

150 Years: Kenai Peninsula History Conference

Newsletter

May 2016

No. 1

What is this about?

It's time for Kenai Peninsula people to talk about their history.

Next year, 2017, marks the 150th anniversary of the United States' purchase of Alaska from Russia. All Alaskans will be reflecting on their history, their identity, and our state's unique heritage as a North Pacific, arctic, and subarctic setting

time a conference focused on local history was held on the peninsula was in 1974 in Kenai.

The Alaska Historical Commission and the Alaska Historical Society invited communities to

Kenai Peninsula history is full of drama and colorful characters. Their legacies shape modern life, yet most people living here now know little about it. Let's change that.

whose modern residents not only have roots in Western Europe but also in enduring and diverse indigenous cultures, Eurasian Russia, and the Pacific Rim.

The Kenai Peninsula, with its thriving Dena'ina, Sugpiaq, ethnically Russian, and other immigrant communities from around the world, exemplifies this ethnic diversity and complex history. Yet the last

step forward and organize events to examine the 1867 Treaty of Cession and its legacies. A committee of volunteers based on the peninsula formed to do just that. The project is in the early organizational stages. Read on to learn what has happened so far, and how you can get

You can help

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People working together are key to making the conference relevant and fun. Organizers don't have a big budget and need volunteers like you. Some ways you can help:

Serve on a subcommittee to arrange food, schedules, guests' lodging, school programs, tours of historic sites, or rides in your own community – among other things.

Give a history or cultural talk during the conference.

Donate funds or in-kind products such as transportation, guest lodging, or tech support.

Sign up for tasks, such as room set up, guiding tours, refreshments during breaks, or manning the registration desk.

Link your organization to the conference to mutual benefit. Use tie-in activities, such as providing food or entertainment, to raise funds. Or set up a table at the conference fair to distribute information and sell history books or traditional crafts.

involved with this rare opportunity.

Planning status update

Launching the conference plan!

In January I floated the idea of having a Kenai Peninsula history conference, using the sesquicentennial (the big word for 150th anniversary) as a way to consider the origins of our modern communities, with their unique stories and thriving ethnic diversity. A steering committee formed to assess interest.

Kenai Peninsula College offered to host the main conference at its Soldotna campus, and we've reserved April 21 & 22, 2017. In addition to auditorium and class space for presentations, we can use the commons to host art exhibits and a fair for nonprofits, artisans, and history books. If resources are available, we will hold outreach activities in communities throughout the peninsula. Historians, local and national, will speak about the U.S. purchase, the peninsula during the 1800s, and how the Native, Russian, and U.S. cultures interacted to create the communities we have today. Events will include panel discussions, multimedia presentations, cultural demos, traditional foods, and guided tours of historical sites.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly unanimously passed a resolution endorsing the conference. Other groups approving the effort so far include the borough school district, the Pratt Museum (Homer), the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, the Seldovia Village Tribe, and the Kenai Peninsula Historical Association (and the local historical groups in it from Kenai, Soldotna, and Kasilof). We applied for a grant from the Alaska Historical Commission, but its status is pending. We are still contacting people and groups.

When we know more about funding options, we can invite one or more keynote speakers and advance to the next stage. That requires subcommittees to give shape to the conference and related events.

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Coming in spring 2017

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Newsletter

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Conference plans moving forward

Good things are happening!

The Alaska Historical Commission **approved grant** funds for our conference. This means we can bring money into the local economy and give the public a good deal on attending.

statewide meeting of the Alaska Historical Society and Museums Alaska, held this month in Juneau.

We now have **more than 100 people** on our mailing list!

Check out our new website:

<http://kenaipeninsulahist.wixsite.com/conference>

and our new Facebook account:

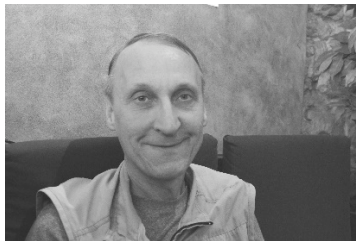
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Our first choice for keynote speaker, **Andrei Znamenski**, accepted our invitation (see this page for more about him).

We're now online (see above).

Project Manager Shana Loshbaugh shared information about the conference at the annual

If you know anyone else who would be interested, point them our way.



Andrei Znamenski

Andrei Znamenski

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... studied history and anthropology both in Russia and the United States. His major interests include Native people and religions of Alaska and Siberia. His first book, *Shamanism and Christianity* (1999) explores indigenous responses to 19th-century Russian Orthodox missionaries. A follow-up project, *Through Orthodox Eyes* (2003), translates the journals of Kenai area missionaries who worked among the Dena'ina in south-central Alaska. His other books are *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination* (2007), *Red Shambhala* (2011), and two anthologies he edited. Znamenski has lived and traveled in Siberia, Alaska, northern Europe, and Japan, and was the keynote speaker at the 2009 meeting of the Alaska Historical Society. Formerly a resident scholar at the Library of Congress, then a foreign visiting professor at Hokkaido University, Japan, he is currently Professor of History at the University of Memphis.

In the works

We need volunteers to ...

Serve on our committees!

We have vacancies on our steering committee. These volunteer positions are crucial to shape the conference agenda in the coming months. We are looking for one person in the Central Peninsula and one in the Homer area.

We also need people to serve on the local subcommittees, especially those who can network with area schools, tribes, and arts organizations.

Some possibilities, while not

yet definite, are too exciting not to share. Several people already have offered to share their expertise on topics such as Sugpiaq history, the Battle of Kenai, and the area's Russian Orthodox priests during the 1800s. There is interest in a panel discussion on Creole identity. A school group can provide us with authentic Russian food.

For tie-in activities, the Russian American Colony Singers from Anchorage plan to perform concerts. We may

show the exciting documentary film on the 1868 wreck of the US ship "Torrent," and arrange display of "Torrent" artifacts in peninsula museums.



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IF YOU HAVE IDEAS OR QUESTIONS
AND TO GET INVOLVED!