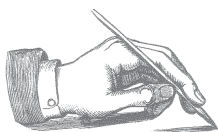




Alaska History News

Volume 35, No. 2 Quarterly of the Alaska Historical Society Summer 2007

Notes from around the state



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

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For several years, Sitka's **Sheldon Jackson Museum** has been sending photographs to the local paper for Artifact of the Month. (See photo right.) This month's artifact, a silver and ivory cribbage board, presents an unsolved mystery. The silver endpiece, carved by Rudolph Walton (*Kaa wootk'*) of Sitka, indicates the original recipient of the board was Secretary of the Treasury General O.L. Spaulding...but who was L.P. Wright? Anyone with answers is invited to contact the museum at 104 College Drive, Sitka, Alaska, 99835 or their website, www.museum.state.ak.us/Sheldon%20Jackson/sjbome.html or just Google it. There's also always 907/747-8981.

The Friends of the Museum would like to thank the descendants of Dr. B.K. Wilbur for contributing the cost of the cribbage board in his memory. Wilbur was a member of the Alaskan Society of Natural History and Ethnology and a close friend of silversmith Walton.



Valdez joined the centenarians of Alaska towns this spring. The work on the new Native Heritage Gallery at the **Valdez Museum** paused while a reception was held. Back at work, the revitalization and additions to the area



Ivory and silver cribbage board with detail of end piece, carved by Rudolph Walton.

Photo courtesy Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka.

proceeded at full tilt. Native artifacts will be re-cased and shown off in the 600-ft. space.

The official opening will be this fall, and we imagine the curator will be happy to have a new office where the large artifacts (pianos, pool table, furniture, etc.) are not stored.

There's a connection between Fairbanks and Valdez that goes back a long way. When the Good Friday earthquake of 1964 happened, Fairbanks not only sent money, then experts back to Washington to plead for help, but even a "Cheer-Up Celebration" in Valdez featuring 450 pounds of barbecued steaks and a live Dixieland band.

So Valdez was happy to take in "smoke refugees" last summer when the wildfires were choking the Interior.

(Continued page 3.)



Holiday gathering in Wiseman.

Photo from *Arctic Village* by Robert Marshall, 1933.

You are invited to the feast!

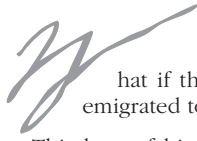


As the newsletter goes to press, the program for the annual Alaska Historical Society and Museums Alaska meetings is being finalized. The response to the society's call for papers around the theme "Food for Thought" has been tremendous. Make sure you have the meeting—to be held in Homer, September 26-29—on your calendar. Heather Beggs, with the Pratt Museum in Homer and this year's conference chair, expects to mail registration, schedule, travel and accommodations information in late June. The society's program will be available on the AHS website, alaskahistoricalsociety.com, by mid-June.

Ann Chandonnet will be the AHS guest speaker at the conference. She has titled her talk "Our Daily Ice: Global Warming and Arctic Alaska's Menus." Ann, a journalist and food historian, lived in Alaska for over 30 years before retiring to North Carolina in 2006. Among her publications is *Gold Rush Grub: From Turpentine Stew to Hoochinnoo*, published by the University of Alaska Press in 2005.

Other speakers will talk about giant vegetables, crystallized eggs and dried beans, homesteading and fur farming, fish and more fish, and traditional cuisine. The AHS program committee chaired by Katie Ringsmuth with members A.J. McClanahan and Marilyn Knapp, are truly creating a feast. Plan to attend!

Phantoms of History



What if the Jews displaced by World War II had emigrated to Alaska, rather than to Israel?

This leap of historical imagination forms the backdrop for Michael Chabon's new detective novel, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. Sitka becomes the center of Jewish civilization, a Jerusalem in the rainforest. I don't know if it is Pulitzer Prize-winner Chabon's writing skill or the exotic setting, but his book has shot to the top of the bestseller lists and he has packed in the crowds on his promotional tour, especially in Alaska.

Or consider another phantom: What if the county seat of Tundra County, Alaska, was Kaktovik? What if the Kayak County courthouse was located in the village of Attu? How about Malemute County, centered on Anchorage?

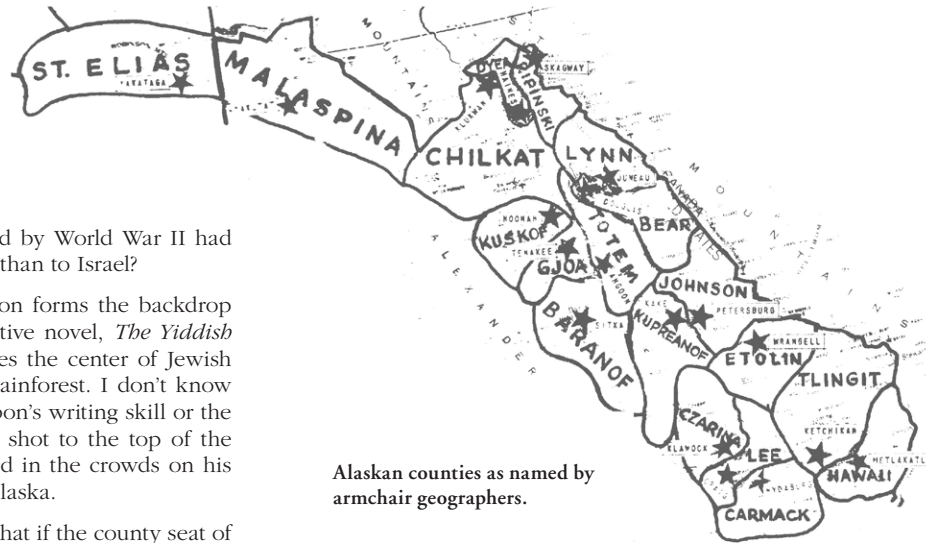
Counties in Alaska? We don't have counties!

I found a strange document at the library the other day, a report titled *Analytical Study for the Establishment of Counties in the State of Alaska*, published just after statehood in early 1959. It seems that some folks in San Francisco were so excited by the new addition to the Union that, at their own expense, they drafted an elaborate plan to divide Alaska into 94 counties, each with a carefully selected name. Southeast Alaska alone would have 18 counties. Copies of this book-length fantasy were mailed to Alaskan legislators, mayors, and newspaper editors, to the editors of *Time* and *Life* magazines, to President Eisenhower, to Eleanor Roosevelt, to the Commandant of the Coast Guard, to the Library of Congress, even to novelist Edna Ferber—in all more than 200 copies, complete with maps, were distributed.

What is astounding about their proposal is not only the practical problem of how, for example, Katmai County with a population of only 110 and almost no cash economy, would be administered.

No, what is more remarkable is all the work that obviously went into this document as the authors labored unaware of the new state's true political status. In a letter to the authors, an obviously flabbergasted George Sundborg—a delegate to the 1955-56 Constitutional Convention and administrative assistant to Senator Ernest Gruening—let them have it with both barrels:

"To say I am amazed by this document is an understatement....How a study made in 1959 could possibly have overlooked completely the Alaska state constitution...is a mystery which I am sure is confronting all of the many people to whom your distribution list shows you have sent copies of this wholly useless piece of scholarship."



Alaskan counties as named by armchair geographers.

After pointing out that the constitution grants local powers to cities and boroughs only, "that there will be NO counties in the state of Alaska," Sundborg lambasts the authors for being "wholly ignorant of Alaska's geography and economy."

"In view of the major flaw which makes your whole report worthless, there is no great point to be served in commenting on details." But having warmed to the work at hand, Sundborg goes on:

"I can't resist, however, giving you my views with respect to some of the names you have selected for the 94 counties Alaska is never going to have...." He berates the authors for omitting Alaska's delegate to Congress, Tony Dimond, "...while doing honor to an assortment of dogs, non-Alaskans, anti-Alaskans and rascals." He lists some of them: Calvin Coolidge, Admiral Byrd, and William McKinley, "the president who did absolutely nothing for Alaska."

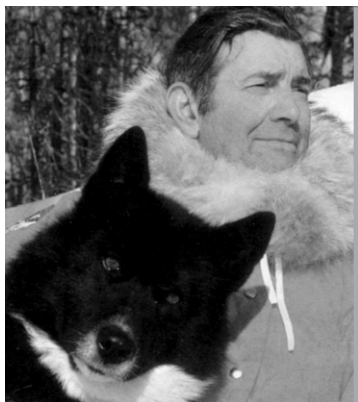
Ever civil, he closes with "But why go on? Cordially yours, George Sundborg."

It is a harmless diversion, imagining what the world would be like if key events had played out differently. Historians generally sniff at such pointless conjecture—isn't there enough to do, interpreting what did happen without chasing the phantoms of what might have been?

Maybe so, but wouldn't Alaska be more interesting if we had counties named for Sam McGee, Rex Beach, and Balto?

Bruce Merrell, President

Notes from around the state



Joe Redington Sr., father of the Iditarod race.

Photo by Bill Devine, courtesy of the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Too bad it's too late to hear everybody's favorite, a lecture on true crimes in Anchorage's history, but great to know the noon "Brown Bag Lunch" and evening programs of the **Cook Inlet Historical Society** continue. Call Jim Barnett at 907/346-2755, or come to the Anchorage museum.



Speaking of which, the **Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center**, as it's now known, reports the usual fine mix of displays, both permanent and traveling, art, music, and fun programs for children. They feel especially honored to be given the Joe Redington Collection by the family of the musher and "Father of the Iditarod". These will be on display when cataloged. They also recently opened *The Alaska Photography of Bradford Washburn* exhibit. A fine loan display *Sharing Knowledge: Alaska Native Peoples and the Smithsonian Collections* opened in April for a full year's run.



The **Kenai Peninsula Historical Association** decided to take action even if Alaska's state and national representatives won't. The speaker at their annual meeting in Soldotna was **Deborah L. Williams**, president of Alaska Conservation Solutions. Her speech was "Ecological and Historical Implications of Global Warming". As our coasts wash away, the polar bears drown from lack of ice, wildfires cast a pall over the Interior, and the tree line marches towards Nome, it seems something must be done. Perhaps the Kenai group can get attitudes changed, one town at a time.



More likely sites for history digs, the **Palmer Historical Society** tells us, are two areas in the north of the Matanuska-Susitna valley where archaeological digs, one of around 5,000 years old and the other around 8,000 years are turning up interesting artifacts under the leadership of **Fran Seager-Boss**. So much for pioneering in the valley.

Meals as a prize are rather common in raffles, but Palmer came up with a nice twist. A real chef, black-tie servers, and elegant cuisine awaited the lucky eight people who won the "Dinner for Four" award. Have a fine chef in your town? Take note.



Attics in old, historic buildings have been known to yield real treasures. We can only hope the volunteer last fall at the **McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum** wasn't expecting too much when he climbed up to clean it and found great mounds of coal dust from the old railroad. They had wondered for years why the building was so dim and dusty. After the attic was cleaned and dust could no longer sift through the ceiling, everything brightened right up.

Always wanted to be an historian in the Bush? The museum is looking for two caretakers-cum-

curators over the summer. A small cabin and a bit of expense money are offered. Memorial Day to Labor Day—probably taken this year, but sign up at help@mccarthy lodge.com or phone Neil Darish at 907/554-4402.

Wouldn't it be fun to have a summer outing and show people around at the same time?



The **Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society** newsletter explains their flood was not of Biblical proportions, but still enough to bring things to halt for the time being. They had been making-do with two rooms in the old school, now community center. There had always been a problem with heat. At first there was so much their historical documents were turning brown and photographs curled. So the heat was turned off. That saved the documents but was very hard on the volunteers in the winter. However, the end of March a hot water pipe burst and a flood ensued. Fortunately, everything of value was saved, but now it seems imperative to obtain new quarters. They are appealing to all for aid with grants and building plans. However, this plucky group continues to offer a \$500 scholarship to an Alaska university or college.

If you can help in any way, call their voice mail at 907/688-4706 or write Post Office Box 670573, Chugiak, Alaska 99567-0573.



The usual busy, busy spring and summer are set, the **Kodiak Historical Society** informs us. "Attu Grass Basket Weaving", hands-on art activities for children, and a great scrimshaw class for salty 7-11 year-olds are in store.

The Coast Guard has donated an album of 500 slides of the air base and town dating from the 1980s, and the society is duly grateful.



Two Unangax basket weavers.
Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, UAF-1990 -3-5, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

(Continued page 4.)

Notes from around the state



Dale DeArmond displays an award for her publication *Juneau, A Book of Woodcuts*.

Alaska State Library Portrait File, Alaska State Library Historical Collections.

World War II saw some of the finest U.S. reporters on the job. Among the most famous and beloved was Ernie Pyle, noted for his coverage of ordinary people caught up in the war. This issue of the **Gastineau Heritage News**, in another of its full-length coverage of a person or topic, turns the tables and prints Pyle's impressions of Juneau in 1937. He was particularly fond of the down-home governor of the Territory, John W. Troy, and an airplane ride he took with Alex Holden over the Juneau icefield.

This issue also has a tribute to famed Alaskan artist, **Dale DeArmond**, who died last November. Among her wood engravings were Juneau buildings, although her illustrated Native myths, particularly Raven, were even more widely known. She married celebrated historian R. N. "Bob" DeArmond, in 1935, and lived in Pelican, Ketchikan, and Sitka before moving to Juneau in the early 1950s.

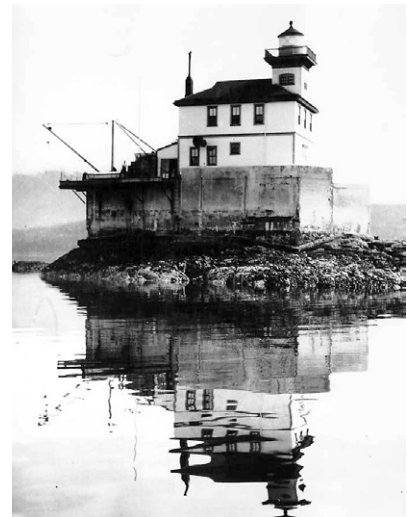
Dale was also the director of the Juneau Memorial Library for 21 years, and is remembered for her warmth, generosity, and friendship to many.



No one seems sure why bear intestines were sent to the Bank of Seward in 1909, the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society** reports, but upon examination by the gutsy bank personnel, \$80.00 worth of gold was found. The bear came from the Knik area, so the Anchorage homesteaders on their way to the Mat-Su might want to detour and see if there's gold in them thar bears.



Find yourself fascinated with Wrangell history? The lively old town at the mouth of the Stikine River offers up a microcosm of Southeastern Alaska. Commercial fishing, gold rushes, the concern with the often stormy weather and seas that led to the founding of lighthouses; these are all covered by historian Pat Roppel in her monthly **Wrangell History**. For \$20 per annum you can read about all of these and more and know the proceeds go to the **Friends of the Wrangell Museum**. A recent issue includes the story of the amazing Lincoln Rock lighthouse that sadly was built on a rock that submerged during really big storms. This led to some shall we say, unpleasant, times for the keepers. There are also some first-hand gold rush accounts as well as the reason there are no lucky shark fins on any boats in Southeast Alaska. Write 318 Church Street, Wrangell, Alaska, 99929. Tour the city at www.wrangell.com or send an e-mail museum@wrangell.com or just call 907/874-3770.



Lincoln Rock Lighthouse.

Alaska State Library Subject File, Lighthouses 04, Alaska State Library Historical Collections.

Feeling hungry? Have some empty three-pound coffee cans? Then the **Kenai Historical Society** newsletter has just the recipe for you. *Kulich* is Russian Easter bread. Like many famous dishes, *kulich* can range all the way from light cake to a masonite texture. This recipe sounds like a good one. The coffee cans are to provide the traditional cylindrical shape. No icing is mentioned, but a butter-cream or seven-minute is usual.

Mulling over an idea to write a book about the history of your area? A talking point—*Alaska's Kenai Peninsula: The Road We've Traveled* has made several thousand dollars for the society, and now there's talk of using the money for grants to historical societies and museums. A virtuous circle indeed.

The lighter side of Kenai law enforcement was the subject of a winter lecture. The comments about early police officers and their prisoners are so charming you really should contact the society for a copy of their March 2007 newsletter. Try tbegriz@acsalaska.net or write Post Office Box 1348, Kenai, Alaska 99611.



(Continued page 5.)



"Frogwoman" print by Dale DeArmond.



Martin Itjen with movie star Mae West, 1935.

Courtesy George and Edna Rapuzzi collection, Phyllis Brown executor.
From "The Lure of Alaska", Alaska State Museum.

Skagway, we all know, was the gateway to the Klondike, but never the mother lode itself. Due to the Rasmuson Foundation that has just changed, the National Park Service has informed us. The foundation paid \$1,000,000 for the Rapuzzi Collection of five historic buildings and 450,000 items. This includes the famous Itjen "Skagway Streetcar", a home-converted 1906 Packard. Martin Itjen and George Rapuzzi came for the gold rush but stayed on as tourism promoters and tour guides. The poke will be divided among the City of Skagway, the Alaska Natural History Association, and the Gold Rush National Historical Park.



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As interest and writing on Alaska history seem to be sprouting like fireweed in the spring, a useful and popular feature is the society's new publication *The Alaska 67* with annotated recommendations of good books on Alaska history. Send your application to Alaska Historical Society, P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-0299; or join through the website: www.alaskahistoricalociety.org.

News & Information

SUSAN GRIGG

Susan Grigg, Alaska Historical Society Board member since 2003, died of cancer May 5 while undergoing treatment at the Mayo Clinic. She came to Fairbanks as head of the Alaska and Polar Regions Department at the University of Alaska's Rasmuson Library in 1996. The library contains over 1,500,000 books, 20,000 serial and periodical titles, and thousands of manuscripts, maps, films, and photographs. It contains the largest collection of books on Alaska and polar regions outside Russia.

Dr. Grigg is survived by her husband, the Rev. Jace Kahn.

On a personal note, I noticed Susan had been in charge of a librarians' conference last year. Susan was born to run conferences. She was straightforward and honest in her opinions, but never in a confrontational "I am making a point to show you know less than I do" manner. Susan just gave her ideas, and they were good ones. She was also formidably well-organized; the sort who appoints committees, checks to ensure they're running, then remembers all the details about programs, sponsors, places, and the minutiae that makes the difference between an okay meeting and a superior one.

If Heaven has a department that needs tidying up, Susan will do it, and if there's an angelic conference, we know who will run it.



DAVID MICHAEL DUNNING

David Michael Dunning, also a Board member, died May 7, age 62, after a lengthy illness. He was credited with revitalizing the **Tongass Historical Society** as well as serving on various history boards and commissions in Ketchikan. He was also a beloved professor of history at the University of Alaska, Ketchikan, and fittingly wrote the history of the campus.

Mike was an expert on commercial fishing, the development of tourism in Ketchikan, and the impact of World War II in the area. He was the author of various articles and spoke at the 2005 Pacific Rim Forum. He was one of those quiet people who pay close attention and when he did speak, we all listened. He is survived by his wife, Judith, three stepchildren, and three grandchildren.

While Susan is tidying Heaven, Mike will be making sure all good Ketchikaners are in, meanwhile judging big tourism boosters on an individual basis.

Susan and Mike will be missed by all of us.
D. L.



PAST PRESIDENT'S PROMOTION

On a far, far happier note, we are delighted to be able to congratulate our immediate Past President, Bruce Parham, on his new appointment. He has been promoted to Director of NARA (National Archives and Records Administration) Pacific Alaska Region (Anchorage) effective April 1. Shall we all simultaneously request material from the archives? Nah — he's too nice a guy!



**Bradford and
Barbara Washburn.**

Photo by Myron Wright.
Courtesy of the Anchorage
Museum at Rasmuson Center.

CONGRATULATIONS & CONDOLENCES

FROM BAVARIA

President of the Alaska Historical Society in the early 1970s, **Richard Montague**, sent congratulations to **Pat Roppel** for her recent award as AHS **Historian of the Year**, from his home in Bavaria. He also enclosed a memorial to his friend, **Bradford Washburn**, who recently died at the age of 97. Washburn climbed Mount McKinley several times, but was most noted in Alaska for his photographs of the state's mountains. He was from Boston, where he established a fine Museum of Science. His wife, Barbara, was the first woman to climb Mount McKinley.

LYDIA BLACK

The community of Kodiak was delighted when Dr. Lydia Black decided to retire to the island in 1988. Retirement to Lydia simply meant she was no longer teaching at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. She continued her fascination with the Aleut and Sugpiak people and her voluminous writing, culminating in the excellent book *Russians in Alaska, 1732-1867*.

She had a dreadful early life; born in Kiev, Ukraine, her father was executed when she was eight years old, but the family finally managed to escape the Nazis and Stalin's USSR. Left a widow at the age of 44 with four young children, she attended college and earned her degrees, including a PhD., in six years. She came to the university in 1984 from the faculty of Providence College in Rhode Island, where she had taught since 1973.

She died at the age of 81 with family by her bedside.

Lydia was a passionate woman, about people and cats as well as her studies. A conversation with her was dramatic, amusing, and always worthwhile. Your editor is proud to have known her and count her as a friend.

The **Kodiak Historical Society** noted the museum always became far too small when Lydia lectured, as anyone who heard her speak wanted to return.



IMPACT OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

60 million international travelers have avoided the United States since the heavy restrictions have been put in place after 9/11/2001, according to the **Travel Industry Association**. Proposed reforms include beefed-up staff at the top 20 arrival airports, shortening visa wait times, and a global promotion program.

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ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM GRANTS

A major problem with the proliferation of recording sounds is the fragility of the materials. An example of that is the 1/4 -inch magnetic tapes used over thirty years ago to record the priceless oral interviews with then elderly Alaska Natives. Hundreds of interviews and conversations over the 20-year span of the project by Leonard Kamerline and Sarah Elder are now in danger because the tapes have deteriorated. However, the **Alaska Humanities Forum** galloped to the rescue. The recordings will be re-mastered and put into CD digital form, and eventually copies will be returned to the Yu'pik, Inupiat, Aleut, and Athabaskan communities where the interviews originated. Other copies will go out to schools, libraries, and eventually on-line in a searchable data base.

Also, don't forget grants of up to \$2,000 are awarded annually covering the broad range of humanities. Check http://www.akbf.org/Grants/grants_main.html. If that's too confusing, you can contact Anne Remick, the Grants Officer, at 907/272-5341 or grants@akbf.org. All applications due October 1, so start now.

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ASHRAB BOARD POSITION VACANT

The Alaska State Historical Records Advisory Board (ASHRAB) is looking for names to submit to the Office of the Governor to fill a position on the Board. The final decision is the Governor's, but we would like to have a number of names of good people who are interested in serving Alaska's history.

The Alaska State Historical Records Advisory Board (ASHRAB) reviews and makes funding recommendations



on Alaskan grant proposals submitted to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). NHPRC is the grants funding agency of the National Archives. ASHRAB also monitors, encourages and tries to support historical records preservation in communities throughout Alaska.

Those interested in serving please contact Board Coordinator and State Archivist Ken Nail, Jr. (Ken.Nail@alaska.gov). To find out more about ASHRAB and its activities please visit the Alaska State Archives website (<http://archives.state.ak.us/ashrab/ashrab.html>).

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ALASKA OFFICE OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

Representative Russ Carnahan of Missouri, with twenty cosponsors, introduced the Preserve Historic America Act of 2007 (H.R. 610) to expand the incentives for the rehabilitation of historic buildings, including owner-occupied residences. Among other provisions, the act would raise the historic preservation tax credit to 25 percent. The bill has been referred to the House Ways and Means Committee. The full text of the bill is at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

The **Chilkat Valley Historical Society** in Haines received a \$2,430 grant from the Hart Family Fund for Small Towns program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The funds are to conduct a condition assessment of the Charles Anway homestead and prepare a preservation plan. Anway built his log house and outbuildings on the site in 1911. The property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The local historical society recently became the owner of the property.

The **City and Borough of Juneau** received notice from First Lady Laura Bush that it was designated a *Preserve America* community in March. *Preserve America* is an initiative of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The designation opens several sources of funds for preservation projects in the community. Juneau is Alaska's second community to be designated; Sitka was designated last year.

For more information about the National Register of Historic Places program, contact Jo Antonson, 907.269.8714 or joa@dnr.state.ak.us.

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AHS BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Laura Samuelson of Nome and Marie Darlin of Juneau have agreed to fill unexpired terms on the AHS board of directors. They were appointed by president Bruce Merrell and will stand for election to their own terms this fall. Thank you, Laura and Marie!

Mt. Bona, as photographed by Bradford Washburn.
UA Museum of the North, Fairbanks, Alaska, UA-1983-148-001.


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E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska
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Editor's Comments

The summer rush is on. A cold, late spring means plants almost leaping out of the ground even though snow lingers in shaded areas. The trees are bare one night and you'd swear are leafing out the next morning. Two weeks ago I went to a local garden center. The afternoon could have been a bad skit. The wind was screaming through the one side of the center left open, knocking over potted trees and shrubs and signs boasting of bargains. We waded through puddles of cold water, blowing on our chilled fingers as we searched for plants. One pathetic little wizened group were billed as "care free" mix, which we took to mean as in "free of cares on this Earth"; dead, you know.

We felt very sorry for the checker, huddled in a heavy coat, covering as much of her face as possible with its collar, then we headed for hot coffee.

Back to the center today. The sun was out, the temperature climbing, and all was serene. Other than the missing "care free" mix, the plants seemed quite cheerful. Unlike the

last time, when the few suffering customers wandered through, this time the place was jammed.

The same phenomenon takes place in Alaska museums and visitor centers at this time. The old reliable and new displays are out, the volunteers ready, and suddenly everything becomes terribly busy. Between being the visitors' answer-person, the garden, the hiker, boater, repairer, painter, and general outdoor duty fulfiller, you can only rejoice in the long, long hours of daylight that make this possible.

However, don't forget to occasionally pause in the evening, treat yourself to a glass of your favorite outdoor beverage, congratulate yourself and the museum for all the information you've given out and enjoy looking at the garden's blooms. (If you're the kind of gardener I am, you may need a neighbor's garden to gaze upon.)

Whatever, have a great summer!
D. L.