



Alaska History News

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Artwork by Rie Muñoz.

ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2008 CONFERENCE ANCHORAGE • OCTOBER 16-18, 2008

Alaska Visionaries: Seekers, Leaders and Dreamers

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Message from the President

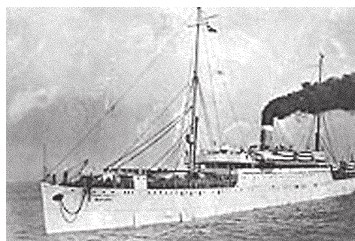
Rites of Passages

Ln the summer of 1923 E. B. White found himself working for the *Seattle Times*. He was an unknown 24-year old reporter and in his own words, "I was almost useless . . . and had not at that time discovered the eloquence of facts," so he was hardly surprised when the city editor discharged him. At loose ends, White looked for work and romance and walked the docks, and wrote in his journal. ("I called it my journal, the word 'journal,' I felt lent a literary and manly flavor to the thing. Diaries were what girls kept.") At the end of July he wrote: "I sail Monday on *S.S. Buford* for Skagway."

What attracted him north was that "Alaska was in the opposite direction from home, where I considered it unsuitable to be at my age."

Packing his Corona typewriter and storing his unabridged Webster's with a friend, White bought a first-class one-way ticket. He figured something would turn up during the voyage north. He enjoyed the cruise, noting that on the second day out his ship passed the *Henderson*, southbound with an ailing President Warren Harding who had just driven the golden spike marking completion of the Alaska Railroad. A week later a radiogram arrived saying that the President was dead.

As the *Buford* headed north through the Inside Passage, White danced, ate well, played cards, and made new



S.S. Buford.

M.V. Wickersham.



acquaintances. A saxophone jazz band was aboard and most of his fellow passengers were well-to-do members of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. But his hobnobbing came to a screeching halt when his ticket ran out at the end of Lynn Canal. "I delayed until the last possible moment my walk down the plank and into the forlorn streets of Skagway—a prospector twenty-five years late and not even primarily interested in gold."

Luckily, word of his predicament had reached the captain who took pity and offered him a job as night saloonman. Waiting tables, washing dishes, sweeping companionways and shining brass, White became one of the crew—a transformation that "took the passengers by surprise and created a certain awkwardness at the late supper. . . naturally they felt uneasy when they found me at their service. There was the matter of tipping. Should a girl with whom I had danced between Seattle and Skagway leave a coin for me when I handed her a cold cut between Skagway and Cordova?"

Conquering seasickness and relishing life with the crew below decks, White soon found himself back in the States. "My spice route to nowhere was behind me." Two years later, he began what became a long and fruitful career, writing for a sophisticated new magazine called *The New Yorker*. He also wrote children's books, including the classic *Charlotte's Web*. It is probably too much to claim that his cruise on the *Buford* changed his life's trajectory but he certainly grew up a bit, and got to see the coast of Alaska.

(Continued page 2.)

Message from the President

(Continued from page 1.)

I have my own, more recent memories of life aboard ship. For two summers I worked on an Alaska state ferry, the *M.V. Wickersham*, on the run from Skagway to Prince Rupert. She was a beautiful ship, purchased almost new from a Swedish ferry line and brought to Southeast Alaska while Wally Hickel was governor, to add capacity to the popular Alaska Marine Highway.

Passengers were dazzled by a heated solarium on the top deck, teak woodwork, a copper dance floor, and nightly seafood buffets featuring whole poached king salmon. I rarely experienced this, partly because my job as dishwasher kept me busy in the galley twelve hours a day and partly because I was often seasick.

The *Wickersham* was a deeper draft vessel than the other "blue canoes" of the ferry system and so on the runs to and from Sitka went outside Chichagof and Baranof Islands, where she was subject to the swells of the open North Pacific. There was something about the rise and fall and roll of the ship, the steam blasting out of my conveyor belt dishwashing machine, and the arrival of the first breakfast dishes with remnants of fried eggs and cigarette butts on them that would bring on that I-wish-I-was-dead feeling.

Besides washing dishes for passengers and crew alike—my favorite tool for cleaning the enormous crusty soup pots was a putty knife—one of my other duties was throwing garbage overboard. Food scraps went down the maw of a chute in the galley, straight through the center of the ship and into the ocean, but paper, plastic, and anything else went into plastic bags that were stacked in a pile on the car deck. Halfway between Petersburg and Juneau one of the deck crew would open a man-sized hatch. I'd bring a butcher knife down from the galley and slash open each of the bags before throwing it overboard. As we chugged north we left a stream of floating garbage in our wake and flocks of gulls picked through it. (This practice had stopped when I was back on the *Wickersham* two years later. Earth Day and a rising environmental awareness had thankfully intervened.)

Between washing dishes and sleeping, I would change out of my food-spattered apron and go up on deck, but members of the crew were discouraged from fraternizing with the passengers. There was no saxophone jazz band and certainly no dancing for this seasick dishwasher.

The second steward on the *Buford* told E.B. White, "Anything can happen in a ship." Anything can also happen to a ship. After the Alaska cruise Buster Keaton, the comic actor, leased the *Buford* and used her as a set for *The Navigator*, his most financially successful film. She was scrapped in Japan in 1929.

The *Wickersham* was sold by the State of Alaska when a new ferry, the *Columbia*, joined the marine highway fleet. She was renamed several times and operated in the North Sea, the English Channel, and the Mediterranean until 2001. In that year, unable to endure the indignity of yet another name—the *Moby Dream*—she was scrapped on the coast of Turkey.

Bruce Merrell, President

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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.

Notes from around the state



Dan DeRoux's painting "Joseph Sells his Dreams to his brother," a depiction of the biblical story of Joseph, from *FromBeginning2End* exhibit at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Photo courtesy Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Yuungnaqpiallerput is Yup'ik for the "Way We Genuinely Live" and is the name of a major exhibition at the **Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center** until October 26. The thrust is to show how the people of southwestern Alaska used science developed over the centuries to ensure not only their survival but a rich, full life for all those years. From kayaks to snow goggles to grass-insulated mittens and boots, visitors can not only view items but find interactive science stations along the way. 200 of the items are from 13 museums in the United States and Germany.

Of course the museum has lots more going on; *FromBeginning2End* for children, art, with art classes, movies; something for everyone. If you can't stop by, visit www.anchagemuseum.org for a taste of happenings.

The **Cook Inlet Historical Society** has given its collection to the museum, but has a full fall line-up with feature presentations on the *Struggle for Statehood*. 2009 is approaching rapidly and the year Alaska became a State will be celebrated in various ways.

The **Gastineau Channel Historical Society** newsletter has continued its multi-page discussion of one aspect of Juneau-Douglas history. This has ranged from the first subdivision in town to important mines to the current issue which highlights the local Filipino community. You may well know many worked in the canneries, but what about the Filipinos who worked on the cableship *Burnside*? 80 of the 175 man crew were Filipinos. The discrimination of the day led to founding of the Filipino Community of Juneau. It continues as the oldest organized Filipino group in Alaska. Money was raised for a building; after it burned, the city and state helped fund the purchase of the present Filipino Community Hall, now part of the Downtown Historic District. In 2003 Manila Square by the hall was named by the city to honor the Filipinos of Juneau. There's also a nice thumbnail biography of a Tlingit-Filipino family who worked hard and saw their seven children grow to join them as respected members of the town.

It's not every house of the manager of the biggest business in town that is remodeled as a bar, but the **Hope and Sunrise Historical Society** reports that's what happened in Hope. They're also happy to get the new interpretive signs erected so respect for historic Hope will end camping on downtown private property. This is all so intriguing; do tell us more.

A fine photograph of an old ore crusher decorates the newsletter of the **Kenai Peninsula Historical Society**. It would be fun to know how it operated.

Digging in the dirt has been the blissful occupation of many people in Kodiak this past summer according to the newsletter of the **Kodiak Historical Society**. All sorts of artifacts and interesting foundations

have been found, which is not surprising as the dig is on the grounds of the Baranov Museum, one of the oldest parts of the city. Three building foundations and remains, lots of hand-made spikes and nails, and an almost intact large Alutiiq spruce root basket were treasures lovingly excavated. This is all part of the Kodiak Bicentennial project and has been highly successful.

There's also the discussion of photos from an early dairy. The farmer would milk the cows, then drive the cans to a rock slide, carry the cans across to another car, and drive them into Kodiak. When the navy needed the land for its base, the farmer cleverly made a deal to supply milk to them. He also made a deal with the Navy for two "reefers"—cold storage units he combined into one quite comfortable home for his family.

Few people I know would be thrilled to examine an old cannery site. Rusty odd-looking machinery, overgrown foundations, bits of cheap ceramic dishes; no treasure or even hope of anything more exciting than some ancient pilings of a one-time dock. However, author and historian Patricia Roppel writes with pleasure about exploring the Burnett Inlet cannery as an aide to an archaeologist. (It helps that she has written a book on the subject.) Her latest newsletters also go into the history of places around Wrangell such as Simonoff or Deadman's Island and how it got its name(s). The account of a cannery owner who tired of tourists stealing cans of salmon awaiting shipment and substituted cans of tar is very nice, as is the gruesome story of a deceased Chinese whose corpse had to be packed in order to ship it home. No barrels for salting, so hand-packed, several cases of which were stolen.



An excavation site surrounding the Baranov Museum revealed perfectly intact wood planking, believed to be the floor of an earlier building.

Photo by Mark Cassell, courtesy of the Kodiak Historical Society.

Notes from around the state



Basketmaker and instructor Diane Douglas-Willard works with a student during classess at Totem Heritatge Center in Ketchikan.

Photo courtesy Totem Heritage Center.

Lots more to read in *Wrangell History*. If you can't be in Wrangell, Alaska, in person, send \$20.00 for a year's subscription (12 issues) and both the **Friends of the Wrangell Museum**, Post Office Box 2019, Wrangell, 99929-2019, which gets the money, and you will be happy.



Photographs and a short biography of Native carvers, beaders, and other demonstrators at the **Sheldon Jackson Museum** are in their current newsletter. Features about local artists are always welcome.

The salaries can't be much, but the community can show it appreciates them. A charming and mysterious map of Sitka, drawn and colored about 1842 and very likely drawn by a Tlingit, is the subject of speculation; many groups have expressed interest in it.



What do travelers like to see when they tour? Old cities, old buildings and the sense of history they impart. What do many U.S. city planners like to do? Tear down old buildings and build new ones. It could be called "Raze and Raise" and from a tourism standpoint alone is a poor choice. Fairbanks is the latest Alaska place to try to underline the importance of some of their early buildings now threatened with destruction, the **Tanana-Yukon Historical Society** reports. The Society has also renewed several contracts with the U.S. Army to manage formal meetings between the army and tribal governments on relationship issues. Anything around your area that might work?



Outstanding community support and a lot of hard work by the volunteers has led to another nice grant to the **Sitka Maritime Heritage Society** for their work in renovating the old government boathouse and turning it into a museum. The latest newsletter has another excellent article on the steamship days of Alaska; this is *The Aftermath of War*; by historian Bill De Armond, son of the famous R.N., historian extraordinaire. Send \$30.00 the group at Post Office Box 2153, Sitka,

99835 or phone 907/747-3448 for a year's subscription to the newsletter and 20% discount on t-shirts, tote bags, and caps.



Need some classes in traditional Tlingit carving, weaving, drum-making, or doll making? You can trust the **Totem Heritage Center** to supply a top tier of instructors. Google them under that name or write 629 Dock Street, Ketchikan, Alaska 99901.



The location and artifact recovery from the wreck of the *USS Torrent* is featured in the latest newsletter of the **Pratt Museum** of the **Homer Society of Natural History, Inc.** (NOTICE: This is also a teaser for the presentation during the AHS annual meeting.) The ship had gone down in 1868 without loss of life, but had never been examined until last year.

They also report another highly successful *Tamamta Katurlluta: A Gathering of Native Tradition* held in late August to celebrate biennially the Kachemak Bay villages of Nanwalek, Port Graham, and Seldovia. This year the Tagiugmiut Dance Group from Barrow added to the festivities.

Cirque de Ritz (the Pratt is into other languages, obviously) is being planned. It's a big auction held annually to sell art, adventures, and all sorts of things to raise money for the museum.



Visit our website:
www.alaskahistoricalociety.org

News & Information



These steam engines were part of the Council City and Solomon River Railroad, abandoned circa 1912.

Photo courtesy of Office of History and Archeology, Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

OFFICE OF HISTORY AND ARCHEOLOGY

It has a rather Hawaiian sound to it, but if you e-mail oha@alaska.net and post *Heritage*-subscribe, you will be put on the Heritage e-mail subscription list, posted every month. Among interesting items lately is the U.S. House proposal to substantially increase money available for historic preservation in Alaska. Since the national administration becomes stingier every year, it is a nice indication of public concern. The Senate has yet to take up the bill, but there's hope.

There is also a booklet available explaining funding available for historic properties that have suffered during natural disasters. If you are among the guardians of one or more of these, this could be valuable.



ALASKA YUKON PIONEERS

A mere \$12.00 per annum can keep you in touch with Alaskans and Yukoners who have gone Outside. Subscribe to the **Alaska Yukon Pioneers Newsletter**. There is also news about gatherings when held. The editor is Ethel LaRose and she can be reached at ethellarose@hotmail.com if you have items to contribute. To subscribe, write Joyce Penman, 27833 85th Drive, NW, Stanwood, Washington, 98292.



NOTICE OF CLOSURE:

ANCHORAGE MUSEUM LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The Library and Archives will close to the public on January 1, 2009, in order to facilitate the move to new, expanded space in the museum addition. It will re-open on May 30, 2009. The new Atwood Family Alaska Resource Center will provide improved access to the museum's collection of over 11,000 books and 500,000 historic photographs. Reference Services will be unavailable during this period. Please contact Kathleen Hertel-Baker, Director of Library and Archives (907-343-6189 hertelkr@anchoragemuseum.org), if you have questions about the closure.



Seekers, Leaders or Dreamers?



Mystery Photo

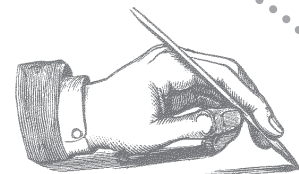
Alaska State Library Historical Collections is looking for any clues to identifying these employees of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

Post your answers at:

alaskastatelibrary.blogspot.com

Visit our website:

www.alaskahistoricalociety.org



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

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ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2008 CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Alaska Visionaries: Seekers, Leaders and Dreamers

Remember, the following program is provisional only, so be prepared for some changes when you arrive.

Monday, October 13

- 5:00-7:00** Arliss Sturgulewski, *Alaska: Where We've Been and Where We're Going*, UAA campus Bookstore
- 7:00-8:00** UAA Honors College Statehood Photo Exhibit Contest

Tuesday, October 14

- 5:00-7:00** Anchorage Times *Exhibit*, The Alaska Collection at the UAA/APU Consortium Library, second floor.

Wednesday, October 15

- 12:00-7:00** Registration Embassy Suites
- 8:30-12:00** Principles of Interpretation, NPS Park Ranger Doug Capra, UAA-APU Consortium Library, 307
- 10:00-3:00** Alaska State Historical Records Advisory Board, Atwood Building, 1860
- 11:30-1:30** Alaska Bar Association Luncheon. Keynote Speaker: Terrence Cole, Director, UAF Office of Public History, *Wickersham, the First Judge on the Yukon*, Dena'ina Center
- 12:00-2:00** Cultural Walk with Nancy Yaw Davis, UAA Campus
- 4:00-6:00** AHS Board of Directors Meeting, Embassy Suites
- 5:30-6:30** Photo Exhibit Opening, *Storied Alaska*, by Michael Conti, Arc Gallery, UAA-APU Consortium Library
- 7:00-9:00** Steve Lloyd, *The Torrent Shipwreck: Searching for Alaska's Underwater History*, Assembly Chambers, Loussac Library

Thursday, October 16

Z.J. Loussac Public Library

- All Day** Registration, Loussac Library Lobby, Coffee, etc.
- 8:00-8:10** Alaska Children's Choir, Wilda Marston Auditorium
- 8:10-8:50** Opening, Wilda Marston Auditorium, Bruce Merrell, Fran Ulmer
- 8:50-9:30** *The Significance of Statehood: A Historical Perspective*, Wilda Marston Auditorium, Terrence Cole, Karen Perdue
- 9:40-10:40** *The Youthful, the Wise, and the Progressive: Alaska's Visionary Educators*, Moderator: Fran Ulmer, Ross Coen, Thomas Begich, Tim Troll
- 10:40-11:00** *The Voices Behind the Vision: Audio Samples from the Alaska Constitutional Convention*, Kathy Price
- 11:00-12:00** *We the People of Alaska*, Moderator: Terrence Cole, Vic Fischer, Jack Coghill, Katie Hurley

- 12:00-1:00** Pioneer Luncheon

- 1:00-2:20** *Ordinary Individuals, Extraordinary Alaskans*, Moderator: Mike Doogan. Michael Carey, John Strohmeier, Lael Morgan

- 2:30-4:00** *Statehood and Alaska Natives: Creating Alaska's Visionary Generation*, Moderator: Willie Hensley. Joan Kane, Jackie Pels, Andrew Hund, Katie John

- 4:00-5:00** *Tracking Language: The Emergence of Native Place Names in Alaskan Literature. Policy and Research*, Moderator: Jeanne Schaaf. Jim Kari, Andrew Balluta, Alan Boraas

- 5:30-6:30** Wine and Cheese Reception, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Alaska Authors' Book Signing, Tour of Ann Fienup Riordan's exhibit

- 6:30-8:00** Alice Welling, *Hullabaloo: The Hysterically Accurate Musical Comedy about the History of Alaska*

Friday, October 17

UAA

- All Day** Registration
- 7:00-8:00** Alaska Fair and Auction
- 7:00-8:00** Local Historical Societies Breakfast Roundtable, Katie Oliver, Doug Capra
- 8:00-9:30** *50 Years of Alaska History*, Moderator: Greg Kimura. Steve Haycox, Clark Gruening, John Havelock
- 9:45-11:00** *Vision Quests and Trail Blazers: Setting the Stage for Statehood*. Moderator: Steve Linbeck. Eric Wolhforth, John Tracy, Tim Bradner
- 11:00-11:45** Keynote Address: Sven Haakanson.
- 12:00-1:15** Luncheon: *North to the Future: The Alaska Statehood Story, 1959-2009*, Dermot Cole
- 1:30-2:50** **A)** *Fishermen, Foresters, and the State Fair: Seeking, Leading, and Flying Alaska*, Moderator: Bob King. Talis Colberg, Chris Allan, Katie Ringsmuth
- B)** *Big Wild History: The Making of Alaska's Urban Hub*, Moderator: Jim Barnett. John Cloe, Erik Hirschmann, Glen Seaman, Bryr Ludington
- C)** *Arctic Vision: Statehood and the Arts*, Moderator Marilyn Knapp. Greg Kimura, June Rogers, Charlotte Fox, Kesler Woodward
- 2:45-4:00** **A)** *Seekers of Alaska: Visionary Explorers*, Moderator: Lael Morgan. Steve Spurr, John Branson, Rogan Faith, Tom Bundtzen
- B)** *Alaska Exceptionalism, Real or Imagined? Social Scientists Weigh the Evidence*, Moderator: Jim Ducker. Clive S. Thomas, Sharon Chamard, Chad Farrell, Ronald Everett, Nelta Edwards

C) *The Feminine Lens: Viewing Alaska through the Eyes of Women*, Moderator: Elizabeth James. Beverly Beeton, Marie Darlin, Malin Babcock, Dorothy Moore

4:00-5:00 AHS Annual Business Meeting

5:30-7:30 Banquet: *A Tribute to Alaska's '59ers*, Terrence Cole, John Straley, Alaska's Writer Laureate: *The Gray Area: Liars, Storytellers, and Private Detectives*

Saturday, October 18

UAA, Aviation Museum

8:00-10:00 Registration

7:00-8:00 AHS Board of Directors Meeting

8:00-10:40 A) *Records of Alaska's Recent Past*, Moderator: Kay Shelton. Anne Foster, Kathleen Bouska, Kathleen Hertel-Baker, James Simard, Glenn Cook, R. Bruce Parham

B) *Visionaries of Alaska Conservationism*, Moderator: Bill Brown. Charles Wohlforth, Roger Kaye, Alexander Simon

C) *Alaskans Tell Their Stories: An Overview of Statewide Oral History Projects*, Moderator: Ron Inouye. Amy March, Dawn Biddisan, Mike Letzring, Stan Jones

9:30-10:40 *Alaska: Linking the Pacific World*, Moderator: Judy Kleinfeld. Ed Vajda, Stephanie Cullers, Deborah Williams

10:40-11:00 *An Orchestral Vision of the Northland: Wilson Sawyer's Alaskan Symphony*, Moderator: Katie Oliver. Bob King

11:30- 1:00 Lunch, Aviation Museum, Introduction: Orin Seybert. Governor Sarah Palin (invited), Joel Hard

2:00-5:00 Civic Conversation, Moderator: Steve Haycox

7:00-9:00 Alaska Day Program
Mark Begich, Mayor, Municipality of Anchorage
Alaska Native Heritage Dancers
Talis Colberg, Senators Ted Stevens and Daniel Inouye



(above) Pratt staff members aboard the USCG Hickory on day of recovery of artifacts.

(right) Howitzer cannon aboard the USCG Hickory. See Wednesday evening's program: *The Torrent Shipwreck: Searching for Alaska's Underwater History*.

Photos courtesy Pratt Museum.



Sunday, October 19

Tours

(Leave from UAA 10:00am, Hotel pick up 10:10am)

Northbound Tour Guide: Aaron Leggett

11:00-12:00 Eklutna

12:30-1:30 Musk Ox Farm

2:00-3:00 Independence Mine at Hatcher Pass

4:30 Return to UAA, Hotels

Southbound Tour Guide: Moe McGee

11:30-1:00 Wildlife Conservation Center

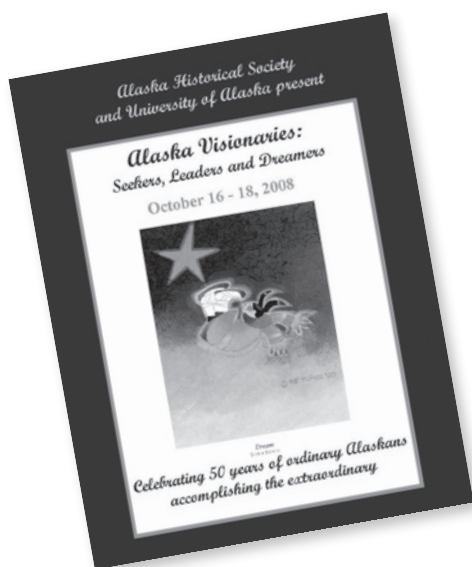
1:30-3:00 Begich, Boggs Visitor Center at Portage Glacier

4:30 Return to UAA, Hotels

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ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING
Alaska Visionaries: Seekers, Leaders and Dreamers
October 16-18, 2008 in Anchorage

Editor's Comments

hen we moved to Alaska in 1963 I warned my children to remember Alaska had been in the Union only a few years, so to take care not to refer to the Territory.

It was a bit of a shock to find lingering resentment around. There was the concern that another layer of government would be imposed on the overburdened citizens of the Territory, and the worry that there was no financial basis for statehood.

True as to the latter. I recall being bemused by the size of the Alaska budget that year. It was \$19,000,000.00, the same as the budget of our recent home, the medium-sized city of Baltimore.

As to it as the interference with the freedom and regulation of Alaskans, Joe Volger

of Fairbanks summed up the opposition in 1973 when he founded the Alaska Independence Party, dedicated to Alaska's secession from the Union. Dick Randolph, Libertarian legislator also from Fairbanks, wrote a book, *Freedom for Alaskans* on his views, presented on the back cover. "Alaskans can free themselves from the ever increasing stranglehold of government control over their lives and fortunes" it trumpeted. "He's now recognized nationally as an important leader of an increasingly popular political movement" was the hopeful conclusion. Sadly for Dick, a few years later he proposed the government rent an airplane and drop currency from the sky. Everyone could then chase after it as it drifted down to the tundra or forest.

When someone asked about the disabled, he airily replied they could crawl towards the cash. He insisted later it was a joke, but even rugged individualists were upset by the picture presented of helpless people leaving their wheelchairs to crawl across the land.

But in a way we all miss the Libertarians and other home-grown individualists. We don't care how they do it Outside! (Remember that common saying?) Take responsibility for yourself is great advice if you are young and healthy, but the idea runs into trouble when the aged and infirm are brought into the picture. Unfortunately, even tough Alaskans do age or become infirm, but the Independence adherents resist that thought. That's what we miss.

D. L.