



Alaska History News

Volume 36, No. 1 Quarterly of the Alaska Historical Society Spring 2008

Alaska Visionaries: Seekers, Leaders, and Dreamers

CALL FOR PAPERS

Alaska Historical Society Annual Meeting 2008 • October 16-18, Anchorage

Amateur and professional historians are invited to submit proposals for papers, panels, and poster sessions for the Alaska Historical Society annual meeting and conference.* The meeting will be held in Anchorage in partnership with the University of Alaska, beginning October 16 and culminating on Alaska Day, October 18, 2008.

After Bob Bartlett, Ernest Gruening and many other Alaskans succeeded in getting Congress to pass Alaska's statehood bill in 1958, major events have changed Alaska dramatically: the 1964 earthquake and 1967 flood; battles over Project Chariot, the Rampart Dam and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; discovery of the largest oil deposit in North America at Prudhoe Bay; construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline; the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act; the Limited Entry fisheries program; the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill; the Molly Hootch decision; the military; and the battle over subsistence rights, to name a few.

The men and women who participated in such events—among them Walter Hickel, Celia Hunter, Stewart Udall, Jay Hammond, and Katie John, were indeed, Alaska visionaries. Each maintained and attempted to implement their aspirations

for the new state. There have been many others—advocates seeking to preserve Alaska's wild lands, Native leaders fighting for their traditional lands, and state politicians working to make big dreams realities. Although many of Alaska's visionaries stood in opposition to one another, each contributed to make Alaska what it is today.

The theme *Alaska Visionaries: Seekers, Leaders, and Dreamers* provides an opportunity to discuss fifty years of Alaska statehood and the people who helped shape modern Alaska. It also asks Alaskans to consider the relevancy of such foresight, and, if indeed, the history of Alaska's visionaries needs to be revised.

Written proposals for papers and panels should be sent no later than April 30, 2008 to: Katherine Johnson Ringsmuth, Program Chair, 19915 Highland Ridge Drive, Eagle River, Alaska 99577; phone: 907/830-2251; email: KatmaiKate@aol.com.

**Individual presentations should be approximately 20 minutes long. Proposals for panel sessions should include three participants and be 60 minutes in length.*

Message from the President

An 8-Year-Old's View of Statehood

When I was a boy and my family moved from Oregon to Alaska it was supposed to be for just two years. But Juneau evidently had more to offer than Portland and today, half a century later, we're still here, mom and dad included.

The statehood effort was well underway when we arrived, with the Constitutional Convention having been held the winter before. Although our family wasn't much involved in politics we knew we were experiencing something historic and special, especially during that 1958-59 period surrounding statehood.

Most of us have seen the iconic "WE'RE IN" headline from the *Anchorage Times* and think of it as marking the arrival of statehood. It was eye-catching but it wasn't entirely accurate: we weren't in quite yet. Rather, it marked the passage of the statehood bill by the U.S. Senate on June 30, 1958, capping decades of effort for admission to the Union.

Bruce waves his 49-star flag.



When word came of that successful 64-20 vote, Alaskans celebrated: sirens howled, fire trucks led impromptu parades and in Fairbanks, a saloon owner tried to dye the Chena River gold with packets of dye normally used in ocean rescue operations. The river turned green instead but who cared?—We were going to be a state!

The reality of statehood came six months later when President Eisenhower signed the bill but in the cold and dark of winter, it was no time for a party. The *Daily Alaska Empire* in Juneau ran its own big headline boasting "WE DOOD IT!" However, the celebration was muted by the season, and by newly-elected

(Continued page 2.)

WE DOOD IT!
THE DAILY ALASKA EMPIRE



Alaska's governor, Mike Stepovich, and congressional advocates for statehood were jubilant after Senate passage of the Alaskan statehood bill by vote of 64-20.
Alaska State Library Photograph Collection, ASL-P01-3918.

Message from the President

(Continued from front page.)

governor Bill Egan's serious illness. Three days after being sworn in, he underwent surgery for gall bladder problems that led to peritonitis, more surgery in Seattle, and a long stay in the hospital. He didn't return to Juneau until mid-April when the first state legislature was getting ready to adjourn.

The celebration I remember had nothing to do with politics and came on July 4, 1959. Juneau put a lot of work into the big event and nature smiled, as it sometimes does in Southeast, by giving us a glorious sunny day. Highlights included:

- ★ A bigger-than-usual parade featuring the Contra Costa County sheriff's department, mounted on their beautiful palomino horses
- ★ The debut of the 49-star flag at a ceremony in front of the library, featuring Benny Benson, designer of the Alaska state flag
- ★ A price war on watermelons: Foodland had "Klondyke Blackseeded" ones for 9 cents per pound
- ★ A local man waterskied from Auke Bay to Sitka, 130 miles non-stop and arrived feeling fine in spite of a leak in his wetsuit that "left him standing in cold water"

Now, fifty years later, we've come a long way. We'll be examining just what sort of progress we've made at next fall's Alaska Historical Society annual meeting in Anchorage, culminating in an Alaska Day celebration on October 18th. I'll hope to see you there but my cowboy hat is long gone, and I can't seem to find my 49-star flag.

Bruce Merrell
President

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Notes from around the state



St. Ann's Hospital staff in Juneau, post 1936.

Alaska State Library, Winter & Pond Photograph Collection, ASL-P87-1175.

The **Gastineau Channel Historical Society** seems never to run out of good ideas for one of their 12-14 page issues focusing on one feature of Juneau and Douglas history, whether it be a mine or airport or other facet. The current newsletter contains three accounts dealing with Juneau's hospitals and nurses. The order of St. Ann's was the first to establish a hospital, followed by the Native Service Hospital.

A nurse who worked there mentioned the tuberculosis annex, reached from the main building by heavy double doors, sometimes had patients who tired of the enforced rest, so would climb out the window and head for the bright lights. The windows were altered by the time she arrived. Public Health Nursing is the third account and that was normally carried out via the *MV Hygiene*, as a boat was the best way to navigate the watery world of Southeast Alaska.

These not only make for interesting reading, but as written by people with first-hand knowledge, make a valuable contribution to the medical history of the area.



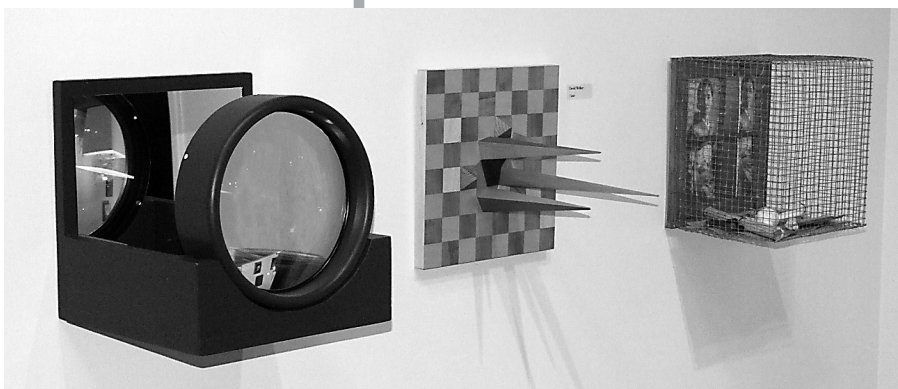
Kenai tends to be a conservative, saving sort of place, the **Kenai Historical Society** newsletter reports. Oh, they don't mind new businesses coming in or local ones expanding, such as the Central Peninsula Hospital or the nifty new log facades gracing several existing ones, but when it comes to signs, they see no reason to rush out and change perfectly good ones. Examples are shown in the recent newsletter. Write them at thegriz@acsalaska.net or send \$10.00 to Post Office Box 1348, Kenai, Alaska 99611 for a year's dues.



Movies as well as a new gallery are keeping the **Juneau-Douglas City Museum** folks occupied. They don't mention if you should bring your own popcorn. Art is also a hot topic. A note for those with small display space—the 12x12 art competition is very popular. All submissions must be 12" by 12".



Artwork from the Juneau-Douglas City Museum "12x12" exhibit, from left to right: *Lenticular Diversion*, Jay Crondahl; *Cancer*, David Walker; *Minidoka Interlude*, Fumi Matsumoto. Courtesy Juneau-Douglas City Museum.



The **Cape Decision Lighthouse Society** reports another good summer with volunteers, including two group of NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) visiting and helping with the renovations. Various other visitors came out as well, so if you overhear a conversation along the lines of "Where are you going?" "Oh, I thought I'd go out to Kuiu and stop off for a few days at the lighthouse to relax; maybe put in a little work...." do not decide the speaker has spent too many days in a kayak.

The society found an account of a heartwarming incident in 1960, before the lighthouse was automated. Around Christmas of that year the keepers saw a float plane descend and anchor off the rocks. The pilot stayed with the plane while his large passenger, complete with a large saw, came up to the bemused crew. Seems he was a pastor who played *Joy to the World* on his musical saw. Then the pilot started shouting, so he gave the men a box of cookies from the parish ladies, and departed.

The society would love to have more details, including the identity of the preacher. Anyone? Write them at 224 Katlian Street, Sitka, Alaska, 99835, or visit www.capedecision.org.



A good report from the *Dead Bear Walking* or as they call it, the *Bear Bones News*. This is the **Cooper Landing Historical Society and Museum** newsletter, named after a bear skeleton exhibit. The total population of Cooper Landing is a bit over 300, so it was amazing to read their two-day open house for Christmas brought in about \$1,000. The quilt raffle trumped it by netting \$2,000. They report a bank balance of \$10,000. Good lord, what would happen if they put on a bake sale? If they want to share their secret, I am sure many of us would love to hear.



Maybe they have only 50 years of incorporation to celebrate, but the **Palmer Historical Society** is enthusiastic and delighted to be finding various historical items such as the plats and original notes of the first cadastral survey of the Matanuska Valley in 1911. They also plan on enjoying the 1939 aerial photographs from time to time, now that they've obtained geospatial copies. Just too much fun to see familiar landmarks and reminisce.



The **Copper Valley Historical Society** has been in existence for over 30 years now. Its two cabins next to the Copper Center Roadhouse had more than 7,500 visitors last year. It's a joy to have old buildings and increasing donations, but they do take time and money to maintain. The State Museum sent a grant-in-aid that is enabling the group to catalog not only their records on the computer, but to add videos, audios, and other goodies if they like.



Notes from around the state



Comb from Sabotnisky for preparing grass. From *Yuungnaqpiallerput (The Way We Genuinely Live): Masterworks of Yup'ik Science and Survival* at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Courtesy the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Seward has been busy celebrating the Iditarod Centennial but always has time for other things as well, the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society** reports. Among them has been going very high tech with new cataloging software, a new computer, a digital camera with lighting extras, and a very fancy music computer connection. Watch out for those techies from Seward!

They also picked up an *Iditarod Pioneer* report from 1912, taken in turn from the *Skagway Alaskan*. The headline is "The Going-Outside Habit" and laments the money people spend to go Outside for the winter when the same amount would build nice houses and improve lawns and gardens. It ends with the comment: "This going Outside is a nervous and meaningless habit. It is like buying an Easter bonnet whether you need to or not. We do it because someone else set the pace years ago."

I doubt this plea moved people any more then than it would now. There's just something about a nervous and meaningless habit in the winter....

Visionaries are always in demand, although it's a risky business. Do well and you're highly praised as prescient; do poorly and you're toast. The *Seward Gateway* of 1917 quoted a local merchant who had opened a branch in Anchorage. He went up to survey the business and reported: "There are more grocery stores, more restaurants, more clothing stores, and more blind pigs than the pay roll of the camp will support." All in all, he simply couldn't see much of a future for Anchorage, so decided "to devote my entire time to this place." There may be a reason Mr. Cotter's name doesn't resonate in the history of Alaska.

Matters are finally being straightened around. Masters of sub-arctic living include the Yup'ik of Alaska and Siberia, but for far too many years their millennia-old culture was regarded as quaint and their belongings at best collectible and worth displaying in museums or private homes.

Yuungnaqpiallerput (The Way We Genuinely Live): Masterworks of Yup'ik Science and Survival, on until October, at the **Anchorage Museum At Rasmuson Center** will correct this. This demonstrates the science involved in surviving under harsh conditions. Yup'ik elders were among the consultants and the exhibit was first shown in Bethel, so it's clear the experts have made sure it's authentic.

The museum also does its share to celebrate the *Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race* by showing memorabilia of the legendary Joe Redington, Sr., often called the father of the race for his role in founding the race in 1973 and his subsequent promotion of it. He and Vi had become alarmed at the hastening demise of dog sledding in Alaska

because of snow machines and decided to do something about it. The world can be glad they did.

And, of course, all sorts of other things are going on at one of Anchorage's favorite playgrounds. Go to www.anchagemuseum.org to get an idea, or drop by if you're in town.



The **James and Elsie Nolan Center** in Wrangell has been running free weekly presentations on various Alaska subjects from weaving to history to ecology and more. They call it *Wrangell Chautauqua*. They're also sponsoring *Travelogues* with locals speaking on different countries they've traveled to. And Pat Roppel has issued a challenge. If enough people subscribe \$20 for 12 issues, she will continue her historical newsletter another year. All money, of course, goes to the Friends of the Wrangell Museum, Post Office Box 2019, Wrangell, Alaska. 99929. This issue features the past and current use of pilot bread. It was amazing to learn Alaskans buy 98% of our dear old standby, *Sailor Boy*, in the big blue box. The other 2% goes to Japan, Indian reservations, and Oregon survivalists. An eclectic group, but it's Alaskan comfort food. On the boat, camping, or just having a snack with a slice of cheese or perhaps peanut butter. Gorgeous. There's also a spirited defense of fruitcake. Sorry, Pat, there you are alone. Fruitcakes and diamonds are forever.



Quick—what's the oldest building in Alaska? If you say the Anchorage museum, you must pay ten cents. Think first European settlement—of course, Kodiak. The Russian *Magazin*, (warehouse, also

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The Erskine House in Kodiak, also known as the Russian *Magazin*.

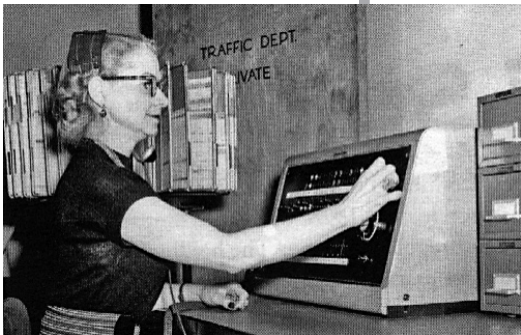
Courtesy of the Baranof Museum, Kodiak.

Notes from around the state

known as the Erskine House) for a number of years now has housed the **Baranov Museum**. It was built in 1808 and its bicentennial has a lovely cut-glass crystal of a present. It has received a *Save America's Treasures* grant of \$273,750, one of only 31 given in the entire United States. That will be an enormous help, but contributions are still sought. A two hundred year old building needs a lot of TLC, even though it has been cared for. As they say, it has survived earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and modern development. For a look at the gallant old girl, go to www.baranov.us.



The State Museum's grants-in-aid can make all the difference to museums. The **Sheldon Jackson Museum** in Sitka was able to bring two conservation interns up to work on damaged spruce root baskets. The interns learned a lot about Tlingit people and the baskets were vastly improved. Visitors to the museum were able to watch them at work.



Telephone operator Ruth Dickenson at the control panel for directory assistance for the Ketchikan Public Utilities. From *A Tradition of Service* exhibit at the Tongass Historical Museum.

Courtesy of the Ketchikan Daily News.

In this era when most United States governments, from the federal on down, seem to be busy privatizing everything from the army to hospitals to snow removal, it's refreshing to read the history of Ketchikan Public Utilities in the **Tongass Historical Museums** newsletter. Apparently private entrepreneurs had failed to deliver reliably, so the city bought them in 1935. That made it

the first municipality in the United States to own all three major utilities. *A Tradition of Service* tells the story.

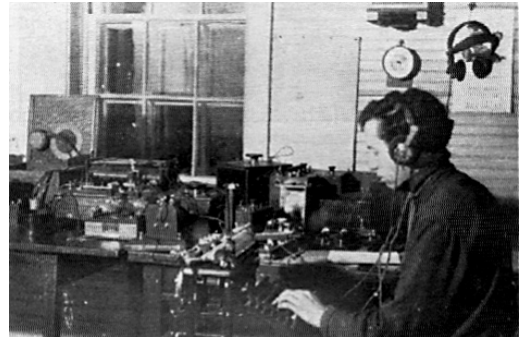
The **Totem Heritage Center** held a highly successful cedar bark hat weaving class. Although most were the traditional style, one enterprising student achieved a cedar bark fedora their newsletter points out Bogart would have envied.



Busy, busy with community outreach programs is the **Wasilla-Knik Historical Society**. After the usual big community Christmas celebration, they went into the PTA Art Show, then into the (what-else?) Iditarod art display before opening for the summer season with Trails Day in June, the Farmers' Market, and the big annual picnic in July. But don't think because they look to the past, they are not up on the latest technology.

There was a problem. They have a historic warehouse by the museum. There were graves in the

area. No one wanted to place the warehouse on top of old old-timers. The solution? Use ground penetrating radar to check. It worked, and now the foundation can be safely begun.



Telegraph operator at Fort Egbert's wireless station at Eagle in September 1909.

The small places can be amazing. Eagle's population is about 120. Last summer, according to **Eagle Historical Society and Museum's** newsletter, *Eagle Wireless*, a record number of tourists showed up in town, wanting to see the local sights. What to do? Why recruit the young people, of course. Apparently they came through in splendid fashion.

An ice cream social with pie added, aided by live music was held in the Elva Scott Memorial Gazebo at the start of the season. It was called *Short and Sweet*, which if you think about it, could have described our dear Elva, although you'd have to add determination and charm to make it complete. There's also a short history of the **Fort Egbert Wireless Station**. Check out www.EagleAK.org.



History came to life at the **University of Alaska Fairbanks** in February. Rosa Parks rode again, Truman decided to drop the bomb, Chief Joseph vowed to fight no more—at the 10th annual Fairbanks History Day Fair. Coordinated by Terrence Cole, **UAF Office of Public History**, about 450 students produced exhibits, documentaries, research papers, web sites, and performances exploring the theme of conflict and compromise in history. The state contest will be next month, and the winners will have the opportunity to attend the National History Day competition held in Maryland in June.





Alaska State Library Mystery Photo: "Nine men and one woman mostly dressed in vests and ties standing and sitting on porch of log cabin with "308" above door."

Alaska State Library, Early Prints of Alaska Collection, ASL-P297-257.

MYSTERY PHOTOS

Everyone wants to be a detective, at least a successful detective. If the Sherlock in you is tapping to get out, try the alaskastatelibrary.blogspot.com, and see if you can identify anyone in the mystery photographs.



STUDENT INTERNS ON THE MOVE

Alaskans are very good about sharing. They share good stories, many mostly true, the oil revenue in the form of the PFD, and now the Alaska State Museum will provide 20 student interns to work at small museums and cultural centers, starting this summer. For more information contact Bruce Kato, 907/465-2901 or email bruce.kato@alaska.gov.



ON THIS VERY SPOT

A newish site caters to historical societies, and it's free. At first glance it's a travel guide, but it has a space to add content or a link to your Web site. Try www.OnThisVerySpot.com. Questions? Write Dale Berryhill at dale@onthisveryspot.com. Fun to explore.



ALASKA YUKON PIONEERS

Lived in Alaska, moved away, or friends left the state and you would like to stay in touch? The *Alaska Yukon Pioneers* newsletter is a monthly way of staying in touch. Send news items to Ethel La Rose, 9512 1st Ave. NE, #204, Seattle, Washington 98115-2018 or call 206/523-6574 or hit the keyboard: ethellarose@hotmail.com.



ANNIVERSARY OF THE BILLIKEN

Devoted member, Verbeck Smith in Seattle (hvsmith@pobox.com) sent along this interesting article:

This is the centennial year of the billiken, a souvenir that became popular after the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle. I just learned of a huge commemorative

assembly of billiken photos on the Internet: **2008, The 100th Anniversary of the Billiken** (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/528571@N25/>)

Here is some background about where this figure became better known from *Seattle's First World's Fair* (<http://www.historylink.org/>)

"The 1962 Seattle World's Fair had its beginnings in an earlier fair that was held on the University of Washington campus. In 1909, the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (A-Y-P) commemorated the first shipment of Klondike gold through Seattle in 1897. The A-Y-P, with its exhibits, rides, food, and fun attracted more than 3.5 million visitors from around the world, giving Seattle much-needed prominence and attention as a leader in Pacific trade...."

Probably the longest and most accurate article about the billiken appeared in 1974 and was re-published on the Internet with the help of the author (<http://www.billiken-lore.com/>). Dorothy Jean Ray learned about the billiken on her first visit to Nome, Alaska in 1945, but no one she asked remembered the origin of these ivory figures that the Natives were carving for tourists. Later DJ wrote the only two extensive articles about them. Though she later became a known anthropologist and Arctic art authority, she also was one of the few people who knew many facts about billikens.

My wife Kathleen became friends with DJ and shared much information from her grandparents' archives and writings. DJ wrote the foreword to *Ice Window*, a book of letters of Ellen and Tom Lopp from 1892-1902. A year or two before her death in December 2007, DJ told me that she had collected another box of materials about billikens since the publication of her second article in 1974. She also revealed that she regretted most not writing a second volume to *The Eskimos of the Bering Strait, 1650-1898*, while she had become best known for her knowledge of Eskimo and other Arctic indigenous art.



Alaska State Museum ASM 98-7-60.



HERITAGE SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

The Office of History and Archaeology sends along items of interest. How about some historic preservation funds for poor but deserving historical societies? Contact the offices or subscribe to *Heritage* e-mail. Well-written, factual, and free! Here's how you do it:

Heritage is produced by the Office of History and Archaeology, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Alaska Department of Natural Resources. Please send your comments, suggestions, and information via e-mail to jo.antonson@alaska.gov, mail to 550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1310, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3565, or telephone 907/269-8721.

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FY 08 HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND BUDGET

The FY 08 appropriation for Historic Preservation Fund programs funds State Historic Preservation Offices at \$39.37 million, Tribal Historic Preservation Offices at \$6.39 million, *Save America's Treasures* at \$24.6 million, and *Preserve America* at \$7.3 million. The total, a little over \$77.5 million, is a slight increase for preservation programs over last year. The administration's FY 09 budget will be announced in early February.

WESTERN STATES AND TERRITORIES PRESERVATION ASSISTANCE SERVICE WORKSHOPS IN ALASKA

The Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service is going to offer two more disaster planning workshops for library and archive collections in Alaska. The first workshop was held at Fairbanks. Gary Menges, Preservation Administrator, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, will lead the Fairbanks workshops. The other workshops will be April 9 at Juneau and April 11 at Anchorage. There is no charge to attend, but pre-registration is required. To register for the workshops go to: <http://westpas.org/courses.html>. If you have any questions contact Gladi Kulp, Alaska State Library, Historical Collections, 907/465-2926 or gladi.kulp@alaska.gov. (Editor's note: No, your kitchen does not qualify.)

Mystery Photo



Help identify this image for the Alaska State Library Historical Collections.
alaskastatelibrary.blogspot.com

Your help is needed



to ask our state legislators to fully fund the architectural design costs for a critically needed new combined state library, archives and museum building. Governor Palin proposed \$4.5 million, but \$7.5 million is needed for this phase of the project. A facility to care for the treasures of Alaska's past would be a great legacy of Alaska's 50th anniversary of statehood. Please call, email or write your representatives in Juneau today!



Visit our website:
www.alaskahistoricalociety.org

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.

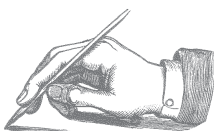
As interest and writing on Alaska history seem to be sprouting like fireweed in the spring, a useful and popular feature is the society's new publication *The Alaska 67* with annotated recommendations of good books on Alaska history.

Send your application for membership to Alaska Historical Society, P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-0299; or join through the website: www.alaskahistoricalociety.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Alaska Historical Society Annual Meeting 2008 October 16-18, Anchorage

Editor's Comments



Let That Passion Show

Early spring is hard in Alaska. Everyone is tired of snow and ice; even avid skiers are beginning to droop. My idea has been to have different colored snow to mark late winter. How about pink for February and Valentine's Day? It would be followed by March and green for St. Patrick's Day. Not only a refreshing change from white, but a sign that spring is coming. However, despite all my lobbying, nothing has been done. White it is, with bits of brown and black where the snow has worn off. Boring.

Late snow is also a metaphor. The city crews throw berms across driveways as they plow. Homeowners curse as one more time they shovel the berms out. A nearby parking lot has an enthusiastic plower. He flings snow to the back of the lot. Unfortunately, a good bit of the snow goes over onto the sidewalk. A shoveler clears the sidewalk. A few days later the sidewalk is again covered.

Even if it isn't man vs. machine, late winter is frustrating. Shoveling out the walk or around the car has become old stuff. Everyone is feeling weary of the same old routine.

So, turn that frustration and irritation into good works. A fine time to lobby your legislators for or against bills. Let that passion show. Money for the museum or to save an historic building, or against the proposal to (write your favorite "It's so stupid I can't believe it" here). Use that energy. How about attending some community events and making your opinions known? (It can help if you've just finished shoveling.)

Real spring will come and you'll feel virtuous and civic-minded; a great way to begin the summer.

D. L.

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

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