

Alaska History News

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Message from the President

Katie Ringsmuth

Northern Pastime:

Linking People, Places and the Past



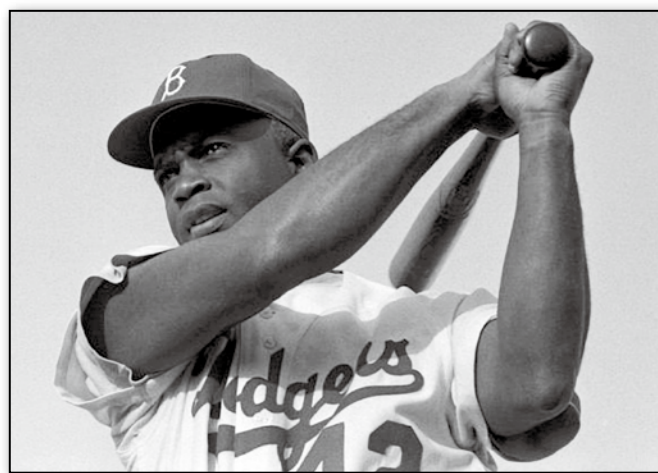
"We have observed several parties of youngsters playing base, a certain game of ball ... Let us go forth awhile and get better air in our lungs. Let us leave our close rooms ... the game of ball is glorious."

Walt Whitman

Personally for me, summertime in Alaska evokes memories of hiking trails lined with fireweed, passing salmon-choked streams, and yes, playing baseball. I met my husband playing softball on the park strip, and for Mother's Day this year we took our boys, Ben and Tom, to watch the Seattle Mariners at Safeco Field. Although at age 40 "the Kid" was only batting a buck-eighty-four, we wanted the boys to be able to tell their kids that they once saw Ken Griffey Jr.—one of the Game's greats—swing the bat during what is likely his last season. Put simply, we wanted to give our boys a lasting memory.

It's hard for a historian not to love baseball, for our national pastime is steeped in tradition. In his PBS documentary *Baseball*, Ken Burns showed us that baseball not only commemorates history, but has also shaped it. As the Game's popularity soared around the turn of the twentieth century, the shared act of being a spectator of the sport helped teach newly-arrived immigrants how to be Americans. Commencing the decade characterized as 'the age of anxiety,' the heavily favored Chicago White Sox, including "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, threw the 1919 World Series for money. The disgraced "Black Sox" marred forever baseball's innocence (say it ain't so, Joe) and set a tone of disillusionment felt by so many Americans in a post-war world. The Game's greatest moment came when Jackie Robinson donned a Brooklyn Dodger uniform in 1947, breaking Major League Baseball's color barrier. In the 1980s, another Dodger phenomenon—Fernando Valenzuela—revolutionized the sport by opening it to Latino players. Today's team rosters consist of players linked to Europe,

Africa, North, Central and South America, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Australia. Indeed, as Burns put it, "the story of the Game is the story of America."



Jackie Robinson swinging a bat in Dodgers uniform, 1954.
Library of Congress, LOOK Magazine Photograph Collection ppmc.00047.

Likewise, baseball has left a legacy here in Alaska. While conducting research on a historic mining property near the world-famous Kennecott copper mines and mill, I came across an article on the front page of the *McCarthy*

Message from the President, continued



St. Paul Island baseball team. September 21, 1921. Richard G. And Mary S. Culbertson Photograph Collection. ASL-P390-038.

Weekly News, April 25, 1926, alerting local miners and company employees that “the McCarthy Baseball Association” was holding a meeting “for the purpose of electing officers and organizing for the coming season.” As I read on, I was surprised to learn that baseball was no leisure sport to those copper miners. Players were paid and instructed “to faithfully serve the said Association, and to at all times conform his personal conduct to standards of good citizenship and good sportsmanship.”

Terrence Cole, historian and fan, notes that the formation of baseball associations was fairly common in Alaska. In 1908, for example, 1,500 people watched the opening day double-header of the Nome Baseball Association. In his article “Baseball Above and Below Zero: The National Pastime in Alaska,” in *The Alaska Journal* (Summer 1983), Cole describes Alaska’s rugged brand of baseball, played on the rocky diamonds in Southeast Alaska to the ball field on the frozen tundra at Nome, “one of the most unique parks in the world.” Cole admits that in order to sell papers local journalists “slightly exaggerated” accounts of the game played under “blistering rays” in front of “crowds of wild fans,” but correctly argues that Alaska’s long summer nights have nevertheless proven to be a spawning ground for major league ballplayers. Today, the semi-pro Alaska Baseball League attracts players from colleges throughout the nation, and according to Lew Freedman, author of *Diamonds in the Rough: Baseball Stories from Alaska* (Epicenter Press, 2000) some of the best Major Leaguers played under the midnight sun: Tom Seaver, Mark McGwire, Dave Winfield, Randy Johnson, Barry Bonds (asterisk and all), even Satchel Paige played in a four game exhibition series at Mulcahy Stadium in 1965.

The intersection of baseball and Alaska also reflects the historic connection between Seattle and the north. Alaska’s lack of a Major League team, combined with Seattle’s geographical and historic proximity, make the Mariners “our team.” While rooting for our team at Safeco Field in May, I struck up a conversation with a woman named Saraphema, who wanted to meet my 10-month-old son, Tom. It turned out she too was from Alaska—“a small village I probably had never heard of—Egegik.” Smiling at the beauty of our small world, I, of course, knew Egegik well. It’s located one river-system down from South Naknek, where I had slimed sockeye at the cannery and spent numerous baseball seasons reading box scores at mug-up.

Perhaps it was the connection we Alaskans quickly foster Outside, or it was just the sunny sky and green grass that created the perfect day for baseball, but Saraphema, now living in the Pacific Northwest, had season tickets and personally knew stadium staff. At her request, a Safeco representative visited us at our seats, presented my boys with two “first game” certificates, a Major League baseball, and earning the biggest smile from both Ben and Dad, a Ken Griffey Jr. baseball card, a keepsake that will surely create a lasting memory and a treasure to be passed on to the next generation.



Published by the American Tobacco Company. Photograph by the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

Honus Wagner baseball card. With only 57 known copies, it is the most expensive in the world. The card was designed and issued by the American Tobacco Company from 1909 to 1911 as part of its T206 series. Wagner refused to allow production of the card to continue, stating, he “did not care to have his picture in a package of cigarettes.” In 2007, the card shown above sold for \$2.8 million.

Notes from around the state



The barkentine *Willie R. Hume* at the C.E. Whitney saltery. National Archives and Records Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, RG 22-FF-A2514.

The summer season at the **Pratt Museum** has begun. The big exhibit for the Homer visitor is *Sailing for Salmon; 125 Years of Commercial Fishing in Bristol Bay*. Much else is going on, including watching bears through the museum's Bear Cam, but the most eye-catching title is *Bears, Brats, and Brew*. Feeding unruly children to the bears while making coffee? Nope—watch the bears through the cam, while enjoying bratwurst and a beer or two. Darn! For photographs and general information go to www.prattmuseum.org or be old-fashioned and telephone 907/235-8635.



The **Anchorage Museum** has always been a busy place, but recently added a science program at its new *Imaginarium Discovery Center*. The beauty of the demonstrations and explanation of exhibits to the visitor is that it will be run by teen volunteers. How about looking at this largely untapped museum source in your town? Too often teens are ignored or deplored; how about adding them? The *Imaginarium* is joined by the *Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center*, *Thomas Planetarium*, and a gallery to exhibit the museum's Alaska Native contemporary art; all opened the end of May.

The museum had a clever marketing idea of using the *Star Wars* traveling exhibit as a vehicle to hold a birthday party in a private room at the museum along with a private showing of the exhibit.



A waning moon. Courtesy Archgraphics.

And there's more. This summer famed mountain climber and photographer **Bradford Washburn** is honored with a display of his photographs. Another photographic and artifact exhibit, on view until December 31, is *Kiska and Adak: War in the Aleutians*.



The home of *Dead Bear Walking*, otherwise known as the **Cooper Landing Historical Society and Museum** can be reached at Post Office Box 542, Cooper Landing, Alaska 99572 if you'd like their summer schedule, or go to museum@arctic.net, or call Mona at 907/598-1042 if it's important.



Spring brings thoughts of cleaning the house, the yard, and anything else you own that's been neglected over the winter. It's a great time to pass the stuff on to someone else. The **Wasilla Knik Historical Society** had a yard sale last month. We expect it did well.



Don't forget there are two museums; the **Knik Museum and Musher's Hall of Fame** and the **Wasilla Page Museum** so you have twice as much to enjoy when in the area. The Page Museum was working on town site buildings and live blacksmith demonstrations this winter. The Knik Museum has artifacts from its glory days as a town populated by prospectors, trappers, and merchants.



Discussions about various families in the early years have so far produced four books sold by the **Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society**. Contact them at www.cerhs.org, or e-mail cerhs1@gmail.com or info@cerhs.org or write CERHS, Post Office Box 650573, Chugiak, Alaska 99567.

Notes from around the state



St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral, Sitka, Alaska.
ASL-P243-1-041.

Inset: The bell tower, St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral, Sitka, Alaska.
ASL-P243-1-035.

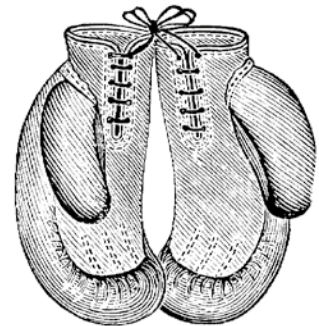
Sitka is one of twelve *Distinctive Destinations for 2010* named by the **National Trust for Historic Preservation**. It has been a busy year at the **Sitka Historical Society**, ranging from special tours to honoring historians to coordinating various events, including the *St. Michael's Cathedral Bell Tower Rehabilitation and Bell Ringing Rebirth*. The society has been given an Elizabeth Peratrovich letter to her son and family photos. Her adopted mother was from Sitka.

Gold Rush celebrations, like all historic such, prize authentic costumes. The **Valdez Museum and Historical Archive Association** reports twenty-three women met to learn from the woman who had made a lovely period hat in 2009. The "Hatsters" were very pleased with their afternoon's work. Expect to be dazzled if you're in Valdez August 4-8 this year. Working on the fine theory of catching them while they're young, the museum supplied kindergartners with *Transportation in Early Valdez*. It concluded with a real dogsled ride, totally thrilling the children. They also had an x-ray taken of an old rifle treasured by them. All its innards showed up nicely, so they're sending images to firearm authorities for further information.

Would you like to receive periodical e-mails telling what **Ketchikan Museums** is up to? Those techies there will do so if you visit laceyg@city.ketchikan.ak.us or telephone 907/225-5900. Nice story and pictures of Ketchikan's military heading off on the mail boat to World War I, while the whole town watched and waved goodbye. The **Totem Heritage Center** continues its carving classes. More techie stuff—if you'd like information, visit them on Facebook.

Know how much fun it is to use a technical term you had never heard before and in a crowd of techies? In this instance it is a construction term. The **Cape Decision Lighthouse Society** is continuing its major work this summer. Among the items planned is a pony wall/ hearth inside the galley. A pony wall??? Seems that's a low wall built to segregate a portion of a large room. A pony is a small horse; got it? The Cannon-Heater wood stove awaits another round of definition. There was a nice wording of recent fundraisers the society held in Sitka and Juneau. Seems Sitka had a Pig Roast and Dance while Juneau produced bagpipers and dancing girls. Don't you wish you'd been there?

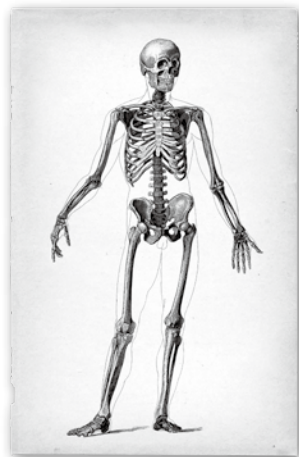
It's not uncommon for an old house or cabin to be rehabilitated and put on display on a museum's grounds. The **Kenai Historical Society** can always be counted on to be a bit different. First, they moved four cabins to their grounds, leveled them after break-up, and installed boardwalks. Next, they are going to use two of the cabins to display local collections. One exhibit will be the 1930s and '40s boxing paraphernalia of a Kenai resident, and the other an exhibit of antique medical instruments collected by a local physician. Nice surprises for the cabin visitors.



Boxing gloves.
Courtesy Gecko Graphics.

And what could possibly be more exciting for a sixth-grade class than to discover human bones at their summer camp? A big thrill, although they were happy to learn proper examination would and did take place. The Kenaitze Tribe's consultant in such matters made sure all respect would be paid. It was, and the tribe was pleased to find the Athabaskan woman, around age 35 when she died, was buried with a pair of pre-1840 scissors and some beads, which fit Kenaitze stories

All Things Eagle and Raven is the main summer exhibit at the **Juneau-Douglas City Museum**. Every year all the museums in Juneau celebrate *Museum Day* in May with free admission and transportation as well as special doings. Perhaps something to think about.



Human skeleton (male).
Courtesy Archgraphics.

Notes from around the state



Alaska Engineering Commission train arriving in Anchorage from Seward, Alaska, February 19, 1921. H.G. Kaiser, Alaska Railroad Collection; Anchorage Museum, Loan from the Alaska Railroad Corporation, AEC.G1715 (detail).

The U.S. is very fond of initializing names. However, one can't blame the **Resurrection Bay Historical Society** of Seward for preferring RBHS. It serves as the umbrella organization for the **Kenai Peninsula Historical Association** and the **Iditarod Historical Trail Alliance** so it can use all the names it likes. The latest newsletter speaks of a visitor from the **Jujiro Wada Memorial Association**, Matsuyama, Japan. Wada pioneered the Iditarod Trail in 1909. The opening of the railroad from Seward to Anchorage in 1918 is also reported, as is the sale in 1909 of the foreclosed Alaska Central Railway Company and Tanana Construction Company for \$600,000.00. Seward was quite the transportation hub 100 years ago.



All of Alaska mourned the destruction caused by the Yukon River ice to Eagle last spring. The latest newsletter of the **Eagle Historical Society & Museums** details the power of the ice and the outside aid from the state and the feds that followed. Surely it's a first that instead of FEMA trailers, 13 new homes were built from log cabin kits. If you'd like to see the photographs or read about the progress, go to www.EagleAK.org or send a query to ehsmus@aptalaska.net. They also have a nifty shop on their Web site.



A busy, busy summer is set for the **Hope & Sunrise Historical Society**, particularly August when an original play by a resident opens. There are also guest speakers, an open house for the community, a Wagon Trail Run, and a hike projected. The season at the museum runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Send \$10.00 for membership (or \$100.00 for a lifetime) to Post Office Box 1888, Hope, Alaska, 99605, or phone 907/782-3740 if you're in a rush.

The big summer exhibit at the **Alaska State Museum** is the thirty-ninth *Alaska Positive*, the statewide-juried photographic display organized every year by the museum. Afterwards it will make its yearly trek around the state.



Hat-making may be the new craze in Alaska. Valdez is into hats of the Gold Rush; Juneau had *Maritime Hats of the State Museum*; kids of all ages replicating Aleut Russian gut hats and Yu'pik visors. For more news and views, visit www.foasm.org.



It takes time for most towns to decide their history is worth preserving. Palmer is an exception. Although this year they're celebrating the big 75th anniversary of the founding of the Matanuska Colony, the **Palmer Historical Society** has been busy with *Colony Days* for some years. This year the emphasis is on the "Colony Kids," the first generation to grow up in Alaska. A panel of the kids was convened this spring and a marvelous time was had by all. Other speakers at recent meetings have talked about family, moving a barn, and mug-ups. And if you think of utility lines as being up there in interest with pruning a tulip, you didn't hear about the muskrats and fish in the early lines or the wastewater treatment plant's salmon run. You might want to check out your town's line.

Visit our website:
www.alaskahistoricalociety.org



We welcome your letters, news and pictures. Please send them to the editor:
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Email: deelong@alaska.com

News & Information

ALWAYS LIKED THE WRANGELL MUSEUM, and would love to support it, but unfortunately have never been there? Love Southeast Alaska history and would love to learn more, but don't even live in Alaska? Do not despair. All you need to do is subscribe to *Around Wrangell and Environs* for a measly \$20.00 and you will receive the fine monthly newsletter by Patricia Roppel. The money goes to the Friends of the Wrangell Museum and the pleasure goes to you. Spring issues include canneries, Japan and Alaska's timber industry, the grist mill at Fort Stikine, Petersburg as "Snoose Junction", buttons for Tlingit robes, and much more. Write Friends of the Wrangell Museum, Box 2019, Wrangell, Alaska, 99929, or send an e-mail to patroppe@gmail.com.



AND NO NEWSLETTER WOULD BE COMPLETE without a mention of the monthly **Alaska Yukon Pioneers** newsletter. Catch up on old friends, read an article, attend reunions, have dinner and meetings, and all for \$12.00 per year. Send your check to Joyce Penman, Recorder, 27833 85th Drive NW, Stanwood, Washington, 98292. Eager? Telephone 253/709-0158, 360/629-3554. More eager? olwomn@wavecable.com.



SADLY, TWO VENERABLE NATIONAL PROGRAMS have been zeroed out in the latest National administration budget. **Save America's Treasures** and **Preserve America's Treasures** together are funded at a bit over twenty-eight million dollars. This is for the entire United States. How much is spent every year on how many non-historical programs you can think of? Try reaching our congressional delegation with your opinions. And where is this information found? The sturdy **Heritage** newsletter of the **Alaska Office of History and Archaeology**. You can visit the Web site at www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/, subscribe via oha@alaska.net or write jo.antonson@alaska.gov with questions. The current issue notes, among many other things, a maritime heritage workshop in Juneau September 14-16, and the Fourth International Russian American Conference in Sitka August 18-21.



WANT TO SEE a University of Denver's student's on-line exhibit about the Unangan (formerly Aleut but originally Unangan, so back now)? The title is *Unagan: Survival in the Aleutian Islands*. Go to <http://mysite.du.edu/~khinric2/> and report back to Kellen, the student.



TAKE WING, ALASKA is the new **Alaska Humanities Forum** three-year program to help Alaska Native students make the transition from village high schools to urban university and professional education. This has been a concern for

many years, as moving to a different culture without losing your own is incredibly difficult. The idea is to give students the tools they need to succeed. The newsletter also speaks of the success of the mandatory Alaska high school course in Alaska history. (This is dear to the hearts of our AHS, as we fought long and hard for this.) The curriculum is on-line and has three million visitors a year. Research on families affected by the Morningside Hospital in Oregon, where mentally ill Alaskans were sent for years, has received funds from the Forum to continue.

Alaska Historical Society

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Nominations sought for AHS awards

IT'S TIME to nominate individuals and groups for recognition by the Alaska Historical Society of notable contributions to the knowledge, preservation, and understanding of Alaskan or local history this past year. Award nominations can be made by letter or submitted electronically. Briefly, the Society's awards include:

The **Esther Billman Award of Excellence** given to a state or local society, museum, government agency, or other organization which has completed a project or series of projects contributing to the preservation and understanding of Alaskan history during the past year.

The **Evangeline Atwood Award** given to an individual in recognition of significant long-term contributions to Alaska state or local history.

The **Historian of the Year Award** given to an *Alaska resident* for publication of significant new material about Alaska's past during the past year. *Nominations for this award must include a copy of the publication for review.*

The **Pathfinder Award** given to an individual or several individuals who have indexed or prepared guides to Alaska historical material that has not been accessible. *Nominations for this award must include sample pages of the index or guide.*

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. *Representative copies of the newsletter must be submitted with the nomination for this award.*

The **Contributions to Alaska History Award** given to an individual or individuals who have made a singular and significant recent contribution to Alaska history.

Nominations must be received by **Friday, August 27, 2010**. They should be sent to Doug Capra, Chair, Awards Committee, Alaska

Historical Society, P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, AK 99510-0299, e-mail akhist@gci.net, www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org

The awards will be announced Friday, September 17, 2010, at the Alaska Historical Society and Museums Alaska banquet at the annual meetings and conference in Fairbanks.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE ACTIVE IN THE ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY?

The Alaska Historical Society is governed by a fifteen-member Board of Directors. The directors select the Society's officers, establish policies, and oversee operations of the organization. Five directors are elected to three-year terms each year. This year, four board members will have served two terms and under the Society's bylaws must take a year off.

Directors generally meet six times a year. They meet "face-to-face" at the Society's annual meeting and by teleconference the remainder of the year. Each director usually heads one of the Society's committees such as membership, publications, newsletter, advocacy, annual meeting program, and awards.

Please consider serving on the Board of Directors or if you have a recommendation of an individual, by **Friday, August 6, 2010** contact Marilyn Knapp, Chair, AHS Elections Committee.



Cabinet card photograph showing a Tlingit canoe with sail on an unknown river, by Miller-Chase, circa 1887. P0049, Item 24, Richard Wood Photograph Collection, Special Collections Research Center, Sealaska Heritage Institute.


ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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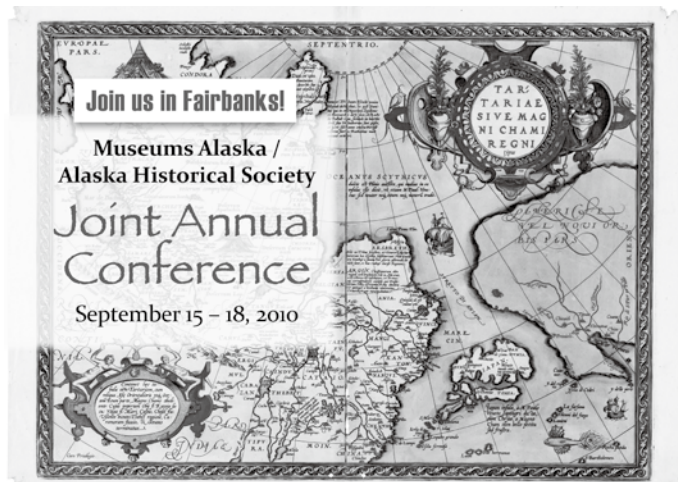
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Become a member... or if you're already a member, sign up a friend or relative. Join the hundreds who want to stay in touch with historic Alaska by sending \$30.00 per member (\$20.00 for students; \$40.00 per family.)

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 book is the society's *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.



Conference themes: Alaska Historical Society *Energizing Alaska*; Museums Alaska *Reflection and Renewal*

Editor's Comments

You are feeling in a rotten temper. Why, oh why, did I ever volunteer at the museum? It's a beautiful day and I'll be stuck inside all afternoon. The same sort of visitors will be there and they'll ask the same stupid questions and I'll have to be polite and answer politely. Then I'll give the same talk about the exhibits.

I really want to work in the garden. I call it my promiscuous garden; everything tries to climb into bed with everything else. The usual occurrence in the spring; the ground is brown with a few green sprouts, then suddenly all sorts of plants are growing and fighting with the grass and weeds. I swear it's overnight.

That evening:

Well, the museum was just great. Some very nice visitors came in; one woman said her family had lived here a long time and I recognized the name. She said she had some family letters she would send, although there wasn't anything important in them. I told her truthfully they could be exactly what a researcher might be looking for. The mention of a neighbor could place that person at that time. Mention of an event could be just what is needed to date it. A photocopy would be adequate if they want to keep the originals.

More pleasant people; two complimented me on my local knowledge. A new volunteer brought cookies for all.

Now it's evening and there's still enough light for gardening at least another two hours. Come to think of it, I'd truly rather spend an afternoon on local history than pulling weeds.

D. L.



Winners of Anchorage Garden Club Christmas party hat contest during club's annual member installation and Christmas party, December 8, 1966.

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