

ALASKA HISTORY *News*

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The controversy in Sitka over its Alexander Baranov statue illustrates one of many conflicting visions of Alaska history, the theme of the Alaska Historical Society's conference this fall. The Russian merchant founded Sitka on a site already inhabited by Alaska Natives and came to be known as a brutal colonialist. In this June 30, 2020, photo, Sitka History Museum curator Nicole Fiorino, left, Sitka Tribe council member Bob Sam, center, and museum director Hal Spackman clean the statue after it was egged in protest a week earlier. Photo courtesy James Poulson/Daily Sitka Sentinel.

Fall conference planners seeking presentations

Logistics are coming together for the Alaska Historical Society's 2022 annual conference with the intriguing theme of "Conflicting Visions of Alaska History." The deadline for presentation proposals is extended to June 15 to allow more time for creative thinking by Alaska's historians.

The conference kicks off in-person the evening of Thursday, Oct. 6, at the Anchorage Museum with a keynote presentation by Bathsheba Demuth, a Brown University professor and author of the award-winning book *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*.

One reviewer called Demuth's book "a

historian's Moby Dick, a great white whale of a book that spans centuries and links landscapes, living beings and the flux of time into a marvelously readable narrative."

AHS is partnering with the Cook Inlet Historical Society to broaden the conference's appeal and take advantage of local historical expertise. Demuth's presentation, to be followed by an in-person reception and book-signing, will be part of Cook Inlet's regular monthly speaker series.

Like other groups hosting public events, the AHS board struggled with whether to transition back to a full in-person conference in the COVID pandemic era. De-

muth's presentation will be available both in-person and online with other sessions virtual. It runs Oct. 6-8 and Oct. 13-15.

Additional sessions will focus on recent history including the rollout of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and preparations for the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline. In addition to speaker panels, the conference also will include discussion forums and an AHS business meeting with the presentation of annual awards.

To submit a proposal, send a title, 100-word abstract and few sentences of bio information to Rachel Mason by email: rachel_mason@nps.gov.

AHS pushes Muni of Anchorage to better care for historical items

As a public official for much of my career, I got pretty good at sniffing out the real reason for many government actions. During my stints with Governors Steve Cowper and Tony Knowles and mayor and U.S. Sen. Mark Begich, I could usually determine whether an issue was driven by bureaucracy, legal constraint or politics.



But Anchorage Mayor Dave Bronson has me and my advocacy colleagues at the Alaska and Cook Inlet historical societies stumped. At issue is the care of and public access to approximately 25,000 books, maps, unique city documents and artwork owned by the city's Loussac Library.

As many historians and researchers will remember, in 2017 a water pipe broke and flooded part of the library's rotunda, forcing its closure and the relocation of much of the Alaska collection. In storage, these materials were inaccessible to the public and some poorly cared for.

Two years ago, Bronson's predecessor appointed a 25-member task force to advise the library administration on planning for new space, dubbed the Alaska Room. In partnership with the Anchorage Library Foundation, about a million dollars was raised: a \$390,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant, \$500,000 in bond funds approved by Anchorage voters, and additional private money. Through a robust public process, the task force worked with an interior design firm to develop space for these materials on the library's third floor.

But all of this progress screeched to a halt—apparently at Bronson's direction—shortly after he took office in July 2021.

Over the past several months, the Anchorage and Cook Inlet Historical Societies have tried to find out why and encourage a restart of the process.

In March, we met with Deputy Director of Library Services Judy Eledge, who denied any knowledge of the effort. In follow-up emails with her, she said “the decision about the Alaska Room and any renovations lies within the Bronson Administration.” On April 21, we directly wrote the mayor. As this newsletter goes to press in mid-May, we're still waiting for an explanation.

This initiative is a continuation of the AHS's advocacy to preserve and make accessible Alaska historical materials. Elsewhere in this newsletter you'll read about our interaction with U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski to protect Alaska documents housed in the Seattle National Archives and Records Administration and to pick up the pace

on digitizing them.

We've also initiated conversations with the Alaska Legislature to establish an Alaska commission to oversee our state's participation

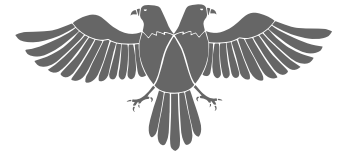
in the national 250th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence in 2026. In 2016, Congress set up a federal commission for this purpose and already dozens of states and tribal entities have created local organizations.

Of course, our board's chief focus remains on a productive and fascinating 2022 annual AHS conference in October. So far proposals for conference presentations are a little light, so we encourage you to develop your best ideas around the theme, “Conflicting Visions of Alaska History.” Deadline for proposals is June 15. I'm working on mine now.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

—David Ramseur

At issue is the care of and public access to approximately 25,000 books, maps, unique city documents and artwork owned by the Anchorage Loussac Library.



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Photo courtesy of Dermot Cole

Terrence Cole's eclectic collection benefits library

An estimated 600 fans of late Alaska historian Terrence Cole crowded Fairbanks's Noel Wien Library in April to buy up Cole's extensive book collection, resulting in the donation of more than \$19,000 to the library's renovation fund. Cole, who passed away at age 67 in 2020, was infamous for buying books on every conceivable topic from world history to baseball.

About 30 volunteers helped set up the two-day sale. Some of Cole's older, more rare books have gone to the Literacy Council of Alaska and others will remain at Noel Wien. Cole was a history professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and author of numerous books. The AHS thanks the Cole family for the earlier donation of eight boxes of Terrence's Alaska history books and ephemera for our fundraising auctions.

NARA digitizing Alaska records, still no new building planned

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is plugging away on digitizing Alaska's federal records housed in Seattle but little progress has been made in upgrading or replacing the archives facility there. That's according to U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski in a March letter to the Alaska Historical Society, responding to our request to her for an update.

The COVID pandemic "slowed NARA's ability to digitize Alaska's records, (but) the agency has committed to me that our records will be fully digitized and posted online on a platform that is easily found and searchable," Murkowski wrote.

Through the AHS's Advocacy Committee, the Society has worked with other

Pacific Northwest historical groups to stop the Trump administration's plan to close the federal archives in Seattle, plan for an upgraded or new facility, and digitize Alaska's records kept there.

Murkowski said she included several provisions in a fiscal 2022 budget bill pertaining to the archives, including:

- Requiring NARA to consult with Alaska stakeholders about their priorities for records digitization within 90 days of the bill's effective date;
- Expecting NARA to complete digitization of Alaska records and post them on their website;
- Prohibiting sale of the NARA Seattle facility "unless and until the General Services

Administration and NARA develop a plan to relocate the records within the Seattle area";

- Directing NARA to report within 210 days the costs of digitizing and relocating the records to a new facility.

Murkowski noted that no new federal funds to upgrade or replace the Seattle facility were included in the budget bill.

The AHS remains dedicated to maintaining a national archives facility in the Pacific Northwest to house these valuable federal records and preserve public access to them. The society also will continue to advocate for the speedy digitization of Alaska's records so that Alaskans may access them from our home state.

—David Ramseur

Layers of history on display at Aleutians museum

At the Museum of the Aleutians in Unalaska, it's all about layers.

"One of the things I love about the Aleutians is the stratigraphy," said Ginny Hatfield, an archaeologist and the museum's director since 2017.

"I love these layers that you can see here, where you can see natural sediment, you can see where they cut in and dug down to make semi-subterranean houses, and then you have layers from volcanoes, depending on what island you're working on. It's kind of really beautiful, these layers of time and trying to interpret it and understand it."

These layers and more are interpreted at the Museum of the Aleutians, or MOTA, which opened in 1999.

"Our mission is to collect, preserve and share the rich cultural legacy of the Aleutian Islands region," Hatfield said.

"We're such a multicultural place, that involves 9,000 years of people living in these islands and then Russian contact. And now we have all of these artists who are making and creating things."

Displays of intricately woven grass baskets, traditional lightweight rain gear made from the esophagus and intestines of sea lions or seals, and fishing-related objects from precontact eras through today were joined in March by the Aleutian Arts Council's 30th annual community art show.

Behind the scenes, MOTA staff care for 500,000 archaeological and other objects, host visiting researchers, organize summer archaeological digs for community members young and old to join, and are working on a genealogy project to tie Commander Island residents with people in other parts of the Aleutians and Southwest Alaska.

World War II buffs expecting exhibits on the 1942 Japanese bombing of Unalaska and occupation of Attu and Kiska are directed to the visitors center

at the Aleutian Islands World War II National Monument.

"Our museum focuses more on what happened after the bombing, which was the evacuation of the UnangaꝻ people," said Hatfield, who noted that visitors sometimes come out crying. "We probably get the most comments about the evacuation exhibit because people don't know about that."

"All of these villages were evacuated at that time. The military here in Unalaska occupied those houses and

"It was a pretty frightening time for them because they went from a treeless landscape to a place of trees that's completely unfamiliar," Hatfield said. "Landscapes are a big piece of our culture, wherever we're from—there's often stories and worlds that are embedded in landscapes, and to be relocated like that was psychologically impactful."

MOTA hosts two or three temporary exhibits annually. The community art show is featured each spring. This summer, MOTA will exhibit work by gyotaku fish printing artist Dwight Hwang of California. Prints for the show were created using fish, octopus and crab sent to Hwang by local fishermen. Hwang will fly in to set up and take down the show and will offer community workshops during each visit.

MOTA's collections are a valuable resource for regional artists and culture bearers.

UnangaꝻ sewer Anfesia Tutia-koff is doing research on sewing with gutskin, and is working with the Qawalangin Tribe to teach gutskin sewing skills to others.

"She's literally studying what her ancestors—like her grandmother and other relatives—have done that we are able to curate on behalf of all UnangaꝻ people," Hatfield noted.

Similarly, weavers from around the region visit MOTA to study how baskets in the collection were woven.

COVID-19 ravaged the museum's income stream by nixing annual fundraising events and cruise ship visits. MOTA pivoted with grants to digitize much of its photo collection, create educational materials for remote schools in the region, and inventory and better care for some parts of the collection.

The museum is open 11am-4pm Tuesdays-Saturdays. Find out more at www.aleutians.org.

—Carol Gales



"Woman Of Ounalashka," an original pencil sketch, is a treasured piece among the Museum of the Aleutians' collections. It was drawn on July 1, 1778, by John Webber, the official artist of Captain Cook's expedition. MOTA 2001.059.

didn't take great care of them. So when the people returned, they came back to a really devastated community." Some villages were never reinhabited.

Evacuees were moved by the U.S. military to sites such as abandoned canneries in Southeast Alaska. Living in substandard and poorly heated conditions, many died from disease and malnutrition. Museum visitors can watch *Aleut Story*, an 87-minute film with interviews of evacuees and survivors.

Passion for study of living people and cultures inspires AHS board member, NPS anthropologist

Rachel Mason's passion for ethnography—the study of living people and their cultures—was born in the culturally diverse city of Chicago; lived in her imagination in the jungles of New Guinea; and was enriched in the fishing bars of Kodiak, Seward's Red Light District and the “lost villages” of the Aleutians.

Mason, the Alaska Historical Society's vice president, is in her third three-year term on the board. She serves because she believes the AHS fiercely champions Alaska's rich history and she wants to bring an appreciation for living communities to the cause.

Again this year, Mason is overseeing the society's premier event, its annual fall conference with the enticing theme of “Conflicting Visions of Alaska History.” She helped craft the conference topics, oversees the review of presentations, and will preside over the six-day event scheduled to kick off Oct. 6. Mason also secured this year's keynote speaker, Brown University Professor Bathsheba Demuth, author of the award-winning book *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*.

A senior cultural anthropologist for the National Park Service's Alaska region and program manager for the Aleutian Islands World War II National Historic Area, Mason's interest in diverse populations began in her Chicago childhood. Her family moved to a camp in northern Illinois that served inner-city youth when her father, who had a background in theology, became the camp director. The camp, Mason said, was a microcosm of 1960s activism, hiring staff from historically Black colleges in the South and preparing young idealists for civil rights work.

Mason's mother grew up in China and earned a doctorate in history. She worked to document Asian history in the U.S. and helped Hmong immigrants adjust to life in the U.S. Mason was also exposed to other cultures when she lived in Bordeaux, France, with her aunt and uncle for a year, and when her family lived for another year in the Four Corners area of the American Southwest.

Mason entered Portland's Reed College already settled on a degree in anthropology and planning to use it studying the people of Papua New Guinea. After Mason earned a master's degree

Rachel Mason believes the AHS fiercely champions Alaska's rich history and she wants to bring an appreciation for living communities to the cause.

in anthropology at the University of Virginia in 1981, a friend told her enough about Alaska to adjust her focus northward. That launched six years of working in Kodiak's canneries, driving a cab, and other odd jobs in post-pipeline Alaska. She never looked back at New Guinea and titled her doctoral dissertation “Fishing and Drinking in Kodiak.”

For her doctoral research in anthropology from UVA, Mason continued her study of the “surprisingly interesting strangers” she encountered conducting studies of the impact of the 1989 Exxon



Rachel Mason exploring history on the Chilkoot Trail. Photo by Martha Mason Miller, courtesy Rachel Mason.

Valdez oil spill on Prince William Sound and Gulf of Alaska fishing communities. At age 40, she landed what she characterizes as her first regular office job as an anthropologist in the Federal Subsistence Program at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Anchorage. She joined the NPS in 2000 and has worked as a cultural anthropologist there since, with collateral duty as a conflict resolution mediator.

Among the research of which she is most proud is documenting the Red Light District in Seward between 1914-54 by recording oral histories from those who knew the working women, titling one presentation on her research “Hardboiled Innocence.” She also continues nearly two decades of work on the “lost villages” of the Aleutians, communities where Unangaġ (Aleut) residents were forcibly moved during World War II and could never return. Her book with Ray Hudson, *Lost Villages of the Eastern Aleutians: Biorka, Kashega, Makushin*, was published in 2014.

When not publishing professional papers or serving as an adjunct University of Alaska Anchorage anthropology professor, Mason can be found on a yoga mat or hiking a desolate Alaska trail, ideally devoid of bears.

—David Ramseur

SITKA

Stories of starting fishing on tap in fall

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society will host a program this fall featuring the theme, “Starting Out: Skiffs and Scows, Innocence and Experience.” Eric Jordan will facilitate as people tell the stories of how they came into fishing. The audience then will have a chance to share their own stories. The event was originally scheduled for the society’s 2022 annual meeting in March, but the story-telling was postponed until the fall. For rescheduling information, go to sitkamaritime.org. The society’s main focus is to revitalize the historic Japonski Island Boathouse as a year-round maritime heritage museum and boat repair facility, but its members support a variety of other activities, including producing a brochure with a walking map and guide to Sitka’s fishing vessels.

SEWARD

1930s restaurant window card on display

The Resurrection Bay Historical Society has a restaurant window card on display that was originally used in the 1930s to promote George Nishiyama’s Chop Suey House. Nishiyama came to Alaska and in 1910 was living in Cordova. In Seward he operated a restaurant called the Noodle House at Third and Washington in Seward; later he may have renamed it the Chop Suey House or acquired another restaurant. During World War II, along with other Japanese-Americans in Alaska, he was sent to a confinement site in the Lower 48. Resurrection Bay Historical Society acquired the card in 1966 along with other items from the Al Peel house. Peel was a former policeman whose wife, Lydia Griffiths, was a well-known madam in Seward.



Window card for Chop Suey House, Seward. Photo courtesy Resurrection Bay Historical Society.

Urban renewal recalled in “pages from past”

The Resurrection Bay Historical Society’s “Pages from the Past” column in its April newsletter cited a 1966 newspaper article that cheered street paving in the town, starting the year after the 1964 earthquake caused so much damage to the community. The first project was paving the streets in the business district. Urban renewal funding was to be used for Ocean Drive and the Seward Highway to Mile 7. The small boat harbor industrial park had paved sidewalks and water and sewer lines, and streets were being built. The writer of the article was responding to a frequent comment he had heard while on a recent trip to Kodiak: “I didn’t think anybody lived there [Seward] anymore!” (Perhaps Seward residents made the same comment about Kodiak, which also suffered significant damage from the earthquake.)

HOPE

Territorial school faced challenges

A Territorial school was established in Hope in 1915 in a building formerly used as a brewery. The school in Hope opened and closed depending on whether there were enough elementary-aged students to make it worthwhile. The school closed in 1922 when enrollment was down to three students. The school reopened in 1934, but the building burned down in April 1937 and students had to spend the last few weeks of the school year in the Hope Social Hall.



Hope School in Spring 1922. The school had to close in the fall because only three students were left, presumably the three sitting in the front row in this picture. The teacher, Mary Managle, is far right. Photo courtesy Hope and Sunrise Historical Society, Clark Collection 2010047.003.

PORT ALEXANDER

Early homesteaders recount their lives in books

Twin brothers Matt and Mark Kirchhoff arrived in Port Alexander to establish homesteads in 1976. Homesteading there seems to have occurred largely through word of mouth. That was the case for the Kirchhoffs. Matt heard about the homestead opportunity in the middle of the Gulf of Alaska while working on a NOAA boat. When he got to land he called brother Mark, who was in New Zealand. The brothers met in Anchorage and headed to Port Alexander to claim their homesteads. Both brothers have published books deriving from their homesteading experiences; Mark’s is *Port Alexander, Alaska: A Centennial Celebration, 1913-2013* (2014, with Tom Paul and Mike Stemp), and Matt’s book is entitled *Cabin: A Guide to Building the Perfect Getaway* (2021, with David and Jeanie Stiles).

ANCHORAGE

Historic Preservation Month activities underway

Preservation Alaska celebrates Historic Preservation Month in May, kicking off the month by announcing the Ten Most Endangered Properties in Alaska. This year there are 11 properties on the list. They are, in order of priority:

1. Fourth Avenue Theatre, Anchorage
2. Ascension Church of Our Lord Chapel, Karluk
3. Bishop Rowe Chapel, Arctic Village
4. Fort William H. Seward Hospital, Haines

5. Pilgrim Hot Springs, near Nome
6. Hi-Yu Stamp Mill, Fairbanks
7. Bristol Bay Boats, Naknek
8. One Room Schoolhouse, Talkeetna
9. Eldred Rock Lighthouse, near Haines
10. Steamer *Nenana*, Fairbanks
11. Pioneer Hall, Ketchikan

Several virtual programs are planned as part of the Historic Preservation Month celebration. One is a conversation with Eric Hollenbeck, owner of Blue Ox Mill Works and Historic Village in Eureka, California, and star of *The Craftsman*, a program on the Magnolia Network on discovery+, that will include a showing of a half-hour program documenting his work restoring historic buildings, including in Alaska. Two other programs will be of a video of moving of the Ascension of Our Lord Chapel in Karluk to save it from falling over a cliff, and a production made for the Mug Up cannery exhibit that is at the Alaska State Museum this summer.

Anchorage plans a Photo Puzzler Treasure Hunt where from photos of distinctive portions of historic buildings in downtown Anchorage players are to identify the building. There is also a Historical Selfie Scavenger Hunt where participants take a selfie in front of their favorite historical property and post it to Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. Again this year the University of Alaska Fairbanks Film Archives will post links on its website and Facebook page to online historic footage of communities around the state.



SS Nenana being built, 1932. Photo courtesy Pioneers of Alaska Museum of Fairbanks, Bill Berry Collection.

PALMER

Trust works to keep ag land in the Mat-Su

The Palmer Historical Society's History Night in April was devoted to the Alaska Farmland Trust. Phoebe Autry shared a brief history of the trust and explained the conservation easement process and the FarmLink program. The trust, founded in 2005, works to protect threatened farmlands and preserve them for future generations. Working mainly in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, where agriculture in Alaska is concentrated, the trust helps farmers start or expand their farming operations and connects land seekers with landowners who want to see their property farmed.

KETCHIKAN

Walks teach of salmon history, colorful characters

Ketchikan is a great town for pedestrians, and visitors and residents alike can enjoy several fascinating historical walking tours. According to Ketchikan Museums' 2021 annual report, another opportunity to learn on foot is in the works. The Ketchikan Salmon Walk along Ketchikan Creek will showcase the salmon themselves as well as the history of the fishery and art that features salmon. Artist Ray Troll designed the logo for the project, which is coming together this year. Another new Ketchikan foot-accessible historical display is also coming soon. The Ketchikan Historic Commission was recently awarded historic preservation grants from the state to create and install 10 signs depicting "Colorful Characters and Places" in downtown Ketchikan.

Grateful donor returns cedar bentwood box

Ketchikan Museums recently receive a red cedar bentwood box with an Eagle design made by noted Tlingit carver Nathan Jackson. The donor, Grete Dixon, said that in the 1970s her son visited Ketchikan to sing in a church ensemble and was hosted by Jackson and his wife, Dorica, during his stay. When Grete and her husband Bill later visited Ketchikan, Jackson gave them the box in return for some masonry work at the Jackson home. After more than 40 years the Dixon family decided to send the box back to Ketchikan for the whole community to enjoy.

Grumman Goose "plane tags" celebrate history

Back in 1989 the Tongass Historical Society sponsored the Save-the-Goose project in an effort to restore an amphibious seaplane in Ketchikan. This Grumman Goose was first brought to Ketchikan in 1945 and flew all over Alaska in the service of Ellis Airlines. Hundreds of people participated in the effort to restore the Goose, and the restoration is still ongoing. Tongass Historical Society recently partnered with MotoArt, a company that turns old aircraft parts into functional art and aviation décor, on a new way to commemorate the Goose. They are producing and selling plane tags—aviation mementos made from the skin of retired aircraft, ready to be displayed or to serve as ID tags. A numbered series of 5,000 Goose plane tags will be released, with metal, white, and green variants. They are available at www.planetags.com.

Wax museum created about local characters

Katie Sivertsen's second-grade class from Point Higgins Elementary visited the Tongass Historical Museum this spring on a research trip. Back in the classroom, the students developed characters engaged as boat builders, lumberjacks, pilots, store owners and teachers and created a "wax museum." The students then visited Tongass Historical Museum again dressed as their characters to present their research to family, friends and museum staff.

KODIAK

Food security subject of community-based exhibit

The Kodiak History Museum's temporary exhibit program prioritizes community-based exhibits. The museum evaluates proposals and chooses those whose topic and significance are most relevant to the museum's mission. The museum and community partners create the exhibits together over the course of four meetings, and partners are compensated for their time. A temporary program entitled "Hunt, Fish, Gather, Grow: Exploring Food Security on Kodiak" closed at the end of April. The exhibit, co-curated with partners Bounty Farm and Kodiak Harvest Co-op, centered on food access on a remote island and included information about local production, supply chain interruption and knowledge about food processing and storage. Another temporary exhibit, entitled "Making History, Day by Day: Kodiak, Our Stories, & the COVID-19 Pandemic," will be on exhibit June 10 through August 1.

Remembering when "Crab Was King" in Kodiak

The Kodiak Maritime Museum has a new outdoor exhibit of photographs of people who lived through the town's historic king crab fishery boom from the late 1950s through the early 1980s. Forty 6'x4' images have been printed on aluminum panels and mounted on buildings around Kodiak's harbor where millions of pounds of king crab were once landed. The images are recent photographs of fishermen, processing workers, bartenders, housewives and others holding color photographs of themselves from the king crab era. QR code signage accompanies the images for the viewer to use a cellphone to listen to three-minute oral histories of the people portrayed telling their stories. The project started with an oral history project, "When Crab Was King," broadcast on Kodiak's KMXT radio in 2008. Two years later an exhibit of photographs of many of the participants enhanced by audio recordings from the oral histories was exhibited in Kodiak, Anchorage, Wasilla, and Astoria, Oregon. The exhibit is intended to remain in place around the downtown harbor for at least a year.



Part of the outdoor exhibit featuring photos of people who lived through Kodiak's historic king crab fishery boom. Printed on aluminum panels, the photos appear around the downtown harbor. Photo courtesy Kodiak Maritime Museum.

VALDEZ

Founders memorial in the works

Plans are in the works for a Valdez Founders Memorial, including a trail and a monument circle at the trailhead. The name for the trailhead monument display is Suacit (The People of The Place That Rises Into View), recognizing the Alutiiq-Sugpiak of the region. It also will honor two prominent founders of Valdez, George Cheever Hazelet and Andrew Jackson Meals. John H. Clark with The Port Valdez Company has partnered with the Valdez Native Tribe, the arts and museum communities, outdoor groups and the City of Valdez on the project. Gar LaSalle/Classic Foundry was selected as the designer. The public art project will include three panels with historical text and benches to create a space for visitors to reflect and learn about the rich history of Valdez. The Valdez City Council approved the site location and design last December. Planners now are finalizing an arrangement with the Alaska Community Foundation to secure the last of the funding necessary to construct the exhibit area and manufacture and install the panels.



Designer's rendering of proposed Valdez Founders Memorial site. Image courtesy John H. Clark.

HAINES

Miniature totems help recall 30-foot originals

The Haines Sheldon Museum opened an exhibit of miniature Tlingit art objects in March that runs through May. The miniatures, drawn from the museum's 23,000-item collection, include a variety of small-scale items such as dolls, canoes and totem poles. Many of the objects were made to sell to tourists. In the late 1800s, wealthy European and American tourists began to travel to Southeast Alaska by steamship. A 1905 pamphlet advertised the "Totem Pole Route," on which ships stopped in different villages to see their totem poles. Tourists were often met at the docks by Tlingit women selling baskets and wood carvings. The miniature totem poles were carved for the tourist trade, but some were small replicas of full-size totem poles and are the only surviving record of the originals. The 30-foot originals represented important stories and crests that were owned by clans and houses. The exhibit showcases stories of the known carvers of miniatures and provides the public with an opportunity to learn more about Tlingit adaptations and creativity in the early 1900s, a time of cultural oppression and change.

JUNEAU

New edition of gold mining book set for release

The book *Hard Rock Gold: The Story of the Great Mines That Were the Heartbeat of Juneau, Alaska* is being reprinted. This detailed and fascinating history of Juneau mines was first published in 1980 by Brenda and David Stone. Thanks to the Stones' son Brandon, along with the Gastineau Channel Historical Society and the Treadwell Historic Preservation and Restoration Society, the book will be republished this summer with the goal of having it completed to sell at Gold Rush Days in late June. Find out more at www.juneauhistory.org.

Walking tours feature mining, crime, murder

The Juneau-Douglas City Museum will host Historic Downtown Juneau and Alaska State Capitol walking tours regularly this summer. Once a month there also will be a Treadwell Mines Historic Trail tour, a Death in Douglas True Crime tour, and a Capital Killers True Crime tour. Weekly schedules and more information are at www.juneau.org/museum/walking-tours.

KENAI

Group revitalized after COVID break

The Kenai Peninsula Historical Association has just one thing to say: "We're back!" After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, a meeting was held May 7 in Cooper Landing for the many museum folks to exchange news. Mona Painter hosted the meeting. The group talked about writing a history of the organization. Several members will explore options for digitizing Peninsula newspapers that have been published through the years. The next meeting will be held October 1 at Kasilof and, weather permitting, will include a tour of the Victor Holm Homestead. The meeting ended with a tasty soup, salad and six-dessert lunch.

STATEWIDE

Book remembers conman Archie Ferguson

Archie Ferguson was part of a wealthy family that owned stores, trading posts and a host of other businesses including a hotel, restaurant, sawmill, greenhouse, mink farm and movie theater, many of them north of the Arctic Circle. He was also a conman and a bush pilot. Archie's father, F.R., brought the family to Alaska in 1915, first to Douglas, then Nome, and finally to the village of Shungnak. F.R. managed the store in Shungnak until he was able to buy a store at Kobuk. The Fergusons began to buy and manage stores in other



Archie Ferguson with airplane tool. Photo courtesy Steve Levi.

communities. Archie's brother Warren ran a store at Koutchak Creek, between Shungnak and Kobuk. Archie ran a store in Selawik. Although he was known to cheat people, he was an equal opportunity conman; he was not particular about who he conned. "He would shortchange anyone, white or Inupiat, tourist or sourdough, man or woman," according to Steve Levi, his biographer. See *Archie Ferguson, Alaska's Crown Prince* and "Craziest Pilot in the World" by Steve Levi, published on Amazon, 2021; quoted in the *Alaska Token Collector & Polar Numismatist*.



Benny Benson receives framed flag from Gov. Bill Egan. Alaska State Archives.

Researcher discovers Benny Benson's true age

Several Alaska communities claim Benny Benson, who won a contest to design the Alaska flag in 1927. Born in Chignik, he was placed in the Jesse Lee Home in Unalaska as a young child. When the orphanage moved to Seward, Benson also moved there. In later life, he lived in Kodiak. Dr. Mike Livingston, formerly a cultural heritage specialist for the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, conducted research to obtain more accurate information about Benson's family history. Livingston discovered that Benson was actually 14 when he submitted the flag design, not 13 as is commonly believed (and as Benson himself apparently believed). Birth and baptismal records of a Russian Orthodox priest in Chignik report Benson's birth date as September 12, 1912. The idea that Benson was a year younger seems to have come about in 1940, when he registered to serve in World War II. He had no birth certificate but believed his birthday was October 12, 1913, and was issued a certificate with that date. After a panel reviewed the evidence Livingston brought forward, the State of Alaska has corrected Benson's official birth certificate.

CORRECTION: *We got the name of an island wrong in the February newsletter. Page 9 had a story about the cattle on Umnak Island, in the Aleutians. We called it Unimak Island, but that is another Aleutian island. The cows are on Umnak, which is farther from the mainland.*

Tlingit elder recalls successful lobbying by “Alaskans on the Potomac” in the 1960s

Tlingit elder Irene Rowan of Klukwan and Haines was a national leader in formation and passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Beginning in the 1960s she was active with land claims, working with the Alaska Federation of Natives and then fighting to establish the Klukwan Village Corporation. In 1976 she helped lead a national campaign to enroll Alaska Natives under ANCSA and returned to Washington as a special assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of Interior.

On April 18, 2022, Alaska Historical Society board members Karen Brewster and William Schneider conducted an oral history interview with Rowan, focusing on her efforts in the nation’s capital to pass ANCSA. Her involvement with a group known as “Alaskans on the Potomac” was instrumental in assisting Alaskans traveling to Washington to work on Alaska Native land claims. Here are excerpts from that interview.



Irene Rowan’s move to Washington, D.C., began with Mike Gravel’s U.S. Senate campaign:

“I, at the time, was married and my husband had run the primary campaign for Mike Gravel. Mike Gravel won the general election and asked if we would go back to Washington, D.C., to work with him. So, my husband was given the task of the land claims, as a staff person to Senator Gravel.”

Native and non-Native Alaskans traveled to Washington to testify and meet with legislators to explain Alaska and Alaska Native concerns. Irene recalls the need:

“They really didn’t hardly know anything about Alaska, let alone Alaska Natives, so this was a real eye-opener for many of the senators and congressmen and staff people. We met mostly with staff people. Those people speak a very different language than we do in Alaska; they talked about public law, that type of thing. So, there was a real language



Irene Rowan discusses Native claims with Alaska’s senators. From left: Sam Kito, unidentified man, Sen. Mike Gravel, Irene Rowan, Sen. Ted Stevens and John Borbridge, Jr. This Tundra Times image’s photographer is unknown. Photo number TT.03591. Courtesy Ukpeagvik Iñupiat Corporation and Tuzzy Consortium Library of Utqiagvik.

barrier. But, there was always someone in the group who was very articulate and effective in getting the message across.”

Rowan felt lobbying efforts would be most effective if these groups could get to know and better understand each other, so she facilitated interactions outside of the capital offices.

“We had a number of social gatherings when Alaskans came to Washington, D.C., whether they were Native or non-Native. [Our place] was across the river and was easy for people to come to, so I had some parties. It was fun for these people to get to know one another in a comfortable setting.”

Anna McAlear, from Unalakleet and living in Washington, also was closely involved with Alaskans on the Potomac. As Irene explains:

“We started meeting at her apartment to talk about what we could do to help the people who were coming down, so we organized to have an office at the NCAI (National Congress of American Indians) building. We had people who volunteered for typing and we had people who would

guide them around the city, help them with housing, restaurants and sometimes walk with them to visit senators. Tommy Richards (a journalist with *Tundra Times*) always had interesting reports for our meetings and ideas of what we could do to help. Most of the people who came down had never been out of the state before and were not that familiar with the English language. So Anna and her husband were very good at driving individuals, helping them find their hotel and learn to operate the elevator, the escalator, clothes to wear. And she would laugh and say, ‘Last night so-and-so from Barrow called and said, “Can you come and pick me up, I’m lost”.’ So, they’d get into the car and go and find the person.”



Rowan’s full interview will be available on the Alaska Native Land Claims Project Jukebox at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library (<https://jukebox.uaf.edu/anca>). Karen Brewster is directing the project under a grant from the Alaska State Library.

Help us honor those who promote Alaska history

The Alaska Historical Society is soliciting nominations for awards it annually presents that recognize people and groups who have done a notable project contributing to better understanding Alaska history.

Projects that have been recognized include sign projects, walking tours to see important places in a community, special photo exhibits, recording memories of a significant community event, compiling an anthology, digitizing archival materials, creating a website and commemorating an anniversary.

Please consider nominating individuals and groups for one of the 2022 AHS awards. Nominations are due August 31, 2022.

JAMES H. DUCKER ALASKA HISTORIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD goes to an Alaska resident for publication of significant new material (published in the last 16 months) about Alaska's past. Historian Ducker edited the society's scholarly journal *Alaska History* for 30 years.

ESTHER BILLMAN AWARD is given to a local or state organization for a project contributing to the preservation and understanding of Alaska history. Billman was the long-time curator at the Sheldon Jackson Museum.

EVANGELINE ATWOOD AWARD is given to an individual for significant long-term contributions to Alaska state or local history. Atwood was one of the founders of the Alaska Historical Society.

BARBARA SMITH PATHFINDER AWARD is given for indexing or preparing guides to Alaska historical material. Historian, archivist, and exhibit curator Smith prepared invaluable guides to Alaska Native, Russian Orthodox and Russian American records.

ELVA R. SCOTT LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY AWARD is for a special achievement of a community historical society or museum. Scott was a founder of Homer's Pratt Museum, and after moving to Eagle was newsletter editor, tour guide and official of its historical society.

TERRENCE M. COLE STUDENT AND BEGINNING PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS are cash awards given to help individuals attend the Alaska Historical Society's annual conference. Historian Cole taught at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and led its public history program.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ALASKA HISTORY AWARD recognizes an individual or group that has made a singular and significant recent contribution to Alaska history.

A nomination should have sufficient detail and supporting materials and should be submitted to the AHS Awards Committee by email to members@alaskahistoricalociety.org or by mail to P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, AK 99510.

Nominations for the Ducker Award must include a copy of the publication for the committee's use.

Still time to donate to AHS in 2022

Donations to the Alaska Historical Society are greatly appreciated and help fund our many programs. Alaska residents can make donations to us through Pick.Click.Give, the Permanent Fund Dividend Charitable Contributions Program.

If you have already filed for your 2022 PFD, you can still add a donation through August 31 by visiting the PFD website and accessing your

MyAlaska account. Thank you for your support!



Present your paper at our conference

"Conflicting Visions of Alaska History" is the theme for this year's Alaska Historical Society conference, scheduled for October 6-8 and 13-15.

The conference will take place largely online, with some in-person events in Anchorage.

Papers related to our theme or on any topic related to Alaska history are welcome. Presentations are limited to 20 minutes. All presenters must register for the conference.

To submit a proposal, please email your presentation title, an abstract of no more than 100 words, and two sentences about yourself to Rachel Mason, program chair, at rachel_mason@nps.gov.

Proposals are due June 15, 2022.

AHS seeking new board members

The Alaska Historical Society is seeking qualified and contributing board members to join its 15-member board of directors. Five directors are elected annually to three-year terms (limited to two consecutive terms).

Service is a great way to participate in building a respected and effective statewide organization that promotes Alaska's history. The board usually meet six times a year, now primarily through Zoom.

The directors elect the society's officers, set policy and oversee operations of the organization. Each director is expected to serve on several committees such as membership, publications, newsletter, advocacy, annual meeting program and awards.

Please consider serving on the board or recommending someone to serve. Submit an email with a one-paragraph biography to members@alaskahistoricalociety.org by August 15, 2022.

AN ODDMENT

Rare newspaper confirms killer of Soapy Smith

The recent discovery of a rare 124-year-old newspaper—a complete eight-page issue of the July 9, 1898, *Dyea Trail*—has helped solve a long-running Alaska mystery: Who killed notorious conman Soapy Smith?

On July 8, 1898, when the crime boss died in a gunfight with Frank Reid on a Skagway wharf, authorities determined Reid had fired two shots at Smith from his revolver. Yet the next day, at Smith’s autopsy, three bullet wounds were found on his body. Where did the other bullet come from? The above mentioned Dyea newspaper, which sold on eBay last year, reveals the answer:

“The inquiry on the body of Soapy Smith on Saturday [July 9] brought to light the fact that a man named [Jesse] Murphy had done his best to kill Soapy during the scuffle between the latter and Reid [sic]. He pulled the trigger on his revolver several times unsuccessfully, before he got it to work. Then he shot Smith and hit him twice, but his aid was not needed as Reid had sent a bullet through his breast.”

The day after the shooting, Murphy insisted that it was he, not Reid, who killed Smith, and it required two autopsies on Smith’s body, by two different doctors, to determine that it was Reid’s bullet that did the fatal work. Afterwards, the bullet fragments recovered from Smith’s body were displayed in an office window of the Skagway *Daily Alaskan* newspaper, eliciting much comment and interest.

In the end, the six sworn jurors at the coroner’s inquest did their job faithfully. They listened to eight witnesses, including Murphy; they listened to the two doctors who performed the autopsies; and they viewed Smith’s body. They all came to the same conclusion: Frank Reid killed Soapy Smith.

And as for Jesse Murphy? Perhaps he didn’t want to go down in history as the man who failed to kill Soapy Smith from just feet away, because he disappeared into obscurity. No matter. The scourge of Skagway was dead, and Frank Reid had become the town hero.

—M. J. Kirchhoff

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Email your presentation title, an abstract of no more than 100 words, and two sentences about yourself to rachel_mason@nps.gov

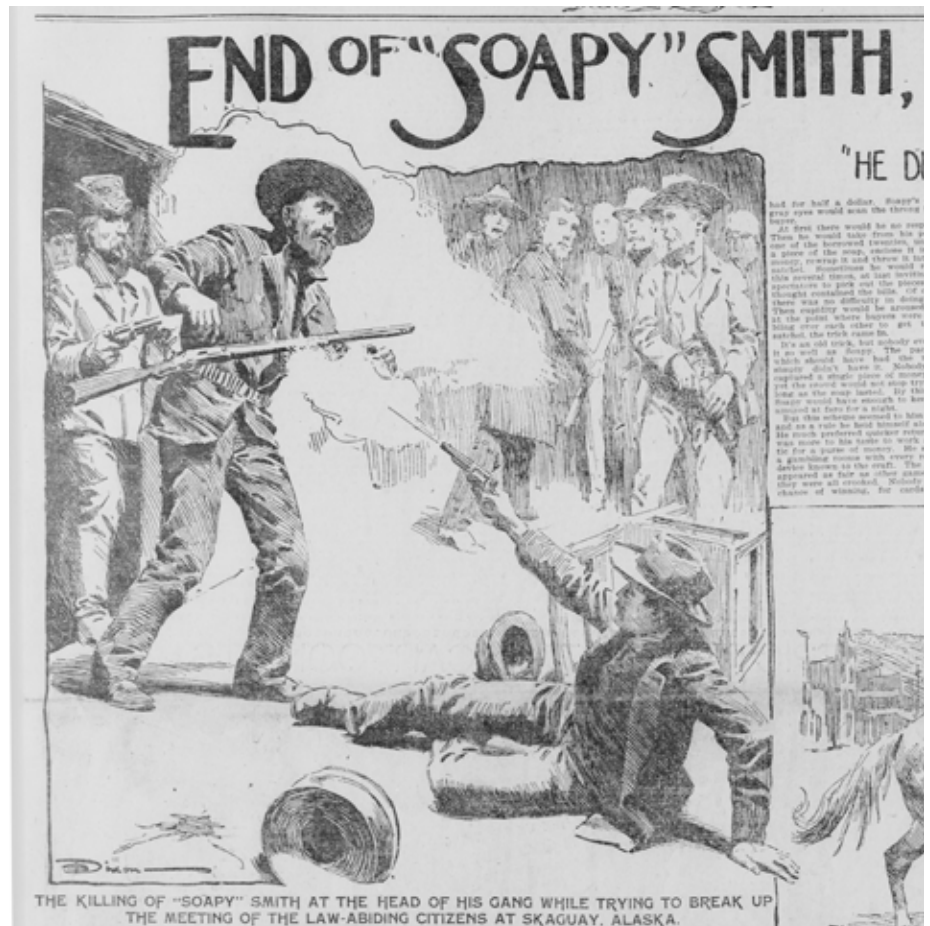


Illustration from the July 24, 1898, San Francisco Call. Courtesy M. J. Kirchhoff.