



Alaska History News

Volume 36, No. 2 Quarterly of the Alaska Historical Society Summer 2008



An outing at Bell Island Hot Springs, 1906. From exhibit "The Hunt Photos, Images of Early Ketchikan."

Courtesy of the Tongass Historical Museum; Harriet Hunt Photo Collection.



Plan to attend the Alaska Historical Society Annual Meeting, *Alaska Visionaries: Seekers, Leaders and Dreamers*, October 16-18, 2008 in Anchorage.

Notes from around the state

Don't know if Ketchikan had more early photographers than most places, or if the **Tongass Historical Museum** folks are just expert in winkling out old family photos, but their spring exhibit was 100 photographs of the town, taken between 1900 and 1926. Their newsletter also has some great pictures of local tourism from the 1930s to the 1950s. The Totem Heritage Center finished its Fall 2007-Spring 2008 instruction programs. For the carving, weaving, and other traditional arts program for this autumn, contact www.city.ketchikan.ak.us, then click on departments, then museums, in July.



The **Hope & Sunrise Historical and Mining Museum** reports a most intriguing walking tour of the Sunrise Historic District. They hope no more than 50 come at a time, as the wet and challenging trail is narrow and hikers must take care and dress appropriately, not forgetting boots.



Foto Fridays are when the **Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society** gets together from 10:00 a.m. to noon and works on identifying and cataloging the mystery people in their extensive photograph collection and preserving old newspapers. Always in need of volunteers to work, help chat, laugh, and generally spend a fun time while conserving history. The society is also in need of a cheap place for a museum until funding can be found for a permanent site. Call 688-4706, send an e-mail to CERHS1@gmail.com, or take pen in hand and write them at Post Office Box 670573, Chugiak, Alaska, 99567.



The Fairbanks historical societies had a whoop-ty celebration of Museum Day in May. Not just a movie at both the Ice Museum and the **UAF Museum**, but the annual scavenger hunt and TV/media interviews, including one about the renovated Native Village. Now that's getting the summer off to a great start.



The **Kenai Historical Society** has been having a good time with a 1953 newspaper, *Peninsula News*. Articles and ads, they report, were typed on legal-sized paper, and illustrated with some hand-drawn illustrations. News of local private pilots repairing their planes, notice of a dog that lost a fight and was successfully treated, and notice that monthly get-togethers were to be started where complaints and constructive criticisms could be aired. (We wonder how long that lasted.)

Forwarding to 2008, various new commercial buildings are going up, and two young moose greeted society members after a recent meeting. There is also an update on the Six Kenai Belles whose photo was taken in 1952.

News of the **Kasilof Regional Historical Association** is also carried in the newsletter.

(Continued page 3.)

Ozymandias in Alaska

The spring-time sun had come out in Cordova, at last, and with it came the locals who made it through another long, soggy winter.

On the sidewalk of an old house on a downtown street, little girls staged an elaborate play involving plastic horses, Barbie dolls, tigers, dinosaurs, and chalk. At the harbor, pickup trucks waited in turn to back boat trailers down the ramp to launch their bowpickers, the small, quick commercial fishing boats heading out after high-priced Copper River red salmon. Tiny Saint George's Episcopal Church dozed in the shade of big spruces on the edge of town, providing musty refuge in this year of Cordova's centennial.



Million Dollar Bridge.

Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Birdwatchers waited at Hartney Bay for high tide to push the flocks of sandpipers and dunlins close to shore. A long-abandoned garage sported one homemade sign: "Obama for President," next to another: "Tools for Rent." Bumper stickers and t-shirts implored

"No Road." The sign outside the bar of the Alaskan Hotel (built in 1908) hung upside down, we were told, so the drunks on the sidewalk would know where they were when they came to.

But the town of Cordova isn't all rear-view mirror. In early May the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council, set up to distribute mitigation money after the 1989 spill, agreed to help fund a new Cordova Center. Built on bedrock above the harbor, it will house an emergency response center and meeting rooms, as well as a museum and library. It is located high enough that it shouldn't be hit by the next tsunami.

Cordova wouldn't have been born, and wouldn't be here today, if it hadn't been for the big dreams of millionaires who lived thousands of miles away. After the richest copper deposits on earth were discovered in the Wrangell Mountains, J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheim brothers joined forces to develop them. The Kennecott mines were 200 miles from the nearest harbor so a railroad was needed to get the ore out. From 1908 to 1911, some 6,000 men worked to build the Copper River & Northwestern Railway.

Much of the route was difficult but nothing compared to figuring out how to cross the deep, glacial silt-laden Copper River some 50 miles out of Cordova. With one active glacier descending to the river's edge from the

west, and another glacier approaching from the east, the crossing from riverbank to riverbank called for a magnificent bridge. Due to the fast moving river and dangerous waves from calving glacier ice, it could be built only in winter on top of temporary wooden pilings. It was completed just hours before the ice went out in the spring of 1910—an event celebrated in Rex Beach's novel *The Iron Trail*. Standing on concrete piers sunk far below the gray water choked with icebergs, this engineering wonder came to be called the Million Dollar Bridge. It actually cost \$1.4 million; in today's money the figure would be more than \$30 million.

To see the bridge today—and it is still standing (the span that fell during the 1964 earthquake was raised a decade ago)—in its remote setting, surrounded by snow-capped mountains and still being threatened by the nearby glaciers, is a shock. After driving over the slushy, narrow Copper River Highway built on top of the old railroad grade, after making our way through cuts in 15-foot high snow drifts that winter winds had pushed over the road, after seeing no sign of another human for an hour, we turned a corner and came upon the great bridge. It is a shock coming upon anything manmade in the wilderness, but it is especially shocking to see something so large, so purposeful, so enduring, at the end of a road through such wild beauty.

Some 200 years ago the English poet Shelley described an enormous shattered statue of a human figure lying in a desert, and bearing this inscription on its base:

'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The Million Dollar Bridge is Alaska's Ozymandias, a monument to great dreams and heroic accomplishments, now standing alone. The freight trains full of copper ore stopped running in 1938 and before long, rails were pulled up and shipped away. The highway that was meant to replace the railroad has been stalled for decades, the subject of endless debate over the future of Cordova. The lone and level snows stretch far away.

The Million Dollar Bridge became our first "bridge to nowhere" and we can draw whatever lessons from it that we will. A century ago, non-Alaskan capitalists dared great things and extracted profits far beyond what they invested in the railroad and the copper mines. They left almost nothing behind, other than memories for those who took part in the grand adventure, and a colossal bridge.

Bruce Merrell
President

Notes from around the state



Eagle Historical Society member Marie Griffin donated this image of early Eagle residents (left to right) Lena Gay, Bob Steel, Jen Cavanaugh, Joe Marchesi, Ed Kelly, Bea Gustin. Courtesy of the Eagle Historical Society.

When you have a good thing happen, a very good idea is to repeat it. The **Eagle Historical Society** had such success with the Pie and Ice Cream Social and Museum Open House last year they decided to do it again this year. Just nothing like a nice tour followed by munchies.

They also happily reported a family member sent along photographs and a good biography of an early Eagle resident, Lena Gay. Lena

had a tragic childhood; her mother, sister, and brother all died young, but she and her father found happiness (and marriage) in Eagle and the small towns around there. It's always wonderful when families send material to historical societies. Certainly your Editor has earnestly lectured many people about sending photocopies if not the real letters, memoirs, and pictures to the community or the state library. Often they will protest that there's not a lot of interesting material, but the reply is that mention of a neighbor, or an event, or just daily life can be just the nugget a researcher needs. You heard it from the Eagle folks first—the International Klondike Gold Rush Trail is a thematic concept of a trail to take the participant from Seattle to the Yukon. More later.



A most ambitious program is underway to help celebrate the bicentennial of the Baranov Museum building, the **Kodiak Historical Society** reports. All sorts of speakers, a play that portrays Othello as Russian American Company officials, a traveling exhibit for the 12th Annual Kodiak Whalefest—the list goes on. Take a look at the site at www.baranov.us, call 907/486-5920, or fork over \$20.00 for a year's membership and get your own newsletter. And, of course, if you make it over, the Kodiakers (Kodiakans? Kodiakonians? Please advise) will be glad to see you and show you their museum. They also bring arts and crafts programs to the classroom and host Family Fun Nights. A very active society.



The Sixth Annual Fish Follies is the intriguing title of the juried art show staged by the **Cordova Historical Society**. This makes perfect sense for a fishing town, as the idea is to make art about fish, seafoods, and the sea. This is a national contest, but this year the winner was a local artist.

The proposed Cordova Center will concentrate the arts and history and general culture of the town. The Cordova skyscraper (okay, it's only four-stories high, but in most of Alaska's communities, that qualifies as a skyscraper) will hold the museum, library, theater-cum-auditorium, meeting

rooms, and an elevator and stairway that their news release cleverly notes "will provide a new pedestrian link in the center of town." That sounds truly fascinating.



Art, boat-building, youth study of natural history, watching Katmai bears on live cam while enjoying beer and bratwurst, local history and walking tours, and celebrating "Alaska Native Ways, Past and Present;" the **Pratt Museum** at Homer dashes through summer with the aforementioned plus much more to see and do.



A big blow-out was held recently at the **Sheldon Jackson Museum**. They had 13 pieces of ordnance, two in storage and 11 on loan to the Sitka National Park. A casual discussion led to the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team coming down from Fort Richardson to see about the Civil War era cannon balls. Sadly, the balls were totally demolished, leaving nothing but shards and holes in the ground, but now the citizens of Sitka are safe. Other possessors of old cannon balls should take warning.



In 1974 \$30,000 was a lot of money. That's what the herring fisherman termed the value of the very large, 1,200-pound anchor that tore up his net in Sitka and thus lost his valuable set. According to the **Sitka Historical Society** newsletter, the anchor, thought to be of Russian vintage, is now back in Sitka, courtesy of the fisherman's son. Any anchor experts out there to help identify?



Anniversaries everywhere this year. The **Palmer Historical Society** is celebrating the 75th year of the Matanuska Colony, the New Deal project to provide farms in the Matanuska Valley to adventuresome colonists. Palmer and Wasilla resulted, and the society is looking for information on the workers who built the colony.

They've also put in a bid for the historical artifacts from the recently closed Matanuska Maid Dairy, an icon of the colony. Other societies take note; don't just lament the passing of a historic company, take action.

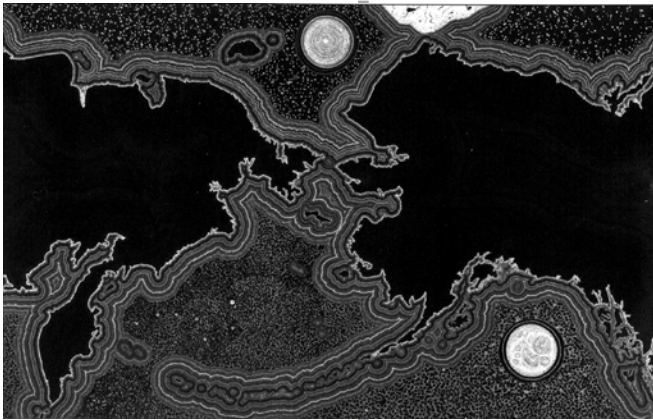
They've also added local recipes from area cooks; the newsletter that has something for everyone!



The Cordova Historical Society celebrates a commitment of \$7 million from the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council towards the development of the Cordova Center project, a community building that will include a museum, library and performing arts theatre.

Courtesy Cordova Historical Society.

Notes from around the state



"Terra Incognita," egg tempera on wood painting by Deland Anderson of Homer. From the *All Alaska Juried Art* exhibit at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Courtesy the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Yet another anniversary is noted this year; the 40th year since the founding of the **Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center**. Museum tours behind-the-scenes, art, history & science family activities—a beehive comes to mind. They're also having a "Paintings & Pasta" dinner. An excellent idea to have food for the mind while munching food

for the body; winning art and minds? Lots more happening, of course. Check out www.anchorage-museum.org if you're not in town.

The summer major exhibit is the latest annual "All Alaska Juried Art Exhibition." If you can't make it, remember the display later travels all around the state.



Do you enjoy learning about steamship days in Sitka and Southeast Alaska? No better navigator there than historian W.D. DeArmond, son of the fabled R.N. His piece for the **Sitka Maritime Heritage Society** newsletter is not only well written and complete but to our joy labeled "Part One." For more news go to www.sitkamaritime.org or write them at Post Office Box 2153, Sitka, Alaska, 99835.



One hundred years ago this past March the first long distance sled dog race in the world was held in Nome. The All Alaska Sweepstakes Race was a tough 408 mile loop to Candle and return through such metropolises as Death Valley, Camp Haven, and First Change. This was noted by the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society** newsletter, which also brought us the news that the Nome Kennel Club put up \$100,000, the richest first place prize in sled dog racing history. For more, they suggest you go to the very sophisticated Web site www.allalaskasweepstakes.org that brings videos as well as color photographs. They also report the Iditarod musher they sponsored came in third and won the best Hard Luck Story award. (Do share with us. Ed.) As for yesteryear, they report the headline of March 29, 1917 in the *Seward Gateway* "Seward Day to be Celebrated for First Time" was followed the next day by the headline "Plans to Observe Seward Day Balked in Legislature." Some things just don't change.



Summer is not only a busy season for the Wasilla Page Museum; the **Wasilla-Knik Historical Society** newsletter reports. There's a tried-and-true yard

sale for a kick-off, followed by National Trails Day in Knik to honor the Iditarod Trail. The Farmers' Market is always a busy place, and July 20 the 25th Anniversary Party will be celebrated with the Knik Annual Social Picnic. There's also a photo of a building to give an opinion on, and memories solicited from those who attended the old Wasilla school. Join in the fun by becoming a member. \$15.00 to 300 North Boundary, Suite B, Wasilla, Alaska, 99654, or dash off to <http://home.gci.net/~wasilaknikhistory>.



Motorcycles are meant for those long, straight roads of the Southwest, where the speed limit is 70 mph and traffic is light. So why has there been a lively interest in hogs in Juneau since the 1930s? The **Juneau-Douglas City Museum** has a new summer exhibit "91 Miles to Ride: Juneau's Biker Culture" (the 91 miles refers to the total road system) that discusses that and has four classic motorcycles on display. Vroom, vroom!

Less fun but a great idea likely spreading all over the state is a special committee to celebrate Alaska's 50th year as a state in 2009. The museum is also being spruced up and the famous Four Story totem pole refurbished by the son of the original carver.

They're also on the 18th year of making local history grants. Small amounts can go a long way towards completing or starting projects. For more info go to www.juneau.org/parksrec/museum.



(Left to right) volunteers Janice Criswell, Patti Fiorella, Rebecca Smith, Damon Stuebner and Curator of Collections Addison Field help restore a totem pole by Haida carver John Wallace at the Juneau-Douglas City Museum.

Courtesy of the Juneau-Douglas City Museum.

Notes from around the state

Since Charles Baronovich was born before the financial hedge fund traders began, he had to make do with smuggling liquor into Alaska for illegal profits. How the Boy Scouts wound up with the valuable Garnet Ledge, the sad story of an early cooperage, the first *Alaska Coast Pilots*, how to use dynamite on teredos, ancient fish traps in Bradfield Canal, Filson jackets, and Billy the Kid's connection with a Presbyterian missionary; all this and much more are found in Patricia Roppel's monthly newsletter. Send \$20.00 for a year's subscription and know all the money goes to the **Wrangell Museum**. Pop a check in the mail and send to Friends of the Wrangell Museum, Post Office Box 2019, Wrangell, Alaska, 99929 if you can't make it by the museum.



The **Copper Valley Historical Society** is a small but very active bunch who publicize all the towns within the valley. Copper Center's Ashby Museum, Chitina's Visitors' Center, McCarthy (described in the newsletter as a "hotbed of local historic preservation", Kennecott's CR&NW (Copper River & Northwestern) Railway Depot, and Kenny Lake's teacher, 2008 Alaska Teacher of the Year recipient Raymond Voley's work are featured in this Interior place where the Ahtna Indians, visited by the Russians, followed by prospectors of the Gold Rush, make a rich mix. Geoff Bleakley, the news-letter editor, can be reached at 907/822-7235. Membership is a measly \$15.00 per year; no address given, but if you send a check to the society at Copper Center, Alaska, 99573, would expect they'll get it.



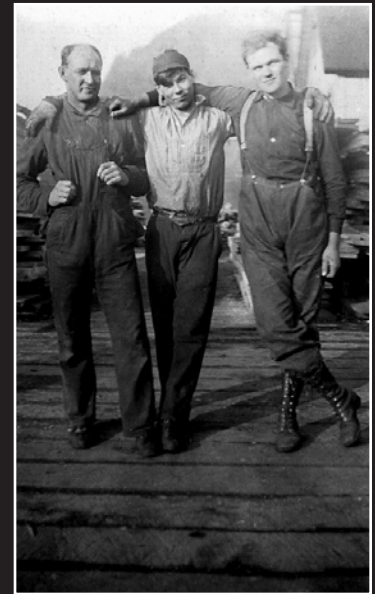
P-713 Copper Center Roadhouse - Richardson Highway

Copper Center Roadhouse on the Richardson Highway (above) and scene at Kenny Lake (right).

Courtesy of the Copper Valley Historical Society.



KENNY LAKE



Mystery Photo

Alaska State Library Historical Collections is still looking for any clues to identifying the trio in this photo.

alaskastatelibrary.blogspot.com

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.alaskahistoricalicalsociety.org.

News & Information

76TH INTERNATIONAL SOURDOUGH REUNION

Lived in Alaska or the Yukon and want to know where and how old friends are? A mere \$12.00 a year will bring the AYP (Alaska Yukon Pioneers) newsletter every month. The 76th International Sourdough Reunion will be in Anchorage in September; you won't want to miss it. The newsletter will give you all the details. Send your check to Joyce Penman, Recorder, 27833 85th Drive, NW, Stanwood, Washington, 98292. Phone is 253/709-0158 or 360/629-3554. olwomn@wavecable.com will also work.



SMITHSONIAN WEBSITE

When you're bored with summer television re-runs, go to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History site of www.mnh.si.edu/arctic. Tons of fun stuff there; get the kids involved. Want some authoritative information on climate change in the Arctic? Check out www.forces.si.edu/arctic.



FACES OF VALOR

A notice about an Alaska native, Col. Frederick Mears from an address on Fairbanks Avenue certainly sounds Alaskan. It was a bit of a shock to find the exhibit, "Faces of Valor: American Soldiers from the Spanish-American War and the War in the Philippines" is at the Pritzker Military Library in Chicago. It is also a bit of a fudge to say Col. Mears was an Alaskan; he was born in Nebraska and spent most of his life in the military. However, he did important work on the Alaska Railroad, so we can grant him honorary status. Go to www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org for surprising information, all free, or visit the library, also free, when you're in Chicago.



HERITAGE NEWSLETTER

Want to know what's going on around Alaska and beyond in conferences, awards, grants, and other matters in the world of history? That's easy—subscribe to *Heritage*, the monthly newsletter of the Office of History and Archaeology, State of Alaska. And it's free! Write to Antonson, Joan (DNR) <jo.antonson@alaska.gov> for details.



SLAM FUNDING

The legislature approved and Governor Palin concurs that the full \$7.5 million to design the unfortunately named SLAM (State Libraries, Archives and Museum) bill has passed. The original sum had been trimmed to \$4.5 million, but great members of the Legislative Committee, led by Ron Inouye and our wonderful advocate, Clark Gruening, prevailed and now there will be money to design the new building to fit the site by the present Alaska State Museum. Well done, guys! Am sending everyone their choice of a virtual beer or virtual cookies; your choice.



Lydia Fohn-Hansen working in a WWII internment camp in Southeast Alaska.

Alaska State Library,
Evelyn Butler and
George Dale Photographs,
ASL-PCA 306-1104.



FOUR STALWART ALASKA WOMEN

Friendly reader Dolores Roguszka, has sent along biographies of four stalwart Alaska women, all honored in 1987 on a poster celebrating Alaska Women's History Month. This solves the mystery photograph mentioned in an earlier newsletter. You now have twenty minutes to write an essay about why Irene Ryan, Mary Antisarlook "Sinrock Mary", Marvel Crosson, and Lydia Fohn-Hansen were the designated women. If it's any comfort, I knew only Sinrock Mary and Marvel Crosson; the first as the richest Inupiat woman from her reindeer herds and Marvel as the first woman pilot in Alaska. Irene was a geological engineer who numbered work on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline among her accomplishments and was also a territorial and subsequently state legislator. If you think Home Economics is all aprons and canning, just read the biography of Lydia Fohn-Hansen.

Not sure if the department has any more copies, but you might write State of Alaska, Department of Education, Division of Educational Program Support, at 801 West 10th Street, Post Office Box F, Juneau, Alaska, 99811-0500 or give them a call at 907/465-8727. Just remember this was put out in 1987, but if there are enough requests, it might be reprinted.



PBS HISTORY DETECTIVES

If there's one thing more fun than reading a detective story, it's being part of a real one. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) has a popular television series called History Detectives. Now the detectives are asking any Alaskan to help by sending a description (preferably a digital photograph) of an object from United States history you would like to know more about. Do include any information you have along with your questions. Send your story ideas to elizabethetg@liontv.us and don't forget to include your name and address. (You needn't offer to bring your own pipe and magnifying glass. Ed.)

(Continued next page.)

They're seeking puzzles all year, and expect they'd even accept two if they're good. For more information on the project, visit <http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives>. If you would rather write, send to Liz Goncalves, History Detectives, Associate Producer, Lion Television, 304 Hudson Street, New York, New York, 10013

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SEALASKA HERITAGE INSTITUTE PHOTOS

Zachary Jones of the Sealaska Heritage Institute sent our diligent editor, Jim Ducker, caretaker of the society's Web site www.alaskahistoricalociety.org, notice that the institute has been given a major Tlingit photographic collection. Jones points us to <http://sbispecialcollections.blogspot.com/2008/01/in-december-mrv-architects-of-juneau.html>

In the 1930s architect Linn Forrest and U.S. Regional Forester, Frank Heintzleman of Juneau were chosen to supervise and document the restoration and recreation of Tlingit architecture and totem poles. The work concentrated on Wrangell and Sitka, and the resulting 150 photographs are highly important. Enjoy the selection.

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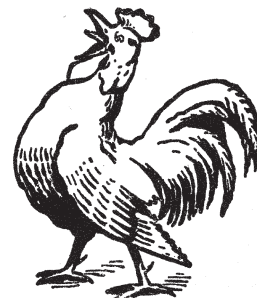
Chief Shakes (*right*) and workers on the roof of the Shales House during its restoration (*below*).

Courtesy of the Sealaska Heritage Foundation; P0014: Linn A. Forrest Photograph Collection.



Does your historical organization have something to crow about?

We welcome your letters, news and pictures.



Please send them to the editor:

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Editor's Comments



Into the fray

*I*t's been another late, cold spring in much of Alaska. Hard to note the grass needs mowing when you've been excusing yourself from gardening by claiming incipient frostbite. However, nature doesn't care. Not only grass is growing, but the trees are budding out, the birds have been singing and the crows are nesting. Early flowers are also defying the chill and blooming. Even my lonely tulip in what I pretentiously call my garden is about six inches high, although all its energy is going into staying green at this point. A bloom will come when the temperature hits 60°, even if that is August, she said pessimistically.

But we can tell summer is definitely here. The tourists are also blossoming. Cruise ships have begun arriving. I must say I admire Americans at times. Here it's been rainy, chilly, and even windy, but the passengers, enveloped in plastic raincoats and armed with umbrellas, stroll around town in good cheer, or roll past in buses on the way to see the sights.



Summer garden, Valdez, Alaska.
Courtesy of the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

This means Alaska's museums are also filling up and your busy time is here. If you're not a gardener, volunteering can mean a lovely excuse for not nurturing plants. Hiking, boating, fixing up the house; all these can be fitted into the schedule. It seems overwhelming, but comfort yourself by remembering how well you've handled it in the past. The old one-day-at-a-time does work, unless you've forgotten that appointment yesterday. Once more into the fray—take heart!

See you in the fall. We can all lay about, exhausted but happy.

D. L.