

Alaska History News

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Quarterly of the Alaska Historical Society



"Joan Crane and inactive T.B. patients on Alice Island on Mt. Edgecumbe, June 1957." uaa-hmc-1152-f16-14.

Message from the President:

We are delighted to announce the Alaska Historical Society will have its annual meeting and conference in Sitka, October 14-17, with an invitation from the Sitka Historical Society to join the Alaska Day celebrations on the 18th. There will be an opening reception the night of the 14th and sessions will begin the 15th. Alaska Day festivities include a ball, parade, brew cruise, band concert, re-enactment of the transfer ceremony and a Coast Guard sea rescue demonstration. This is a great opportunity to explore the many attractions of Alaska's first capital: the Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka National Historic Park, Russian Bishop's House, Sitka History Museum, and the Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center to name just a few. Shortly we will announce the theme for the conference and a call for papers.

The Alaska Historical Society can take a great deal of pride in the effort mounted by our membership to fight the plan to close the National Archives and Records Administration center (NARA) in Seattle. Penelope Goforth has worked tirelessly to rally the entire Northwest into action. Bruce Parham provided first-hand knowledge of NARA operations and collections. David Ramseur made key contacts with congressional staffers, and Ian Hartman gave on-air interviews and contributed to an opinion piece printed in the Anchorage and Fairbanks newspapers. Karen McCarthy of Senator Lisa Murkowski's office arranged and participated in a meeting with congressional staff from Idaho, Washington, and Oregon and National Archives leadership. Steve Haycox and Tom Bundtzen provided their knowledge of valuable collections at NARA. Thank you to all who wrote and made calls to get the message out. We don't know the results of our efforts yet, but I think the message was heard loud and clear that closing the NARA center in the Northwest would negatively and seriously affect Alaskans' access to public records. **Please help keep the pressure on the federal government to respect our right for reasonable access to our public records.**

—William Schneider



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS CENTER IN SEATTLE APPROVED FOR CLOSURE:

The National Archives and Records Administration facility in Seattle is to be closed. The Federal Public Buildings Reform Board, created by Congress in 2016 to identify and dispose of high-value federal real estate, recommended the sale of the building, okayed by NARA senior management. The Office of Management and Budget accepted the recommendation at the end of January. According to NARA, the Seattle facility was in need of extensive and costly repairs. The board claimed to have failed to find an alternative location in the region to house the records. A specific date has not been set for the closure, but is expected to take approximately 18 months. The plan is to move the Seattle branch archival records to California, and the federal agency records to Missouri. In 2014, the Alaska records

were moved from Anchorage to Seattle, and the new plan is to move them out of the Pacific Northwest and divide them. Alaska materials will not only be farther out of reach for researchers, students, affected Native individuals, attorneys and government agencies, but the closure will delay the digitization of Alaska records promised by NARA when it closed the Anchorage facility. Representatives for Senator Lisa Murkowski and Washington Senators Maria Cantwell, and Patty Murray met with senior NARA staff on February 4th. Each Senator has made it clear that maintaining and increasing their constituents access to federal documents important to the the study of history, ongoing litigation, and scientific research is a high priority. The Alaska Historical Society's Advocacy Committee is keeping in contact with Senator Murkowski on the issue and will post updates on the AHS website. The Advocacy Committee encourages AHS members to let Alaska's congressional delegation know how the records in the National Archives have been of use.



"I didn't know all this stuff. [It's] a surprise. Really, really special."

At the moment of discovery last week [in the Seattle Archives], Rhonda Farrar, who is Tlingit, finds a genealogy of her family including Native names in a document from Juneau, Alaska. It has her great-grandparents in it. More information found includes her aunt's tribal enrollment paper and other enrollment information.

—The Seattle Times
Alan Berner, January 25, 2020

THE IMPORTANCE OF NARA IN MY WORK:

I frequently accessed the National Archives when it had a branch in Anchorage to use the "Records of Production and Development of Metal Mines, 1910-1969" (Record Group 70). These records were administered by the U.S. Bureau of Mines, created by an act of Congress in 1910. The files had information on all lode and placer metal mines operating in Alaska—with an emphasis on gold and silver. As background, until 1934 the United States was on the gold standard. All gold produced anywhere in the United States, including the Alaska Territory, had to be sold to the U.S. Mint. After 1934, it was still a requirement to provide information on gold production and one had to get permission to sell gold to domestic buyers until Congress decontrolled the price of gold in 1969. The records, in the Seattle National Archives facility since 2014, show gold and silver output from Alaska mines for 60 years. The records are in 40 boxes. There were some restrictions on how one could publish the records. Some records were missing--or I did not find them--but these records are valuable. For each mine there was a description of the operation, amount of production, value of mineral commodities, duration of mining activities, number of employees, amount of ore processed, cost analyses, and other pertinent information. When I compiled the Annual Minerals Summary for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources from 1981 to 1997, the information from the USBM records was used to create historic production tables. From 1998 to 2007,

I used the files to complete and edit the Alaska Resource Data File an important open file report published by the U.S. Geological Survey. ARDF files are the definitive mineral resource files for Alaska with more than 20,000 individual entries of Alaskan mineral occurrences, prospects, and mines. Small mining firms and prospecting companies access these files to obtain production and other data on their claims. The records, to my knowledge, have not been duplicated or digitized. Although it would be best to have these records in Alaska, I hope they will continue to be kept in the Pacific Northwest and available to their principal users. The mining and exploration fraternity also uses the archives at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library. In its archives are detailed claim histories. Mine operators can find data helpful in their search for additional minerals. Recently the minerals community has voiced support for the Rasmuson Library archives. The Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation is networking with the archives as it is planning for a museum in downtown Fairbanks.

—Tom Bundtzen, Consultant, and President, Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation

Notes from around the State



The *Gastineau Heritage News*, a publication of Juneau's **Gastineau Channel Historical Society**, reported that in the first part of the 20th century, it only cost 25 cents to take the ferry anywhere in the Gastineau Channel—except in the years 1915-1917, when a price war between ferry companies led to a price drop first to 17 cents, then to two tickets for a quarter. On a pleasant day, ferry riders between Juneau, Douglas, Treadwell, Sheep Creek, and Nevada Creek had spectacular views of mountains, glaciers, and icebergs. If the weather was less pleasant, and Southeasters and Taku winds prevailed, seasick passengers might have less appreciation of the scenery. In winter, high winds and icy gangways and floats might make getting on and off the boat hazardous. Many passengers were happy, therefore, when a bridge spanning the channel opened September 2, 1935. All but one of the boats used for ferries were sold after bridge construction began. The last ferry to run was the *Teddy*, smallest in the fleet. After the bridge opened, the *Teddy* kept running until October 31. That day, the skipper blew three long blasts, signaling a farewell, as it pulled away from Douglas for the last time. Source: R.N. DeArmond, "Ferry Discomforts," and "End of Gastineau Channel Ferry Service," from *Days of Yore, Info Juno*, June 11 and 18, 1988.



The **Juneau-Douglas City Museum** has established an annual Marie Darlin prize of \$5,000 to honor her legacy as a passionate and devoted Juneau historian, community watchdog, and advocate for

senior citizens until her death at age 93 in 2018. The award will recognize outstanding works of art and scholarship concerning the cultures and peoples of Southeast Alaska, Yukon Territory, or northern British Columbia. Nominees must have completed a work of enduring value that has been published, exhibited or performed within the last five years. The deadline for nominations for the first annual Marie Darlin prize is April 3. Please visit Juneau.org/library/museum for detailed nomination instructions.

The museum held its first City Salon event of 2020 in February. USGS scientist Chris McNeil spoke on "History and Implications of 70 Years of Research from the Juneau Icefield." The talk was followed two days later with a panel discussion titled "Art at the Edge of Climate Change & the Juneau Icefield" with artists Ben Huff, Hannah Mode, and Annika Ord, moderated by Professor Kevin Maier, University of Alaska Southeast. The conversation was about the importance of art in the changing environment of the Juneau Icefield, and each artist's involvement with the Juneau Icefield program and the landscape that fuels their art.



An exhibit entitled *Into the Wind: Aviation as Southeast Alaska's Lifeline* opens March 6 at the **Tongass Historical Museum** in Ketchikan. Airplanes touch every aspect of life in Southeast Alaska: they deliver mail, provide medical emergency transport, take people to work, pick up hunters, transport sports teams, and bring food,

Notes from around the State



Chilkat robe by Dorica Johnson, Ketchikan.

"I guess by 1970, there were only a couple of people left who really knew how to do the weaving, and I became familiar with this when I was at University of Washington...and was already into textiles and weaving and decided, I always say, with all the arrogance of a 22-year-old that I was going to learn it."

"It's a free-hanging warp — mountain goat wool, traditionally, and cedar bark, spun together. Everybody uses merino (wool) now, but if you can get goat wool with long enough fibers, it's really nice to work with. Then it's a twining technique. Two-strand and three-strand braiding and twining."

(For this robe, Dorica Jackson used traditional Native dyes made with moss, hemlock bark and oxidized copper.)

<https://www.krbd.org/2019/04/10/city-museum-buys-chilkat-robe-by-dorica-jackson/>

supplies, and even Santa to communities not connected by roads. The exhibit looks at the people who keep planes running—pilots, mechanics, dispatchers, and others—and the communities that depend on them. The museum is still looking for photos and videos to add to their documentation of aviation in Southeast Alaska. If you have any, please email them to erikac@ktn-ak.us

Ketchikan Museums added 130 donations to their collections in 2019 and made other acquisitions through purchase. Highlights among the new items include Dorica Jackson's Diving Whale Chilkat robe, a mask by Ernie Smeltzer, Bill Lattin's camera equipment, Chip Porter photographs, and cannery employment records. Projects this year included restoring the Chief Kyan totem pole.

In honor of Valentine's Day, the **Kodiak History Museum** reflected on a special item in its collection: a scrapbook that 17-year-old Kodiak resident Marie Olsen kept after thousands of U.S. and Canadian servicemen arrived in Kodiak in 1941 and Kodiak became the headquarters and launching point for the WWII Aleutian Campaign. Hollywood stars came to entertain the troops and the servicemen had an opportunity to socialize with local women at dances, held almost nightly. Marie Olsen saved her dance invitations in a scrapbook. She wrote about her experiences, good and bad, with dancing partners, and made lists of musical performers. Highlights from Olsen's scrapbook are part of the WWII permanent exhibit in the museum.

The museum recently discovered a historical connection in Uganik Bay, following its 2016 West Side Stories oral history project. David and Pam Pingree, Uganik Bay residents, discovered their property was formerly owned by W.J. Erskine, manager of the Kodiak branch of the Alaska Commercial Company who lived in today's museum building. Erskine scouted potential halibut fishing grounds around Kodiak Island in 1911 and declared the northeast arm in Uganik Bay a fine site for a cold storage plant. The Pingrees discovered a description of their property

along with a hand-drawn map and photograph, more than a hundred years old. The site was not developed, however, until the Pingrees purchased it in 1999.

ROSSIA (Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska) reports that the St. Nicholas Chapel in Kenai has a new roof. The failing old roof produced a "slow drip of destruction," saturating the walls below. The roof replacement project created community awareness, momentum, and excitement. ROSSIA also continues preservation work on the Holy Ascension Cathedral in Unalaska, with considerable progress on a fire suppression system with a pump building and purchase of a pump. Preservation of the Bishop's House next to the cathedral is continuing as well, with work inside on doors, window frames, and wainscot.

The **Soldotna Historical Society and Museum** held its annual general membership meeting at the Kenai Wildlife Refuge on February 29. Branden Bornemann from the Kenai Watershed Forum talked about the historic Soberg House. Ralph Soberg was the general foreman for the Alaska Road Commission, and later the Alaska Department of Transportation, and oversaw construction of the Sterling Highway. The building known as the Soberg House is one of the first permanent structures built in Soldotna. It first was used as an office, and around 1955 was converted into a home for the Sobergs, and today is the KWR's office

The **Resurrection Bay Historical Society** started its 2020 monthly lecture series with a program by American Legion Post 5 Commander Clare Sullivan. Post 5 is celebrating its centennial this year, and the talk titled "Who We Are at Seward Post 5: A Brief Story of Our Last Hundred Years" gave insight into the personalities who have given the post its focus. The February speaker was local historian Lee Poleske speaking on "Iditarod Facts and Figures."

Dr. Sleem, a Syrian-American who moved to Seward in 1903, is featured in a

Notes from around the State

"Oh what was your name
in the states?
Was it Thompson, or
Johnson or Bates?
Did you murder your wife?
And run for your life?
Tell me. What was your
name in the states?"

—Anonymous

A NEED FOR LAW AND ORDER



Soldiers of the Company L, Skagway, Alaska, 1899. Called "Buffalo Soldiers" by Native Americans during the Indian Wars because of their dark skin and tight, curly hair, the term would come to encompass all black soldiers. Company L was formed in March 1899. Some were former slaves, some had fought in the Indian Wars, and many in the Spanish American War. National Archives photo no. 111-RB-2839.

Early Skagway was "little better than a hell on earth" and "about the roughest place in the world."

—Sam Steele, North-West Mounted Police

new book by Linda K. Jacobs, *Strangers No More: Syrians in the United States 1880-1900*. Sleem came to Seward after receiving a diagnosis of heart failure and being told to move to a cold climate. He built a two-story log house that served as a lecture hall as well as his home. He drew mining maps that were used for many decades. Sleem left Seward in 1911 for Valdez.

RBHS's Pages from the Past: On May 21, 1987, the *Seward Phoenix Log* reported that the people of Seward were rallying to save the geese and ducks who had been suffering many casualties on the highway through the busy boat harbor area. Within a seven-hour period, the community raised \$30,000 to build a boardwalk barrier on both sides of the highway, keeping the birds from foraging for food there. The first contributors were the children of Nana's Nuggets day care center, whose parents came up with \$100.

Benny Benson was a resident of the Jesse Lee Home in Seward when he won the design contest for the Alaska flag in 1927. The RBHS newsletter discovered that in the local Seward contest, Benny finished third. Sidney Henrickson's design placed first, and Marit Eide's was second. All three entries were forwarded to Juneau where the committee of judges proclaimed Benny's design the winner. Henrickson was killed in action in the Philippines in World War II.

On August 6, 1964, the *Petticoat Gazette* reported that the new ferry in the Alaska Marine Highway System, the *Tustumena*, was docked in Seward to begin its maiden voyage. A crowd of nearly 200 Seward residents gathered to see the vessel off, and the high school band played for the occasion. The *Tustumena* last sailed from Seward in 2005.

At the **Palmer Historical Society's** History Night on February 19 at the Moose Lodge, the audience had an opportunity to get the dirt on Palmer!

The speaker, Joe Moore, a retired soil scientist and a long-time Palmer resident, discussed the glacial history of the area, its distinctive landforms and soils, and how Palmer's icy past has made it a great place to live in the present.

The **Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society** set April 18th for its annual spring potluck. At their annual fall meeting they presented the Founders Plaque to Virginia "Jinny" Kirk, one of the individuals who created the society on September 7, 1993 and who continues to be active in the organization today. Among its projects, the society is working on a book about the community from 1934 to 1986. Topics to be included are the building of the first school, the community club, and bringing electricity and telephone service to the area.

The **Cook Inlet Historical Society** celebrated Alaska's Black history with a special event in February. The evening featured a dance performance by Black Arts North and presentations about Black history in Alaska by Ed Wesley and Cal Williams. Wesley has lived in Alaska for more than 45 years at Fort Greely, Delta Junction, and Anchorage. Williams came to Alaska in 1965 and worked in media for KTUU-TV and hosted "Cross Cultural" on KAKM. Those attending the meeting also could pick up a copy of a new publication, *Black History in the Last Frontier* by Ian Hartman, supported by the National Park Service. Hartman is President of CIHS and a professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Katie Ringsmuth's popular **Tundra Vision Lecture Series**, held this year at the Anchorage Public Library just had Scott Jensen and Carolyn Hall, owners of Jensen Hall Creative video production company, speak on "Illustrating Stories through Moments in Media." Rhonda McBride, host of "Frontiers" on KTVA, will speak March 26th on "The New Frontier of Great Storytelling: A Conversation." And Jeff Landfield, founder of The Alaskan Landmine will present April 30th on "The Landmine's Real Juneau: Stories from the Capital

WHAT'S IN A NAME



Della Murray Banks recorded in her diary: "It was about time (1896) that the question arose as to the name of our settlement. The post office we expected to have couldn't just be termed 'The Spit.' In the general room the men discussed several names and J.E. Guilbault exclaimed: 'Why not call it 'Homer' after you (Homer) Pennock.'" Everyone agreed.

According to author Bruce Cotten (1922), Pennock was "the most talented confidence man that ever operated on this continent."

—From *Kachemak Bay: the Country, the Communities*, Janet Klein, 1987

Photo above: Della Banks cooking on the Dalton trail, 1898 "for our famished outfit. Each meal required ninety biscuits, which I could bake fifteen at a time in our sheet-iron stove. My knees became calloused from kneeling on the rough ground, kneading dough and making biscuits. Conveniences? There were none."

<http://www.skagwaystories.org/2010/12/16/della-murray-banks/>

City." More information about the programs can be found on the Tundra Vision Facebook page.

✦
The **University of Alaska Anchorage Kachemak Bay Campus** in Homer observed Alaska Civil Rights Day on January 20 with a talk by Salamatof tribal leader Jonathon Ross. Ross led a conversation about the Dena'ina people of Tikahtnu (Cook Inlet), their traditional territory, and the importance of place names in the context of civil rights in Alaska.

✦
Last November, the **Alaska Mining Hall of Fame** inducted three pioneers who worked for the U.S. Bureau of Mines: Thomas L. Pittman, John Joseph Mulligan, and Donald Paul Blasko. The bureau operated in Alaska from 1910-1996. Pittman came to Juneau in 1957 and worked on Prince of Wales Island until his death in 1992. Mulligan headed the Alaska Field Operations Center for the bureau in Juneau from 1970 to 1985. He wrote and edited many of the biographies for the Mining Hall of Fame. Blasko moved to Anchorage in 1964 where he served as the bureau's petroleum resource officer for thirty years. All three men constructively worked with the new State of Alaska as it formed mineral and energy programs.

The organization is inducting another three pioneers on April 1 at the Fountainhead Antique Automobile Museum in Fairbanks: Raymond (Ray) Smith, a University of Alaska graduate and instructor at the School of Mines in the 1930-40s and later president of Michigan Technological University; Roshier Creecy, an African-American who mined in the North and later established his permanent home near Wiseman; and Arnold Nordale, a successful developer of small lode gold mines near Fairbanks in the early 20th century.

The **Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation** is designing a new museum at 4th and Cushman streets in Fairbanks in coordination with the building owners Charles and Christine Cole. It will have an archive station. A May or June opening is planned.

Mary Ehrlander and **Hild Peters** have been selected by the editorial advisors of the Alaska Historical Society's journal *Alaska History* to receive the Morgan and Jeannie Sherwood Award for the best article to appear in volume 34 (2019) of the journal. Their article is titled "Grafton and Clara Burke: Medical Missionaries in Fort Yukon." The award is a \$500 cash prize. Congratulations!

✦
Since the early 1800s, women have struggled against the odds for the right to vote and achieve equality with men. The ratification of the 19th Amendment on August 18, 1920 giving women of the United States the right to vote, was a milestone in women's rights and advancements in equality. In recognition of the upcoming 100th anniversary, the **Oral History Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks** has updated the: *Recovering Our Past, The Struggle for Women's Suffrage Project Jukebox* (<http://jukebox.uaf.edu/site7/suffragists>). It is a great resource for background information and to use for conversations about women gaining the right to vote in Alaska and current access to equal voting rights.

This Project Jukebox is a slideshow of images with audio excerpts from interviews with women who were directly involved with the fight for women's suffrage. Sherma Berger Gluck conducted the interviews in 1974 and based the audio slideshow on her book *Recovering Our Past: The Struggle for Women's Suffrage*. Gluck founded The Feminist History Project to trace the struggle for women's suffrage through oral history and was director of the Oral History Program and professor in the Women's Studies Program at California State University, Long Beach. In 2009, Gluck allowed the University of Alaska Fairbanks Oral History Program to create the Suffragists Project Jukebox program.

More than just an update of the program, the recent project resurrected forgotten resources. As technology changed the original Suffragists Project Jukebox

Notes from around the State

no longer functioned as originally intended, thereby making the material inaccessible. While updating the jukebox to Drupal 7 format, it was discovered that the complete oral history recordings of the suffragists were no longer accessible online at their home archive: The Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive at California State University Long Beach <https://csulb-dspace.calstate.edu/handle/10211.3/206609>. Brought to the VOAHA's attention, the full recordings are back online at: https://csulb-dspace.calstate.edu/handle/10211.3/206609/discover?filtertype=subject&filter_relational_operator>equals&filter=Suffragists

It is great to have these key stories that are essential for understanding who we are as Americans available.

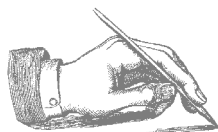
SEEKING TREASURES

The AHS Annual Silent Auction committee asks that as you do your spring cleaning and finds items of historic interest you consider donating them to the society for its major fundraiser. Please send an email to members@alaskahistoricalsociety.org with descriptive information and get the items to us by August 15. The auction will be held at the AHS meeting October 14-17 in Sitka.

Time to apply for the Society's **Student and Beginning Professional Scholarships**. The Alaska Historical Society awards several scholarships to help students and those starting careers in the cultural resource field attend its annual conference. The awards cover travel, accommodations, and conference registration, up to \$1,500. Recipients are to make a presentation on their work and attend the entire conference. The application deadline is May 15, 2020. To apply, send a letter, a resume, and abstract of the proposed presentation to members@alaskahistoricalsociety.org attention Awards Committee.

Visit our website:

www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org



We welcome your letters, news and pictures. Please send them to us at one of the addresses to the right.

Alaska Historical Society

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AN ODDMENT BY CHRIS ALLAN:

BEHOLD THE KLONDIKE FARO KING!

Faro is a game of chance that originated in 17th century France and was so named because of a picture of an Egyptian pharaoh on certain French playing cards. A favorite of highborn gamblers, faro was the game at which the young Count Rostov in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* lost a fortune. Faro was introduced to the United States via New Orleans, and it soon became wildly popular in the American West. This account from Dawson City describes the gaming tables with the 'faro king' and his lieutenants keeping the peace:

The faro king has in his train many valiant men-at-arms. The soft shuffle of pasteboards and the grating of gold nuggets over tables of rough boards are heard at all hours of the day and night. . . . Around the table nearly every profession is represented—men who filled teeth, kept books, hung wall paper and served time in the states have congregated in this out of the way corner of the earth. Most of them felt that they needed greater liberty, and they have found it in Dawson City. Every man takes care of his own. Revolvers are part of the stock furniture of the gambling table, and they repose behind the bar in company with the whisky bottles and the essence of ginger.

The faro king sits on his high stool at the door of the leading gambling resort and keeps a wary eye upon the operations of the dealer and players. Let no man think that he can clean out a Dawson City faro bank by simply 'shooting up' the landscape. Revolvers are in easy reach, and men can pull triggers as well in the Klondike as they can in the Sierras. You always think of a faro king as a person brilliantly arrayed in a check suit, cross-barred shirt, gaudy tie and patent leather boots. Dawson City's monarch wears felt boots, fur overcoat and coonskin cap. There is nothing flashy about him except when it comes to a matter of firearms.

—From "Dawson's Tenderloin,"
St. Paul Globe, January 16, 1898.