investigation grid. The horizontal stratigraphy on the site was excellent, and allowed the archeologists to separate gold rush from post-gold rush era deposits. The gold rush saloon (1898-1899) served a much larger proportion of whiskey in bottles than it did beer or wine; snacks of nuts were served; meals with beer were common; the stampeders were free with their money; women were present in the saloon. After the gold rush (1900-1904), more beer in bottles appeared in the archeological collections; the nut snacks were replaced by free lunches, including clam chowder; while beer remained popular, the less expensive mutton appeared on the menu more frequently; money grew tighter and not so many coins and tokens were lost; the women left the saloon. The post-1904 period at the Mascot Saloon barely exists in an archeological context, and then only as construction or structural debris.



School girls of Unga, ca. 1946 from *The Alaska Pen*.

ALASKA YUKON PIONEERS

Happy to live Down South now, but would love to hear from old friends and let them know your new address? Make the meetings of the **Alaska-Yukon Pioneers** in the Seattle area, or send \$12.00 to the group at 27833 85th Drive, NW, Stanwood, Washington, 98292 for a year's worth of their lively monthly newsletter.



DISTINGUISHED AWARD WINNERS

Three AHS members were among those honored with **Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities**, the **Alaska State Council on the Arts** and **The Alaska Humanities Forum** announced. **Brenda Campen** from Mt. Edgecumbe High School is the first **Alaska History Teacher of the Year**; historian and professor **Terrence Cole** from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, received the **Distinguished Service to the Humanities** award, as did **Perry Eaton**, noted for his work in the arts' development in rural Alaska. Congratulations to all! We all feel quite smug when our members receive the plaudits they richly deserve.



ALASKA STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS 40 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

More congratulations to the **Alaska State Council on the Arts**, on its 40 year anniversary. This is the wonderful group, the Alaska arm of the National Council on the Arts, that makes sure all Alaskan lives are enriched by art. Public art everywhere in the state, from schools to airports to the Silver Hand that denotes authentic Native artwork, is overseen by the council. They distribute grants, encourage individual artists, and generally work tirelessly for all of us. Feeling artistic? See their cool site and learn more at www.eed.state.ak.us/aks-ca/ or write 411 West 4th Avenue, Suite 1E, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2343 if you're the patient sort.



HERITAGE NEWSLETTER

And don't forget the great folks at the **Office of History and Archaeology**. See what they're up to in the *Heritage Newsletter*; found by going to <http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/oba/heritage.htm> for the mind-boggling list of grants, events, archaeological sites, historic preservation, and far more. An old building you're worried about? How to get started on getting your community's centennial recognized? Simply how to get started on historic projects of any sort — just take off your shoes and socks and dip your dainty feet in this clear pool of information.





Eklutna Christmas party.
Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Editor's Comments

The former Public Records Office is now the National Archives of England, Wales, and the United Kingdom, and is situated at Kew, part of Greater London. That's where most of the maritime archives are kept, so it's a happy hunting spot for Alaskans interested in Captain James Cook or George Vancouver, or any of the English fur traders to the Northwest Coast.

This is not just a tip for researchers, it's also a lead-in to an anecdote. One day at lunch I met a pleasant couple from Stansted. They were compiling as much information as possible on the history of their community, under threat from airport expansion plans. The idea was to make the town aware of the value of keeping its old buildings, fields, and general ambiance. We agreed that people today seem to feel modern is good, and progress even better. As the wife said, "People travel thousands of miles to see where their ancestors lived. Wouldn't it be sad if there's nothing left today?" Far too many Alaskans like to point out that Alaska is a young state. So it is, in terms of the rest of the United States, but 1959 is ancient history to anyone under 40. Last year I was asked during my lecture on Alaska history to



The Walter Trench Cabin in Wasilla is getting a new roof and other structural improvements funded by the City of Wasilla. (See front page for story.)

sixth-graders exactly when some event I had mentioned happened. "Oh, not long ago," I answered, "About 1999, I think." From their shocked looks I realized that when you're 11, you would have been a tiny kindergartner then, and that is very long ago indeed.

Shouldn't we believe that preserving our photographs, our diaries, and the minutiae of our and others lives, leading from that onto the larger picture of our buildings and our landscapes, is not only a pleasant and worthwhile thing to do, but our duty to all Alaskans? The past is the future, and the future the past. Unless we understand that we doom our descendants to aimless drift.

Dee Longenbaugh