

Alaska Historical Society



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PLACE AND POWER

Alaska Historical Society 2020 Conference

Presentation abstracts

Keynote speakers:

Thornton, Tom - Senses of Place and History in the “Toponymic Hotspot” of Sitka Sound
(Keynote, Th 10/8, 10am)

Of the communities involved in the Indigenous place name survey that resulted in *Haa Léelk'w Hás Aaní Saax'ú, Our Grandparents' Names on the Land* (Thornton 2012), Sitka was among the most interesting for its “hotspots.” Despite early colonization and significant development of its coastal landscape, Sitka Sound boasts some of the highest concentrations of Tlingit place names found anywhere. Why and how are these names and their historical, geographical, and cultural associations still remembered and relevant both to historical investigations and to contemporary approaches to social-ecological systems and stewardship? The concepts of cultural keystone species (e.g., Pacific herring) and cultural keystone places are discussed in this light.



Thomas F. Thornton is Dean of Arts & Sciences and Vice- Provost for Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Alaska Southeast and Senior Research Fellow at the Environmental Change Institute, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford. His research interests include Indigenous and local knowledge systems and human-environmental interactions, the political ecology of sustainable development and resource stewardship in complex social-ecological systems, and human adaptation to environmental change in the North Pacific, especially Southeast Alaska.

Kitka, Harvey – Reflections on Place and History in Sitka Sound (Keynote, Th 10/8, 10am)



Harvey Kitka was born in Sitka in 1941. His parents were Herman and Martha Kitka. He is Tlingit, of the Kaagwaantaan clan, and his real name is Yanshkaowoo. He is retired from fishing and electrical work, and now takes part in tribal needs.

Presenters:

Black, Dawn - The Interactions of the Russian American Trading / Hunting Companies and Priests with the Alaskan Artels on Marmot, Hinchinbrook and Sitka (Baranov) Islands (Russian America, Sa 10/17, 10am)

The artels (collective work groups and stations) on Marmot, Hinchinbrook and Sitka Islands and nearby areas all have close ties to Kodiak. Marmot Island's artel will be visited this year. Hinchinbrook Island was where Baranov and his associated Unangax and Alutiit first skirmished with local Native peoples. Those who worked there were mainly related to the Alutiit people and were taught by Orthodox priests such as Fr. Andrew Kashevarov. Baranov moved on to Sitka where his company's artels became gripped in the battles of 1802 and 1804, the subjects of a newly translated Russian book on that subject.

Dawn Lea Black has published a book on Natalia Shelikhova with Dr. Alexander Petrov, and several articles on Russian America. She went on a speaking tour to three Russian Universities in 2019. In 2020, she facilitated the publication in English of Alexander Zorin's book on the 1802-1804 Battles of Sitka. She is a property manager in Kodiak.

Gmelch, George and Sharon Gmelch - The Legacy of Richard King Nelson (1941-2019): An Anthropological Perspective (Remembering Richard Nelson, Th 10/8, 2pm)

Richard King Nelson (“Nels” to his many friends) died on November 4, 2019 in San Francisco. A cultural anthropologist and gifted communicator in multiple media, Richard was a leading figure in Alaska Native studies, ethnobiology, and natural history. He was also an acclaimed nature writer and influential conservationist. This paper focuses on Nels’ anthropological career and his commitment to documenting the environmental wisdom of other cultures as a record for future generations as well as contemporary lessons for the rest of us.

George Gmelch and Sharon Bohn Gmelch are professors of anthropology at University of San Francisco and Union College, Schenectady, New York. They have been friends of

Nels since graduate school at the University of California, Santa Barbara in the 1960s, collaborators with him on several research projects, and co-teachers in student field programs.

Grantham, Anjuli - New Analysis of the Alaska Packers Association's China Contracts (Alaska Canneries, Sa 10/17, 2pm)

Labor contractors hired, fed, and managed the Alaska Packers Association's cannery crew, leaving just scant traces of cannery workers within the corporate records. The APA's annual tabulation of "China contracts" indicates the labor contractor for each cannery, the terms of the contract, and, beginning in 1905, the ethnic composition of the cannery crew. This presentation shares a deep dive into the labor contracts from the NN Cannery in South Naknek from 1894-1939. Examining the "China contract" from this single cannery shows how this record can be used to bring minority workers from the fringes of history to the center of the narrative.

Anjuli Grantham is Curator of Statewide Services at the Alaska State Museum. She is the editor of *Tin Can Country: Southeast Alaska's Historic Salmon Canneries* and a collaborator on the NN Cannery History Project.

Haycox, Stephen - "Longue durée": Russia's Half-Hearted Approach to North America (Russian America, Sa 10/17, 10am)

Historians have long pondered the scant population of Russian America, scarcely more than 800 people at its greatest extent. Various policies of both the tsarist government and the directors of the Russian American Company mitigated heavily against migration to and settlement in the territory. New scholarship confirms and clarifies those policies, but does not fully explain the reasons for them. This paper explores the long-term view of Russia's North American adventure, and its consequences.

----- - Complex Circumstances, and Unforeseen Consequences: The End of Treaty-Making and ANCSA (The History of ANCSA, Fr 10/16, 10am)

In 1871, after it had fashioned approximately 370 treaties with various American Indian tribes, the U.S. Congress mandated an end to treaty-making. The U.S. government executed no treaties with Alaska's Natives. This has highly significant historic significance for Alaska, for it meant that after statehood, when the Alaska Natives sought a settlement of land claims, there existed no Congressional delineation of Alaska Native lands. This paper explores the genesis, circumstances, nuances and importance of that phenomenon.

Stephen Haycox taught history full-time at the University of Alaska Anchorage for forty years. He has published several books on Alaska history, including a narrative history, and numerous professional articles. He has twice been named Alaska Historian of the Year by the Alaska Historical Society.

Johnston, Grand Chief Peter - The Yukon Land Claims Process: Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow (The History of ANCSA, Fr 10/16, 10am)

In 1973 the Yukon Native Brotherhood presented a landmark manifesto to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in Ottawa with a plan for settling land claims in the Yukon Territory. It took 20 years of intensive negotiations between the fourteen Yukon First Nations, Canada and Yukon to reach an Umbrella Final Agreement in 1993. The agreement changed forever the socio-economic and governance foundations of the Territory. Grand Chief Johnston will describe the principles and processes that led to these modern treaties, which stand as a testimonial to the values and resilience of Yukon First Nations in reaching a peaceful resolution to their claims.

Peter Johnston, Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations, is the son of Sam Johnston, one of the Yukon Chiefs who travelled to Ottawa in 1973. Johnston has served in many leadership roles through the years, working towards the implementation of the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement.

King, Bob - Photograph Archives of Alaska Fishery Scientist Ole Mathisen (Alaska Canneries, Sa 10/17, 2pm)

Biologist Ole Alfred Mathisen (1919-2007) came to study Alaska salmon after WWII to earn his PhD from the University of Washington. Later, he served as Dean of the University of Alaska's School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences. Along the way he took photographs and slides of his research work, people, Alaska villages and communities, canneries, boats, airplanes and yes, even the fish. The Mathisen family wants to donate his collection of over 2,000 color slides dating back to 1946 to the Alaska State Library. This presentation includes selections from his collection, most from Bristol Bay, and many of which are located and dated.

Robert W. "Bob" King worked as news director at Dillingham public radio station KDLG and later served as staff on media and fishery issues for Governor Tony Knowles and Senator Mark Begich. Now retired, he is hunkered down in Juneau and keeps busy researching Alaska fishery history, especially Bristol Bay.

Lentfer, Hank - Anthropologist to Artist: The Literary Legacy of Richard Nelson (Remembering Richard Nelson, Th 10/8, 2pm)

Richard Nelson was just twenty-two when he left Madison, Wisconsin for the Chukchi coast and apprenticed himself to Inupiaq hunters. It was fall of 1964. The first snow machine had yet to arrive in Wainwright. Richard's first winter in Alaska set the path for the rest of his life. Haunted by the absence of humanity in his published ethnographies, Nelson turned to storytelling with the publication of *Shadow of the Hunter*. Although Nelson drifted from the discipline of anthropology, he remained dedicated to celebrating the wisdom of indigenous cultures and immersing himself in wild country.

Hank Lentfer was a close friend of Richard Nelson. He has written a just-published biography entitled *Raven's Witness: The Alaska Life of Richard K Nelson* based on many hours of interviews with Richard as well as his journals and correspondence.

Loshbaugh, Shana - The Brief, Awkward History of Fort Kenay (Topics in Alaska History, Fr 10/9, 2pm)

As the U.S. Army occupied Alaska after the 1867 transfer, it established forts as the vanguard of Americanization. Unlucky Battery F sailed in 1868 on the *Torrent*, bound for Kenai, but shipwrecked near Port Graham. After rescue and a dreary Kodiak winter, the soldiers reached the Russian post of Nikolaevsk on April 17, 1869 and scraped together a stockade dubbed "Fort Kenay." In August of 1870, the War Department ordered it to close. Marine archaeology aficionados discovered the *Torrent* shipwreck in 2007 and salvaged items from it. Lively eyewitness accounts of this weird interlude survive.

Shana Loshbaugh came to Alaska in 1981 and found it too interesting to leave. She divides her time between the Kenai Peninsula and Fairbanks, where she studied Environmental History at the university.

Miller, Debbie S. - Loving Alaska and the Joy of Listening (Remembering Richard Nelson, Th 10/8, 2pm)

Over the past decade, Debbie traveled extensively with her partner, Richard Nelson (Nels), to explore wild places in Alaska and Australia. Nels thrived on the beauty, life, and rich sounds of the natural world, which inspired him in all of his work. This is an introduction to Nels at home and in the field, his boundless enthusiasm and energy, his passion for listening, learning and sharing, his kindness and generosity of spirit, and his reverence for the Indigenous people who were his teachers.

A 45-year Alaskan, Debbie is the author of many nature books for children and adults. She collaborated with Nels on several projects, including his last published essay in the book *On Arctic Ground* (Braided River, 2012).

Monteith, Daniel - Sheldon Jackson Boarding School and Its Impact on Language and Culture (Sitka's History, Th 10/15, 2pm)

The Sheldon Jackson School was the most prominent boarding school in Southeast Alaska and served students throughout the Territory of Alaska. This research will give an overview of its history and examine through the eyes of Native elders the impact of the boarding school on Native languages.

Daniel Monteith, a professor of anthropology at the University of Alaska Southeast, first worked in Saxman and Ketchikan and now lives in Juneau. He has been working with Alaska Native elders for over thirty years and is interested in how boarding schools have impacted their lives.

Ongtooguk, Paul - ANCSA: The Whitewater of Indigenous Land Claims (The History of ANCSA, Fr 10/16, 10am)

The legal and political framework for land claim settlements are designed and enforced by the federal governments with their own essential interests driving the velocity, direction and outcomes. At best, tribal nations mitigate the effects of the federal governments serving as both interested parties and referees in the taking of Native lands. These two fundamental facts of Indigenous law and politics are keys to understanding ANCSA and Native land claims in general. This presentation explores aspects and consequences of these points.

Paul Ongtooguk is Inuit connected to northwest Alaska, graduating from high school in Nome. He holds one BA in religion and philosophy and another in history, with a graduate degree in education. His career has centered on the political and educational history of Alaska Native peoples.

Pollnow, Anne Elise - The Sitka Woman's Club: Sitka's Connection to the Woman's Suffrage Movement (Women's Suffrage, Fr 10/9, 10am)

The Sitka Woman's Club was founded May 16, 1916, under the name of the Friendly Society, with the objective "to be of service to the community, to champion humanitarian causes wherever they might be, to identify problems and devise solutions." Mrs. Elizabeth DeArmond was the first and the last president before the group joined the National Federated Women's Clubs in 1935. On May 11, 1951, thirteen members signed articles of incorporation forming the Sitka Woman's Club as a non-profit corporation. This presentation will explore the history of the club and its social, economic, and political investment and connection during the era of the women's suffrage movement.

-----Tlingit Placenames on the Katlian Bay Road Project (Sitka—A Powerful Place, Th 10/15, 10am)

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities contracted with Sea Level Consulting to work with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska to assist with the naming of signage for bridge crossings, viewpoints, and rest areas located on the proposed Katlian Bay Road in Sitka. With direction from the Tribal Council and Ethel Makinen, daughter of Charlie Joseph, Sr., Tlingit placenames were incorporated into the project plans. This presentation will share the efforts, process, and site names and translations identified during this investigation. It is presented in honor of Sitka Anthropologist Richard Nelson who worked tirelessly and optimistically to illuminate the brilliant and respectable traditional ecological knowledge of First Nations citizens throughout Alaska.

Anne Pollnow is the owner of Sea Level Consulting, LLC, a cultural resource firm based in Sitka, Alaska started in 2008. As an archaeologist, she specializes in Southeast Alaska archaeology and history, and the unique laws and regulations relating to the preservation of cultural resources and heritage.

Poulson, Rebecca - Sitka in the 1880s: Small-Town Politics and Personalities that Shaped Alaska (Sitka—A Powerful Place, Th 10/15, 10am)

The 1880s saw Sitka transform from military post to civil capital, and the development of many of the social and political structures and relationships we know today. These structures were shaped in Washington D.C. but also by very local – but high-stakes - political struggles among Sitka’s Presbyterian mission, the mixed-race Russian community, a handful of civil government officials, immigrant entrepreneurs, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Tlingit clans. This paper uses federal lawsuits filed in Sitka to explore the personal and political dynamics of this critical period, especially the participation and influence of Tlingit clans.

Rebecca Poulson is an artist and writer in Sitka, Alaska. She is a member of the Alaska Historical Commission.

Ringsmuth, Katherine - “A Project for the Moment” (Alaska Canneries, Sa 10/17, 2pm)

Cannery workers held critically important jobs in Alaska’s salmon industry. Their collective knowledge of the mechanical operation, the physical labor, and the salmon themselves formed the cannery’s industrial backbone. Despite being essential participants in the fishery, cannery workers--who included Asians, Latinos, African Americans and Alaska Natives--were marginalized, exotified or ignored by historians, writers, and managers in the popular narratives of Alaska’s salmon fishery. This discussion addresses the unifying significance of current and past cannery workers, lessons learned from the 1919 pandemic and the current Black Lives Matters movement, and how they tie together through the NN Cannery Project’s Mug Up exhibition experience.

Katie Ringsmuth teaches Alaska history at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She is founder of the public history business Tundra Vision, and oversees the NN Cannery History Project, a community endeavor that is working with the Alaska State Museum to develop the exhibition *Mug Up: The Language of Work*.

Schmidt, Angela - Historical Scenes of Sitka (Sitka—A Powerful Place, Th 10/15, 10am)

The Alaska Film Archives at the University of Alaska Fairbanks holds nearly 100 historical films and videos containing scenes of Sitka. Spanning 90 years of the community’s history, the moving images include Tlingit activities, Russian churches, commercial logging and fishing operations, and tourism attractions. This presentation will be a compilation of scenes showcasing Sitka’s rich history.

Angela Schmidt is a film archivist with the Alaska Film Archives, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Schneider, Will - ANCSA: Aboriginal Title to the Land and Aboriginal Hunting and Fishing Rights (The History of ANCSA, Fr 10/16, 10am)

One of the ironies of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is the fact that land and subsistence were essential elements of land claims proposals leading up to congressional passage of the act. Yet, in the final version of the act, aboriginal title and aboriginal hunting and fishing rights were terminated. This paper examines the record and draws some tentative conclusions on what happened and why when Congress did their final mark. Then the paper describes the implications of congressional action and its impact on tribal influence on fish and game management.

Will Schneider is retired from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where for many years he directed the Oral History Program / Project Jukebox. He is the President of the Alaska Historical Society.

Sherif, Sue - Before and After the Nineteenth Amendment: An Overview of Woman's Suffrage in Honor of Beverly Beeton (Women's Suffrage, Fr 10/9, 10am)

The road to the Alaska territorial legislature's adoption of women's suffrage in 1913 and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was not a smooth one. Although this year we commemorate the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in the U.S. and the 107th anniversary of women's suffrage in Alaska, these important events were neither a beginning nor an end. We hail Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton as instigators, but there are so many more suffragists to remember.

Sue Sherif retired from the Alaska State Library in 2014. Her talk is based on a course on women's suffrage that she taught for the Fairbanks Osher Lifelong Institute in February 2020. She has served as board member and president of the League of Women Voters of the Tanana Valley and on the board of the LWV of Alaska.

Tidwell, TiaAnna Puya – Christine Storm, main character in Edna Ferber's *Ice Palace* (Topics in Alaska History, Fri 10/9, 2pm)

This presentation examines Edna Ferber's enormously popular pro-statehood novel *Ice Palace*. The novel is set in the fictional town of Baranof modeled after Fairbanks and was released weeks before statehood was achieved in Alaska. Ross Coen, J.E. Smythe, and Thomas Schatz have clearly outlined Ferber's relationship with influential Alaskan figures such as Ernest Gruening, and the political impact of *Ice Palace* in the American imagination. My work examines the main character, Christine Storm, and the way Ferber uses her to create a foundational myth for the emergent settler state society of Alaska. I engage with (post) colonial frameworks to describe the settler colonial anxieties and processes at work in the text.

TiaAnna Tidwell is an Assistant Professor in UAF's Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development. Originally from Anaktuvuk Pass, she is an enrolled member of the Nunamiut tribe and currently resides in Fairbanks.

Troll, Tim - The Spanish Flu in SW Alaska: Bristol Bay and Unalaska (1918 Epidemic, Sa 10/10, 10am)

In the spring of 1919 a second Alaska wave of the Spanish Flu swept through Unalaska and the villages of Bristol Bay. Like the first wave in the fall of 1918 adult Natives fell victim in large numbers leaving many orphans. This presentation includes the short film *Bristol Bay Remembers: The Great Flu of 1919* recounting the tragedy as it unfolded in Bristol Bay and recently uncovered photographs from the U.S.C.G. cutter that responded in Unalaska and Dillingham that tragic spring.

Tim Troll lived on the Lower Yukon in the early 1980s. He is a member of the Alaska Historical Society's Board of Directors and serves as Executive Director of the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust.

Vandegraft, Doug – Historic Bars of Sitka (Sitka's History, Th 10/15, 2pm)

The Alaska Act of 1868 made it illegal to import liquor into Alaska. In 1869, in blatant defiance of the law, several saloons in Sitka advertised in *The Alaska Times*. Those saloons were probably some of the very first bars in Alaska. In 1939, the Navy arrived in Sitka, followed by the Army in 1941. Serving the military, the fisherman, and the pulp mill workers, bars such as the Silver Foam Recreation Center, the Columbia, Ernie's, and the Pioneer were well known throughout Southeast Alaska. This presentation will focus on the historic bars of Sitka, including those still in business.

Doug Vandegraft is a former Alaskan and the author of *A Guide to the Notorious Bars of Alaska*, now in its second edition. He retired in 2018 after working 35 years as a cartographer for the Federal Government.

Wight, Philip - Roadblock: The Origins of the Anti-Roads Movement in Alaska, 1960-1980 (Topics in Alaska History, Fr 10/9, 2pm)

For much of the 20th century, road construction symbolized modernity, development, and prosperity for settler-colonial Alaska. The Richardson, Glenn, and Alaska-Canada highways were celebrated as ribbons of progress through the morass of wilderness. Yet by the 1960s, many Alaskans began to question the merits of ever-more roads connecting isolated communities and opening ever-more resource development. Today, proposed roads are fiercely contested. This presentation investigates the origins of the "anti-roads" movement in Alaska. Why and when did many Alaskans begin to question the merits of road infrastructure? How have these historical concerns structured contemporary road debates?

Philip Wight is Assistant Professor of History and Northern Studies at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He studies energy and environmental history, with a focus on political economy, transportation infrastructures, social movements, and climate change in the far north.

Williams, Leanna Prax - Missing from the Northern Sky: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of the Merrill and Eielson searches, 1929-1930 (Topics in Alaska History, Fr 10/9, 2pm)

In the fall of 1929, two of Alaska's most prominent pioneer aviators, Russ Merrill and Ben Eielson, disappeared during flights in the territory. This presentation analyzes newspaper coverage of the searches, focusing on their use of frontier language and imagery. It explores the roots of the still-popular trope of the Alaska bush pilot as a "cowboy of the sky," a largely outmoded depiction in an industry focused on safe operations. The author considers possible safety impacts of these newspaper events and subsequent popular culture depictions of northern pilots on modern Alaska airline operations.

Leanna Prax Williams is a PhD student in Interdisciplinary Studies program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks where her research focuses on entertainment and news media depictions of early northern aviation. She earned her master's degree in Arctic and Northern Studies in fall 2019, winning the Kleinfeld Prize as that year's outstanding M.A. student and receiving commendation from the Graduate School for excellence in thesis writing.

Woods, Fred – The Rise of the Sitka Saints: A Century of Sitka Latter-day Saint History (Sitka's History, Th 10/15, 2pm)

This presentation will trace the history of Latter-day Saints since the first arrival of LDS missionaries in Sitka during the 1920s. It will include an account of the building of a Sitka Latter-day Saints chapel, as well as their connection to the city, and will be laced with an authentic voice based on primary sources and interviews coupled with dozens of historic images.

Fred E. Woods has worked at Brigham Young University as a professor of religious education since 1998. He has lectured extensively and internationally on the topic of global Latter-day Saints history. He has published with *Alaska History* and wrote *Melting the Ice: A History of Latter-day Saints in Alaska* (Provo: UT, BYU Studies, 2018).