

Alaska History News

Volume 36 No. 4 Quarterly of the Alaska Historical Society Winter 2008

Notes from around the state

At the moment, the historical society that has most celebrated the 50 years of Alaska statehood is the **Kenai Historical Society**. Their recent newsletters have the reminiscences of a young soldier who barely made the three-year residency requirement to be a member of the first state legislature and photos of Allan Petersen's grandsons after his election to that ground-breaker taken at the time, on the 25th anniversary, and the 50th. Quite a record.



Think igloos and the Iditarod and what Alaska town comes to mind? You're wrong; it's Wrangell. Their museum has a display of locally made Igloo Pottery from the 1950s and '60s. They also have a new exhibit that features a complete collection of Iditarod posters. The **Wrangell Museum** is also working on scanning their 7,000 plus photographs into a database.



Someday someone will surely write a book about early automobiles in Alaska. When it happens, the disappearing White car of the Kennicott Valley must be included. The **McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Society** sent along the lovely story. Around 1919 the first White brand touring car came to the valley and was used as a taxi service for ten years, hauling miners from Kennicott to McCarthy. It was a five-passenger car but often held nine, not including the ten standing on the running boards. No heater, but the isinglass curtains helped in winter. Best of all were the large diameter wheels, good for even deep snow. Its last days were sad; someone used it for duck hunting and the owner decided it wasn't worth fixing. The rear springs and canvas top are known to have been a gift, but the rest of the car just disappeared, bit by bit after 1955.



The *Struggle for Alaska Statehood* is the theme of the lecture series the **Cook Inlet Historical Society** is sponsoring this winter and spring. Check with the Anchorage Museum for details or write them at 121 West Seventh Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska, 99501-3696.



A town isn't really a town until it has a post office. Am sure all of Soldotna rejoiced when a local family used part of their house in 1949 to open an official one. The cabin is now back on its original

Brochure announcing lecture series
courtesy Cook Inlet Historical Society



In 1958, young lads Joe and Jim Arness proudly posed with the Anchorage newspapers celebrating Alaska statehood. They relived the moment for the silver anniversary in 1984 and again for the golden anniversary.

Photo courtesy Kenai Historical Society

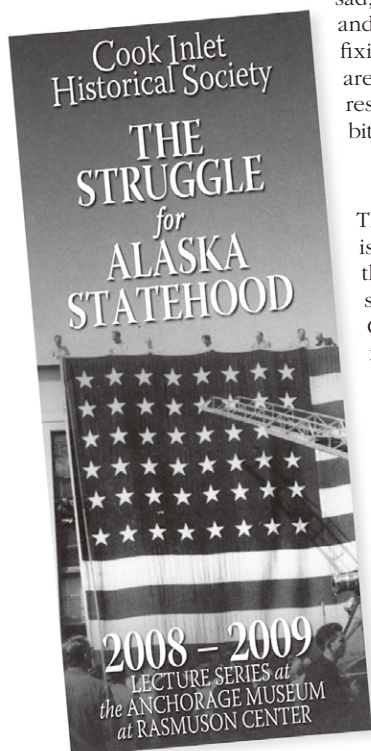
site and recently made the National Register, the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society** newsletter reports. There's also a wildlife conservation item from 1915. A local doctor recommended placing fences along the Kaslof River where 70 to 100 moose drowned every year after thin ice broke under their weight. It was estimated that 4,000 moose were in the area.

There's also an exciting seasonal item from 1915: Seward reported the first turkeys ever to be raised in Alaska not only were thriving, but the "gobbler phenom" as one was called, laid 61 eggs from May to October, a record. It was reported she had been "setting and laying and laying and setting alternately all summer."



A news-flash from the **Cape Decision Lighthouse Society** newsletter. The mysterious man who appeared near Christmas of 1964 and played carols on a musical saw before leaving has been identified. He was Reverend David Fison from the Methodist Church in Ketchikan, still alive and active. He enjoyed visiting the five remote lighthouses in the area, spending an hour at each one. Given the December weather in Southeast Alaska, that was quite an adventure.

(Continued page 4.)



History Still Matters—Even in the Digital Age

*W*e are living in historic times. Whether we like it or not, over the last several months Alaska has been at the center of the national stage. We've been there before: the turn of the century gold rushes, the 1964 earthquake, and the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill each grabbed national headlines. But in today's digital age of the Internet and 24-hour news, more people than ever before have access to information about Alaska—and not all of it is good information or even true. With the eyes of the world looking north, it is important that Alaska historians do what we can to make sure that thoughtful, intelligent, and correct information is available to the media and the education community, as well as the simply curious.

Not only is this our responsibility, but the spotlight provides the Alaska Historical Society an excellent opportunity to do as our mission states: to promote Alaska history by the exchange of ideas and information, the preservation and interpretation of resources, and the education of Alaskans about their heritage. Besides the AHS journal, *Alaska History*, and our fabulous newsletter, the AHS website (alaskahistoricalociety.org) offers innovative ways to inspire new historical interest, original research, and membership growth. Not only can the web site reach anyone with a computer, but it is also a medium with which the next generation of historians is most comfortable. They should be encouraged to assist the Society's transition into the 21st century by developing, for example, blogs, pod casts, and other history-related on-line projects. The sky's the limit.

One project in particular that I think underscores such innovation is the Constitutional Convention tape recording project, supported by the Alaska Historical Society, the Alaska State Archives, and the Office of Public History at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The project is endeavoring to make the audio testimony from the Constitution Convention accessible for the first time to the general public. In their original media format, however, the numerous tapes are of limited practical value and the recordings too cumbersome and inaccessible for the public to use. But thanks to digital technology, voices can be listened to with only a click of the computer mouse. The perfect vehicle to present and access the information is a multimedia, interactive website. Audio, photos, images of documents, and text would bring the convention to life.

Perhaps some think that technology removes us from the intimacy of history's human story. At the 2008 AHS annual conference in Anchorage, Kathy Price, education program director, talked about the project, played various samples of audio clips, and made an interactive PowerPoint presentation. It was clear that new insights can be acquired by listening to some of the debates. Sitting in the audience was a young attorney named Mike

McLaughlin, who was deeply and personally overwhelmed by Kathy's presentation. After, Mike thanked Kathy for her work. He asked her for a copy of one of the recordings he had just heard. Mike's dad was convention delegate, George McLaughlin of Anchorage, who died when Mike was 5-years-old. That was the first time Mike had heard his father's voice. Indeed, history matters, even in the digital age.

Katherine Johnson Ringsmuth

(above) Katie John and Katherine Johnson Ringsmuth



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www.alaskahistoricalociety.org

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2008 ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY AWARDS

Bruce Merrell, President and Ron Inouye, Awards Committee, presented the 2008 Alaska Historical Society awards at a luncheon at the Alaska Aviation Museum in Anchorage on October 18, 2008, as part of the annual meeting. Congratulations to the individuals, historical societies, and public institutions for outstanding research, writing, and promotion of Alaska history the past year.

Nancy Ferrell of Juneau received the **Evangeline Atwood Award**, given to an individual in recognition of significant long-term contributions to Alaska state or local history. Nancy has written books for young readers and adults, three of which are on Alaska subjects. These include *Alaska: A Land in Motion*, a geography text for elementary age students, a biography of writer Barrett Willoughby, and a book on the early years of Juneau. She has completed work on another book, *White Water Skippers of the North*. Nancy has lived in Juneau for 40 years. The award is named for one of the founders of the Alaska Historical Society, who also researched and wrote as well as supported preservation of Alaska's past.

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M.J. (Mark) Kirchhoff of Juneau received the **Historian of the Year Award**, given to an Alaska resident for publication of notable new material about Alaska history during the past year. Mark's recent book is a biography entitled *Jack Dalton, The Alaska Pathfinder*. Dalton was a household name in Alaska around the end of the 19th century. He hunted marine mammals along the Aleutians, was on the first expedition to climb Mt. St. Elias, floated the length of the Yukon river in 1894, drove cattle to feed the starving prospectors at Dawson in 1899, mined gold at Porcupine, and helped the government test the coal resources of the Matanuska Valley. Dalton also was involved in shootings, multiple marriages and business deals gone wrong. Mark spoke about Dalton at the Alaska Historical Society meeting in Haines three years ago, and his book has been anxiously awaited. He used early letters written by Dalton and his family, interviewed and corresponded with people throughout the Pacific Northwest and found fragmentary information in a diversity of sources. One Awards Committee member noted even the detailed footnotes in the book are interesting!

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The **Kodiak Historical Society** was recognized with the **Elva R. Scott Local Historical Society Newsletter Award**, given for the best newsletter published by a local historical society over the past several years. This past year the *Baranov Quarterly* has had articles on what the museum is doing and items about historical events on the island. The recent issue had information about the archaeological excavations on the museum grounds last summer along with an article about photographs recently donated to the museum archives. Congratulations to Katie Oliver, Director of the Baranov Museum, her staff, and the Kodiak Historical Society Board of Directors for the excellent newsletter. The award is named for Elva Scott, the editor of the *Eagle Wireless* for the Eagle Historical Society for more than 25 years.

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The Editorial Advisory Board for the Society's journal, *Alaska History*, just voted for the best article published in the 2007 or 2008 issues. This year's award goes to **Chris Allan** of Fairbanks for his "Save Fort Egbert!: How the People of Eagle Reclaimed Their Past." The article is an excellent study of the evolving efforts and relations of a local community and bureaucracies to

preserve an important part of Alaska's past in a way sensitive to community concerns. The award includes a \$500 prize.

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Stephanie Cullers of Anchorage received the **Student and Beginning Professional Travel Scholarship Award** that helps people attend and participate in the Alaska Historical Society annual meeting. The award includes \$500 and a registration to attend and present a paper at the society's annual conference. Stephanie is a senior at the University of Alaska Anchorage majoring in history. She presented her very interesting paper, "Governor Hickel: Joining Together Alaska and Japan."

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The **Contributions to Alaska History Award** recognizes someone who has made a singular and significant recent contribution to Alaska history. This year two individuals were recognized: **Jacquelin B. (Jackie) Pels** of Walnut Creek, California, and **Stan Cohen** of Missoula, Montana, for publishing works about people, places and events in Alaska's past. Jackie's recent books, published under the name Hardscratch Press, have included *Family After All* a two-volume work about the Jesse Lee Home—emphasizing the children who lived there, and *The Alaska 67: A Guide to Alaska's Best History Books* for the Alaska Historical Society. Jackie started her press in 1990, and has now published 22 volumes, 15 of which are about Alaska. Since 1976, Stan has written and published 18 books about Alaska and the Klondike, and edited and published at least 15 others under the name Pictorial Histories Publishing Company.

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Kathryn "Kay" Shelton, Director of Alaska State Libraries, Archives and Museums until October 31st received special recognition. Kay has been an archivist and librarian in Juneau for many years, working for the University of Alaska Southeast, the Alaska State Archives, and the Alaska Historical Collections until becoming the State Librarian. She has done so much during her career, and most recently successfully championed the effort to get design funding for a new library, archives and museums building. She has served the Alaska Historical Society in almost every capacity.

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Dee Longenbaugh of Juneau received the **2008 Beaver Log** (President's Award) from Bruce Merrell. He cited her as "editor extraordinaire" for her interesting and always timely work as editor of the society's quarterly newsletter *Alaska History News*. In addition, Dee serves on the board of directors and is a regular reviewer for the society's journal. In her spare time, she owns a bookstore and this year's award featured a historic photograph of the building where her business is in Juneau.

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Again, congratulations to the award recipients. It's not too early to start thinking about great people and projects to recognize next year.

Notes from around the state



“The Topographers,” photo from collection documenting the Alaska Canada boundary survey from 1910 to 1913.

Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Asa Columbus Baldwin Photograph Collection, ASL-P71-275.

Years ago I mentioned early Alaska diaries to R.N. DeArmond, noted Alaskan historian. He said every now and then someone would bring one to him, but they usually were thin on entries, remarking only “snowed again today”. **The Eagle Historical Society** newsletter speaks of a much more fascinating one. Dr. Willis Kingsbury was a physician with the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey which was working on the Alaska-Yukon boundary during 1889-1891. He kept daily records of everything encountered, from the people, weather, and geography, as well as taking many, many photographs. Kingsbury’s society is hoping to publish the diaries soon.

They also contrasted today’s placement of permanent building foundations in Eagle to an account of some years ago. A volunteer was startled when the white baseboard molding he was vacuum-ing in the mule barn went right up the machine. Seems the ancient manure had just been painted shiny white.

There’s also a note in their recent newsletter of “Wilderness Wisdom” pointing out that when painting the outhouse, do not paint both seats at the same time. That’s the practical stuff we need to know.



Want a nice 33' fishing boat? Will require some work; actually, must be dried out for around three years before renovation can begin. Contact the **Valdez Museum & Historical Archive** to learn more, 217 Egan Drive, Post Office Box 8, Valdez, Alaska, 99686 or phone 907/835-2764, or check www.valdezmuseum.org.

They also report Jim and Nancy Lethcoe, noted local historians, have a new book out. *Experiences of Gold Hunters in Alaska* is a true story of a gold rush group of adventurers.



A new website is something to brag about, and the **Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society** would like

you to check out www.CERHS.org. They have certainly gone uptown! They also sell DVDs of local families talking about early days in the area. There was a class offered in writing up family early days this past October. All this techie stuff means you’d better be careful when talking to CERHS members; they may know more about the Internet and the Web in general than you do!



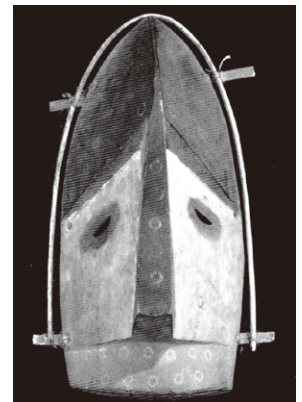
A payment of \$30.00 individual or \$40.00 for the family will not only give you a membership in the **Sitka Maritime Heritage Society**, but you will receive the quarterly newsletter which contains such items as an article on the Davis Boat, a popular rowboat from Metlakatla and further information on Alaska steamships from the foremost Alaskan historian, R.N. DeArmond. www.sitkamaritime.org takes you right there, or phone 907/747-3448 or write Post Office Box 2153, Sitka, Alaska, 99835.



For all the news about the history of Wrangell and southern southeast Alaska in general, there is no better source than Pat Roppel’s monthly *Wrangell History*. The latest issues go into a rather mysterious ginseng farm of 1918, the intriguing possibility of Hoochie Coochie dancing in gold rush Wrangell, and a homestead on Green Island. Send \$20.00 to the **Friends of the Wrangell Museum**, which is where the money goes, and see what else she’s come up with. Pop “Wrangell Museum” into Google for the addresses.



Speaking of the museum, the marvelous exhibit of Sugpiaq masks and music from Kodiak is on display at the **Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center** until January 9th. Christmas will also be celebrated in various ways, and of course, the usual movies, art classes and exhibits for children, as well as photographs and a myriad of lectures and other activities are offered. If you can’t make it in person, go to www.anchagemuseum.org to sample the goodies.



Mask from *Giinaquq (Like a Face)* Sugpiaq Masks of the Kodiak Archipelago exhibit at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Photo courtesy Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.



Cemetery to the left of vegetable garden in Juneau.

Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Case & Draper, Photographers, William Norton Photograph Collection, ASL-P226-220.

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 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.

Cemeteries can be fascinating. When your editor was child, our family moved a great deal around the U.S. Southwest. When we came to a new town, our mother headed for the local cemetery once the furniture was in place. Nothing like checking out early families; who had the most money so the biggest memorials; who had the most graves so there the longest; the epidemics that wracked the community; all resulting in a great history of the town. The **Gastineau Channel Historical Society** of Juneau has new brochures out on their classic Evergreen Cemetery. Not only are the town founders there, but various others such as Walter Harper, first person to ascend Mount McKinley.

They also had a tour of the local electric company. Now that's an idea—how about visiting one of your oldest companies with a guide who knows the history.

Women married to Alaska government officials during the early American period are rarely mentioned, let alone their daughters. One wife and two daughters turned out to be competent artists; one, Lesley Jackson, daughter of the missionary-cum-politician Sheldon Jackson, excellent. Best of all for Sitka, both she and the other two daughters liked to paint Sitka, the **Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum** newsletter reports. An exhibit of women artists who painted views of Sitka is now on view at the museum.

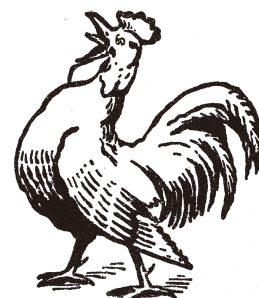
There is also an interview with a modern Tlingit totem carver who enters into the old, old argument about whether traditional carving should be retained or should innovations be welcomed. An interesting read. Check the museum out on the Internet or contact them at 104 College Drive, Sitka, Alaska, 99835.

The **Juneau-Douglas City Museum** is continuing its free winter admission, courtesy of various sponsors. That increases visits and enables donors to feel they're contributing to the community in a very nice way.

One of their favorite recent contributions is some fragments of the electrical transmission towers and line, courtesy of the major avalanche last April that temporarily raised rates 500% and spurred much inventive conservation on the part of customers.

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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News & Information

WELL DONE, LIBRARY CAVALRY!

In the old Western movies, just when things were the grimmest and the defenders about to be wiped out, here would come the U.S. Cavalry over the hill, gauntlets holding the reins and trumpets sounding. When the oldest college in Alaska, Sheldon Jackson, in Sitka, was forced to close in 2007, the librarians from the Alaska State Library in Juneau instantly formed a posse, so to speak, to see what they could do about protecting the college library and archives. The state library Historical Collections will house the archives for the next five years. The C.L. Andrews collection will be transferred to the Sitka public library. Questions about access to the SJC Archives can be directed to James Simard, Head of Historical Collections, 465-2926.



THEATRE SCHOLARSHIP FUNDRAISER

AHS, as we laughingly refer to the Alaska Historical Society, now sponsors travel scholarships for a student and a one-year-professional who are conducting original work in Alaska history to attend the annual meeting and present their work. This January **Cyrano's Theatre** of Anchorage is presenting *Libby*, a play about the Pribilof Islands in 1880 and donating the proceeds to the scholarships. The play's co-sponsors are the AHS and Cook Inlet Historical Society.



ALASKA YUKON PIONEERS

And here's the reminder for those who want to know what old friends are doing. Subscribe to the **Alaska Yukon Pioneers** newsletter. \$12.00 a year sent to AYP, Joyce Penman, Recorder, 27833 85th Drive NW, Stanwood, Washington. 98292 will do the trick.



NATIONAL RECREATIONAL TRAILS PHOTO CONTEST

The **Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance** notes American Trails has a website contest to find the best one for showcasing a trail; information, engaging the public, etc. It is also sponsoring a National Recreational Trails Photo Contest. The deadline is December 15, so perhaps too late this year, but check out www.americantrails.org/webcon.html for the website and www.americantrails.org/nationalrecreationtrails/photocon.html for details.



SWAN POINT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Swan Point Archaeological Site has been named to the National Register of Historic Places. Since it dates back around 12,000 that seems logical. There is also a program to share the cost of internships, and Congress has voted to keep historic preservation funds at the current level. Where did all this information come from? Why, **Heritage**, of course. That is the newsletter of the Office of History and Archaeology, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Alaska Department of Natural Resources. In less time than it takes you to type that out, you can contact oba@alaska.net and write "Heritage, subscribe" as the subject. Want to try the website? Easy: www.dnr.alaska.gov/parks



Sheldon Jackson Museum and Library. Probably photographed by E.W. Merrill.

Alaska State Library Historical Collections, William A. Kelly Photograph Collection, ASI-P427-20.

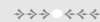
ALASKA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Here's a group you might not be familiar with—the **Alaska Association for Historic Preservation**. Yes, preserving old Alaska buildings is their goal and \$20 per annum the modest cost. They also try to raise funds for endangered buildings, make the public aware by listing the ten most endangered properties in the state each December, and generally work in all areas having to do with old buildings threatened with destruction. In Anchorage they're at 203 West Third Avenue, 99503 or phone them at 907/929-9870 or send an e-mail to preservation@gci.net.



PROJECT JUKEBOX

Who can resist a project known as *Project Jukebox*? That's the oral history program of the Rasmuson Library at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Check it out at <http://communitiesofmemory.blogspot.com/> and see how the 1994-1996 project has been updated with videos and other 21st century goodies.



ALASKA HISTORY TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Among the recipients of the **2008 Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities** was **Ray Voley** as Alaska History Teacher of the Year. Mr. Voley teaches at the Kenny Lake School, Copper River School District.



ALASKA STATE MUSEUM GRANTS -IN-AID

The **Alaska State Museum** not only protects and displays objects showing Alaska history, but has a very active grant-in-aid program, funded by the Alaska State Legislature. This year it was able to award \$105,600 to 30 requesters, mostly for computers and storage upgrades. There are also handy discussions in the bulletin about dust control and the use of buffered tissues for collections. A toll-free call to 1-888-913-MUSE will work, or you can expand by e-mailing scott.carlee@alaska.gov.



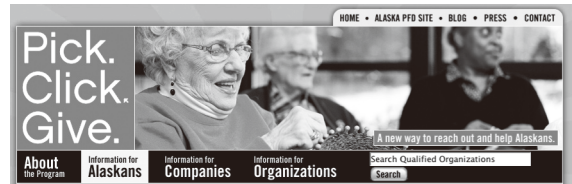
AYPE CENTENNIAL

Interested in attending to a conference on the centennial of the 1909 **Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition**? Planned for Seattle next March 7. Write PNWHG Conference, 2908 27th Avenue West, Seattle, Washington, 98199 or e-mail Trish Hackett Nicola via PNWHGConference@gmail.com or phone her at 206/284-5232.



KUDOS FOR QUIGLEY BIOGRAPHY

Jane Haigh of Fairbanks won second place in the WILLA Literary Awards for scholarly non-fiction; her biography, *Searching for Fannie Quigley* tells the story of a colorful Denali woman.



A new, easy way to support AHS

The Alaska Historical Society is pleased to be a participating organization in the new Permanent Fund Dividend Charitable Contribution Program for 2009. The Alaska Legislature passed a law in 2008 making it possible for Alaskans to donate to qualifying nonprofit organizations when they file on-line for their PFDs.

By giving through this program, you join others to help better our communities and our state. The Alaska Historical Society is a nonprofit statewide educational organization that has programs to preserve and promote knowledge and understanding of Alaska's great history. We encourage Alaskans to donate to help with our programs to encourage the exchange of ideas and information, the preservation and interpretation of resources, and the education of Alaskans about their heritage.

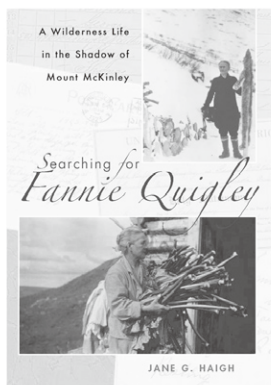
When you go on-line to sign up for your dividend, you will see the "The Gift of Giving" option. Search for Alaska Historical Society, click, then follow the instructions to make a donation. Please take the step after you make your donation to provide your name and contact information so we can acknowledge and recognize your generous support.

You can find more information about the program, including frequently asked questions at www.PickClickGive.org. Or send us an email at akhist@gci.net.



1909 Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition postcard.

Alaska State Library Historical Collections, Michael Z.Vinokourov Photograph Collection, ASL-P243-2-182.



Searching for Fannie Quigley,
by Jane Haigh.


ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Alaska Electric Light and Power library.
Alaska State Library Historical Collections, A.E.L.&P.
Photograph Collection, ASL-P140-265.

Editor's Comments

Research is about the most enjoyable indoor pursuit known. Yes, I do mean even better than crib or poker as there's no danger of losing money, and I don't want to hear about the chances of making money. No, research has it over everything else because you know how it turned out; you just need to know why.

I do research when I travel; this year it was the British Library and the Archives at Kew, looking for material on English explorers and traders who came to Alaska. Captain James Cook, George Vancouver, and various fur traders like George Dixon, Nathaniel Portlock, and John Meares. Then I went to Madrid and searched the National Archives at the Museo Naval for the Spanish explorers who visited our state.

So, in addition to having some healthy travel and a chance to use my twelve words of Spanish, I have contributed a bit of knowledge about the early Europeans in our waters.

There are, of course, the wonderful resources in the Alaska Historical Library and the State

Library, not to mention the wonders of inter-library loan from our public libraries. No Spanish required.

You are feeling shy about research because libraries are places where you must be quiet. No problem (or, as we say in Spain—*no problema*). Very easy. First, what do you want to research? The history of your old house, said to have been built on what was then the edge of town? Head to the library and see what local history is available. Check with local historians. See if there are old town plans available. An excellent source is the old insurance maps. They will supply exact information if your town had insurance (and most did and do).

In other words, start with the general and work your way on to specifics. Along the way enjoy yourself and discover the more you know about the subject the more interesting the small bits become. Best of all, you can wrap yourself in the warm mantle of knowing more than most about something.

D. L.