

ALASKA HISTORY *News*

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CATCHING AN EARLY 20TH CENTURY ALASKA DINNER *This photo from the era 1896-1913 depicts six Black soldiers in Alaska with three halibut. It personifies that while discrimination and racism have been long present in Alaska, so have positive mobilization and movements dedicated to social change. The Alaska Historical Society joined with Alaskans across our state in February to recognize Black History Month. As the celebration of history broadly is under attack in many quarters, the society is working to put our state's history front and center. Photo from William Norton Photo Collection, Alaska State Library (P226-867).*

AHS engages public to elevate civil discourse

Claiming Florida “wants education, not indoctrination,” Gov. Ron DeSantis rejected an advanced placement course in African-American history in his state’s schools. In Virginia, Gov. Glenn Youngkin proposed revising educational standards to remove mention of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and to clarify that the Civil War was fought primarily over states rights, not slavery.

Inside Higher Ed reports that legislators in 42 states have introduced nearly 200 “educational gag order” measures that would ban so-called divisive concepts con-

cerning race, gender, sexuality and U.S. history in classrooms. The *New York Times* published two long articles in a single week about “the dangerous decline of the historical profession,” detailing how the teaching of history in the U.S. is under attack.

It’s rare that controversies over the subject of history dominate the headlines, yet all these developments occurred in just a few-week period in this New Year. Surprisingly, none of the troubling incidents happened in Alaska, where we are never shy about arguing over either our history or current affairs.

In fact, one recent positive note about history comes from our Legislature, where state Senate President Gary Stevens, a 25-year retired University of Alaska professor, introduced legislation (Senate Bill 29) calling for a statewide civics education curriculum.

To strengthen Alaskans’ appreciation of our history and raise the level of our civil discourse, the Alaska Historical Society is engaged in several initiatives. One is a four-part series about major developments in Alaska’s history and their lessons for today.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

"Connections and Disconnections" explores good, bad in Alaska history

The oft-repeated adage: "Laws are like sausages—it is best not to see them being



made," is attributed to 19th century Prussian politician Otto von Bismarck. That notion, that the end result is more palatable than the process, applies to the Alaska Historical Society's current planning

effort for our 2023 annual conference.

After the Covid pandemic forced us for three years to tune in to presentations in the isolation of our home laptops, this fall we're planning to return to in-person sessions with plenty of opportunity for social interaction in a stimulating venue. Our challenge is two-fold: a compelling theme and location.

We've tentatively alighted on a broad theme of "Connections and Disconnections in Alaska History," which we believe speaks to how historic developments have had positive and negative impacts on the territory and state.

With the Alaska Railroad celebrating its centennial this year, this theme allows potential presenters to explore it and other transportation connections—dogsleds, boats, vehicles and airplanes—which have linked Alaskans to one another and to the rest of the world. These modes of transportation enriched investors, attracted new immigrants and assisted resource development, but also tarnished our environment and introduced fresh conflicts with Indigenous Alaskans.

Another example of Alaska connections and disconnections has been our boom-and-bust resource development cycles involving gold, salmon and oil. These projects brought new settlers and aspects of modernity to Alaska, but Alaskans too often have been disconnected from the economic benefits derived from our resources. The success of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act may be helping turn this

model around with Alaska Native corporations generating large revenues which remain in Alaska.

There's no more stark example of disconnection than the practice of separating Alaska Native youth from their families and communities and sending them to boarding schools, resulting in the loss of language, family ties and culture. Yet that experience also enhanced some connections in the form of educational opportunities and relationships created among Native youth which contributed to both political and economic empowerment.

We hope the notion of "Connections and Disconnections" will inspire conference presenters to explore the many other facets of Alaska history, from Russian colonization to today's reemergence of the Cold War, from the perpetual standoff over conservation versus resource extraction to new controversial proposals for development projects. Viewing Alaska's history through the lens of connections and disconnections helps us understand our past and inform discussions and decisions now and in the future.

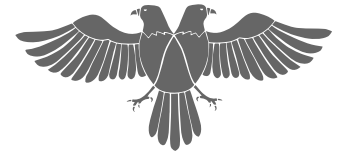
As this newsletter goes to press, the AHS Board of Directors is soliciting venues for the 2023 conference. Our preference is a community on the Alaska Railroad corridor to capitalize on both existing transportation links and ease of access for the many attendees we attract.

Building on the success of Professor Bathsheba Demuth's lecture last October, delivered both live to those in-person in the Anchorage Museum and online, our venue must have adequate bandwidth for similar simultaneous presentations this year.

Before the sausage is encased, we welcome your thoughts on themes, venues and possible guest presenters. Please direct them to our conference planning chair, Rachel Mason (Rachel_Mason@nps.gov) or me (David_Ramseur@msn.com).

Thanks for your continued support of the Alaska Historical Society.

—David Ramseur



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P.O. Box 100299

Anchorage, AK 99510-0299

Phone: 907-276-1596

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Toward civil discourse

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Another is creation of a state commission to oversee Alaska's celebration of the 250th anniversary of America's founding, emphasizing Alaska's contributions to the nation.

The declining history profession

Neither could come too soon. According to Daniel Bessner, Washington state international studies professor, America's historical profession is in "rapid—maybe even terminal—decline." He cites an American Historical Association (AHA) report that found only 27 percent of those who received a doctoral history degree in 2017 were employed as tenure track professors four years later. This comes at a time when U.S. universities are cutting tenured professorships to reduce costs.

At the same time, the number of undergraduate majors in history, humanities and related fields is down more than a third since 2012, to the lowest level since the 1980s. Contributing to the decline are private institutions which traditionally fund up-and-coming scholars in history and related fields. For example, the Social Science Research Council recently ended its international program which funded 1,600 scholars over the past 25 years who studied non-U.S. and Indigenous cultures.

Within the history profession, debate is raging over the relevance of history and divisive issues such as race, gender and political

correctness in historical analysis. The *New York Times* reports that at the January AHA annual conference, the group's president—a distinguished University of Wisconsin expert on the African diaspora—was singled out for criticism when he questioned whether the focus on contemporary social justice historical research amounts to "a predictable sameness" which misses the complexity of the past.

Conversation in Alaska

In Alaska, the AHS is working to put the relevance of our state's history front and center. We're organizing a series of public lectures and panel discussions on key developments in Alaska's history and their lessons for today. We hope to engage both in-state and national experts and make the forums available in-person and online to Alaskans, including students. The working topics include:

- **Can sovereignty and equality co-exist?** The landmark 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was broadly welcomed as the settlement of long-standing Alaska Native land claims. Yet some contend the act extinguished Native sovereignty and raises questions about Native rights to self-government and equality for all.

- **Alaska: the canary in the coal mine for climate change** Many scientists consider Alaska ground zero for the impacts of climate change underway across the world. What do historical records produced in Alaska say about future policies to combat and adapt to our changing climate?

- **The Americanization of Alaska**

Beginning with the 1867 transfer of Alaska from Russia to America, the federal government administered Alaska. Was this "Americanization" positive with new government services or an unwelcome colonization?

- **Can conservation and development benefit each other?**

Since Statehood in 1959, some of Alaska's rich storehouse of resources are being depleted or out of favor to develop. What's the right mix of development versus conservation?

America's 250th birthday

Another AHS initiative is helping Alaskans capitalize on the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a national commemoration beginning on July 4, 2026, and running through 2027. Congress established a U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission and many states are creating their own commissions, but so far not Alaska.

Much of the national celebration activities are focused on the 13 original colonies. Of course, Alaska did not become a state for nearly 200 years after, but we believe this celebration is an opportunity for Alaskans to explore and inform our fellow Americans of Alaska's history in the context of the history of our nation.

This should include our rich and diverse population, how Alaska serves as a gateway for American membership in the Arctic, Alaska's significant role in the Allied victory in World War II, a national leader in recognizing basic civil rights for all, and through an historic land claims settlement, Alaska helped make Alaska Natives among the most powerful Indigenous peoples in the world.

The society has initiated conversations with legislators and the state administration about ways to create an Alaska America250 anniversary commission. We believe Alaska's commemoration events should include new historic research by both students and scholars reflecting on Alaska's vital contributions to the nation.

The society welcomes thoughts from our members on these initiatives. We stand ready to partner with our elected leaders and educators to ensure a robust and meaningful civics education is part of Alaska's education curriculum and accessible to all students. We encourage members to reach out to their legislators and remind them of the value of civics in our schools.

—David Ramsey



FAIRBANKS HISTORY DAY CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY Fifty-four middle and high school students entered projects in the 2023 Fairbanks History Day regional competition in February, with many more participating in their classrooms. Twenty-six community volunteers reviewed and ranked exhibits, papers, documentaries and websites, offering feedback and suggestions on their work. The top three projects in each category advance to the Alaska Historical Society-sponsored statewide online contest in April, with top finishers in that round of competition advancing to the National History Day contest in College Park, Md. Photo by Leanna Prax Williams.

The Alaska Jewish Museum: Small but powerful

Though tiny, the Alaska Jewish Museum (AJM) tells big stories.

“We are not just a repository for files, book, and artifacts,” said curator Leslie Fried. “Our exhibits are stories of people’s experiences in the past and how they resonate with those of the present.”

Formerly a scenic painter for film, theater and TV, Fried completed graduate degrees in library science and museum studies in 2008. She was recruited in 2011 to help develop a museum in Alaska that could be a home for Jewish history, art and culture.

Anchorage’s Chabad community, led by Rabbi Yosef Greenberg, had long planned for the museum. Greenberg told Fried they wanted a museum devoted to the Jewish experience in Alaska rather than to focus on the Holocaust.

“But the experience of the Holocaust has seeped into many different aspects of Jewish life in general,” Fried said, including into most of the museum’s exhibits.

The museum officially opened in August 2013. Operation Magic Carpet, an Alaska Airlines airlift of Yemenite Jews to the new state of Israel in 1948-1950, was the subject of the first in-house exhibit. The first actual AJM exhibit was hosted by the Anchorage Museum and dedicated to photojournalist and humanitarian Ruth Gruber, who was sent as an assistant by the Secretary of Interior to Alaska before Pearl Harbor.

The museum now hosts up to 2,000 visitors annually. Most visit in summer and about one-half are Jewish.

For Alaskans, an eye-opening exhibit documents the Alaska Development Plan. It was designed to bring Jews from Nazi-controlled Europe to settle in the Alaska Territory around 1940, but ultimately failed in Congress.

Part of the exhibit’s power comes from its displayed reproductions of letters housed at the University of Alaska Fairbanks written by European Jews begging to immigrate to Alaska. Fried designed the exhibit to be reminiscent of a ship, with the letters hanging from the ceiling like sails.



Inside the Alaska Development Plan exhibit is a 1933-1945 timeline juxtaposing events of World War II, the Holocaust, Nazi Germany, immigration, and Alaska. Photo by Leslie Fried.

This is a visual and thematic connection between the rejected plan and the fate of Jewish passengers on the Saint Louis, a ship that in 1939 carried Jewish refugees from Germany to Cuba where they were refused entry except for a few whose families were waiting there. They were also turned away from the U.S. and Canada, and ended up back in Europe where hundreds of passengers died in concentration camps.

The museum has a strong online presence. Before the pandemic, it posted a virtual tour to introduce exhibits to an international audience. When Covid closed the museum, Fried created more online content, including “Conversations with the Curator.” Interviews with four Jewish Alaskans—including Vic Fischer, an original signer of the Alaska Constitution and a childhood witness to the rise of Hitler and Stalin—were filmed and posted on the museum’s website.

A new virtual exhibit, about the Alaska Commercial Company and its Jewish founders, will soon be online. Fried was at the 150th gala of the company in 2017 when a letter from founder Lewis Gerstle was read aloud. The letter outlined how staff were to treat customers.

“Basically, it consisted of the three tenants of Judaism: charity, education and social justice,” Fried said.

Fried often takes the museum’s message into the community. She participates in diversity events at Alaska’s military bases, submits a film to the Anchorage International Film Festival and visits classrooms to raise Holocaust awareness.

“I try to make connections with students about some of the things they experience like stereotyping or bullying, behaviors I think we really have to watch in this time of rampant intolerance and turmoil.”

Fried wants to attract more visitors from within Alaska. Comparing traditions such as coming-of-age practices among cultural groups in Alaska is one idea for broadening the museum’s appeal. Because of its tiny size, she tries to limit visitors to no more than about 10 at a time. One dream for the future is adding two new galleries to the museum. A larger dream envisions an entirely new building.

Visit the museum at the Alaska Jewish Campus, 1221 E. 35th Ave. in Anchorage. It is open in winter Sunday-Thursday, 1-6pm, and in summer on Fridays, too. Visit online at www.alaskajewishmuseum.com.

—Carol Gales

Oral historian and anthropologist Will Schneider conceives of big ideas to advance AHS mission

The college-era inspiration of two renowned Arctic specialists may be partially responsible for William Schneider's enormous body of work over more than four decades of researching, recording and interpreting Alaska's history, especially the state's Native heritage.

The young Connecticut native was headed toward an uncertain future with a philosophy degree in 1968 when Richard Preston tickled Schneider's curiosity by introducing him to the Native peoples of the Canadian and Alaskan Arctic. Schneider was so intrigued by anthropology that he earned two graduate degrees in the field and devoted his 31-year career at the University of Alaska Fairbanks to understanding Native history. He also feels indebted to Dr. Frederica de Laguna, a well-known figure in Alaska anthropology studies, for guiding him through his doctorate.

A professor emeritus since 2011, Schneider is one of the Alaska Historical Society's most thoughtful and active board members. Between mushing his dogs in Fairbanks' Goldstream Valley, Schneider recently envisioned and shepherded production of the most comprehensive guide to the landmark Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The 1,200-page research guide, edited by Karen Brewster, identifies most documents in existence about the 1971 federal law.

Now Schneider has conceived of a four-part AHS "critical issues" lecture series designed to demonstrate the role of history to current decision-making. Its goal is to raise the level of civil discourse in Alaska.

After earning a master's in anthropology from Bryn Mawr College, Schneider first visited the tiny northeast Interior village of Beaver. His focus was on the historical interaction between the Inupiat and Athabaskan peoples who lived there in a mixed indigenous culture. He credits local resident Grandma Charlotte Adams for making him welcome and a part of her family. His 1976 doctoral dissertation, *Beaver, Alaska: The Story of a Multi-Ethnic Community*, tells the history of the community through accounts of local residents.

"Our job as historians is to present the whole picture of events so those listening or reading can have a full understanding of what transpired before us and how it may shape us today."

Following five years as a National Park Service researcher on historic sites and subsistence issues in Alaska, he was hired as a UAF professor in 1980. Schneider's focus helped create the university's oral history program, interviewing hundreds of Alaskans and acquiring existing oral history collections. Today the collection includes more than 13,000 individual recordings.

With the help of many, he established UAF's Project Jukebox, the digitization of oral recordings to store, retrieve and play them assisted with photographs, maps and text.

Schneider has authored or edited nine books and scores of articles, primarily on Alaska Native history. His work has received



Professor emeritus Will Schneider trains his dog team in Fairbanks' Goldstream Valley when taking a break from contributing his vision to the Alaska Historical Society board. Photo by Willa Schneider.

numerous awards including both the Fairbanks (1994) and Governor's Alaska Humanist of the Year (2011). He was the 2022 recipient of the AHS's "Beaver Log," a special award selected by the society president for outstanding public service.

Schneider confesses that retirement left him at loose ends, missing the intellectual stimulation and companionship on which he thrived at UAF. He says the AHS became his "lifesaver" by helping fill those professional gaps and a forum to advocate for educating Alaskans about the importance of their history.

Today he is concerned about the state of civil discourse in Alaska and lack of rigorous study of Alaska history. That's why he's working so diligently to pull together a series of panel discussions for consumption by both adult historians and high school students. He's working to engage other civic groups across the state before launching the series this year.

"Our job as historians is to present the whole picture of events so those listening or reading can have a full understanding of what transpired before us and how it may shape us today," Schneider said.

His other challenge is putting more miles on his dog team and himself so they are both in good enough shape to venture off to winter cabin solitude in the White Mountains.

—David Ramseur

ANCHORAGE

Cycling has deep tracks in Alaska history

When did the first bicycle come to Alaska? Could it have been during the Gold Rush, when the “Klondike Bicycle” was hailed as a method of carrying equipment and supplies over ice? Terrence Cole published stories in 1989 about cycling in Alaska during the Gold Rush. Last year, Jessica Cherry and Frank Soos produced an anthology, *Wheels on Ice: Stories of Cycling in Alaska*, which includes Cole’s stories and many others. Cherry, a geoscientist, pilot and writer, spoke in the Cook Inlet Historical Society’s lecture series in January about the social and environmental history behind many of the book’s articles.



*Children in Wales, Alaska, riding a wooden tricycle, 1913-1939. This photo is among many historical cycling photos in *Wheels on Ice: Stories of Cycling in Alaska*. Photo from the Gonda Winkler Collection, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.*

Chugach State Park focus of presentation

The Cook Inlet Historical Society’s February program was a panel discussing Chugach State Park, Anchorage’s “backyard wilderness.” The half-million-acre park was created in 1970. It is the third-largest state park in the United States and gets more than 1.5 million visitors annually. Current Park Superintendent Ben Corwin, past superintendent Pete Panarese, the park’s advisory board chair Ryan Yelle and park planner Monica Alvarez talked about the past, present and future of the park.

PBS Antiques Roadshow coming to Anchorage

The popular Antiques Roadshow will visit Anchorage on July 11, the program’s first visit to the state in the 28 years it has been on the air. Each hour-long program features leading appraisers’ reviews of antiques and collectibles. There will be three programs filmed in Anchorage that will air in 2024, with filming at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. The show has a system for free tickets in advance, with further information on the show’s website. The deadline to enter is March 13. The site has a second-chance application as well, in which an item and a story can be submitted for review. Call 888-762-3749 for more information.

SITKA

New owner recalls long life of the M/V Otter

The Otter is an 83-foot power scow built in 1942 at the Maritime Marine shipyard for use at the Bendickson Cannery along the Nushagak River. Compared to the power scows used by the military, the Otter is built with less wood and has a metal framework. It has a flat bottom with planks running perpendicular to its length. Now owned by Tom Sigmond, it is still in use as a tender, floating shower and laundry facility. Rebecca Poulson interviewed Sigmond in February 2022 about his work on boats, purchase of the Otter, his work with the boat during the pandemic, and the future of Alaska fisheries. Find the full interview, and a short version, at www.sitkamaritime.org.

Historic boathouse rehab underway

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society reports that members and volunteers got much done in 2022 on its major project to rehabilitate the Japonski Island Boathouse, using a grant from the federal Historic Preservation Fund. Ernie Eggleston donated locally sawn wood to repair the timbers at the main opening of the boathouse. Volunteers—even including a group of honors college students from around the country—rebuilt the east wing walls, restored and installed all the windows, and painted siding. As in all historic preservation work, the original materials were retained when possible. Pieces too damaged to reuse were replaced with new material that matched the old.

SMHS’s annual meeting in February included a program called “Scows, Tenders, and Fish Buyers: Pughs, Old Milwaukee, Kalinin Bay and Hole in the Wall, Stories of a Half Century on the Grounds.” Moderated by Eric Jordan, a panel shared stories of remote fish buying in Southeast Alaska from the 1950s to the present. It was followed by audience members telling their stories. For those who don’t know, a pugh, or peugh, is a spike on a pole used to move fish from the fishing boat to the buyer’s boat.

KODIAK

Limited entry fishing topic of lecture

The Kodiak History Museum started “Lectures at KHM” on Feb. 3 with a talk by Toby Sullivan, who discussed limited entry and its impacts on Kodiak’s fishing industry. The lectures are envisioned to discuss and explore important topics and issues in Kodiak’s history and today. Support for the program is from the Kodiak Community Foundation.

TENAKEE SPRINGS

Special Rie Munoz exhibit at museum

The Tenakee Historical Collection and Museum is opening for the summer on April 20 and looking forward to visitors from around the world. Although the ferry schedule has decreased, more small charter vessels visited the town last summer. This summer’s special exhibit will be the second part of the Rie Munoz art exhibit. It will feature her art works from 1990 until the end of her career. For information, visit www.tenakeehistoricalcollection.org.

SOLDOTNA

Dena'ina village site highlighted at talk

At its general membership meeting Feb. 11, Soldotna Museum members listened to anthropologist Adam Dunstan, who teaches at Kenai Peninsula College, speak about the large, unique Dena'ina village site near the campus and the insights that investigations of it provided to understanding Alaska history. A business meeting afterwards included a statistical review of 2022 that noted 1,420 visitors between June and August, 3,309 website visits, 1,300 followers on Facebook and 362 followers in Instagram.

PALMER

Local innkeeper details mine history

The Evan Jones coal mine, also known as the Jonesville Mine, operated in Sutton between 1920 and 1968. Jones came to Alaska in 1917 with his family and served as superintendent of the Doherty Mine on Moose Creek. He then became superintendent of the Eska and Chickaloon coal mines owned by the Alaska Railroad. In 1920 he opened the Evan Jones mine in Sutton with a group of private investors. In the 1930s the high-producing mine had the contract for supplying coal to the railroad, and the railroad transported coal from the Matanuska Valley to other markets. The mine closed in 1968 when the military and Anchorage power plants switched from coal to natural gas. Jim Psenak gave a presentation in January to the Palmer Historical Society about the mine. Psenak is an owner of the Alpine Inn in Sutton, which has hosted the annual Coal Miners Ball for many years, scheduled this year for April 25.

KETCHIKAN

Photographer documents historic wooden boats

Ketchikan Museums partnered with local photographer Brooke Ratzat to document 11 wooden boats still being used around Ketchikan through photographs and oral histories. Ratzat is a former owner of the wooden troller F/V Carol W, and worked in her family's marine welding business and for the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. After creating a list of vessels and researching them, a mix of boats was selected based on age, gear class, history with Ketchikan and connections with the owners. The interviewees talked about the fishing lifestyle, how the industry has changed, and their personal history with fishing. "History Afloat" is an online virtual exhibit and can be viewed at www.ketchikanmuseums.org

Modern blacksmiths forge epic knife

Bifrost Blacksmithing's name comes from Norse mythology. Bifröst is the burning rainbow bridge that connects earth with Asgard, the land of the gods. Since 1992, Jake Bermier has been creating exquisite knives and tools in his Ketchikan shop using local scrap metal such as railroad spikes and trap springs. Last year, Bermier and apprentice Joron Whitton created an epic Ketchikan knife out of locally sourced materials and called it "Pieces of Our

Past." The knife is currently on display in the "Sustaining Community" exhibit at the Tongass Historical Museum.

The knife blade started out as a roller bearing assembly from the M/V Columbia, an Alaska Marine Highway System ferry homeported in Ketchikan since 1974. The bearing was cut in half and hammered flat. The guard material is hull plating from one of the new ferries, M/V Tazlina or M/V Hubbard, after the ships were modified to add side-loading doors. A thick copper spacer below the guard came from the tugboat Achushnet, homeported in Ketchikan. The ship served during World War II prior to becoming part of the U.S. Coast Guard fleet and was retired in 2011. A thinner strip of copper next to the spacer came from the Ketchikan Pulp Company mill which closed in 1997. The handle is antler from a Sitka blacktail deer, a local species. The pommel, the rounded knob at the end of the handle, features a cabochon that is green beach glass found at Mountain Point. The glass was flintknapped and set into a copper bezel from a pipe that came out of the Ketchikan Pulp Company mill. Joron Whitton made the sheath out of cow leather that was hand-stitched and dyed. They also created a custom stand made of cedar and antler.



"Pieces of Our Past" knife produced by local craftsmen. Photo courtesy of Ketchikan Museums.

Historic Tree Point lighthouse remembered

Lighthouses warn mariners of hazards along the coast and guide them to better approaches to land. At the turn of the 20th century, commerce in Alaska waters was rapidly increasing, necessitating the construction of lighthouses to help vessels safely negotiate the rugged coastline. Tree Point Light Station at the entrance to Revillagigedo Channel about 40 miles southwest of Ketchikan opened in 1904. It used a glass lens, originally illuminated by a kerosene vapor lamp, to refract and reflect light into a horizontal beam. The lens rotated once a minute and created a flash every six seconds. At first the lens operated by a clockwork mechanism, but in 1939 the light and rotation were electrified. In 1963 the lens was replaced with a rotating beacon. The original lens is at Ketchikan's Tongass History Museum.

SEWARD

'64 quake helped Seward pave its streets

Paving Seward's city streets was an important part of the Urban Renewal Administration program to rebuild the city after the damages of the 1964 Alaska Earthquake. The Oct. 21, 1965, issue of *Petticoat Gazette*, reprinted in the Resurrection Bay Historical Society's January newsletter, had a story about the paving getting underway. Before the earthquake, none of the city was paved. The project not only paved the downtown and residential areas, but added about four miles of paved road to give access to the harbor. The boat harbor was considered essential to growth of the tourist industry in the rebuilt city.

METLAKATLA

NPR highlights new local archives

Metlakatla, on the extreme south end of the Southeast Alaska panhandle, is the only Indian Reservation in Alaska. It was founded in 1887 by Anglican missionary William Duncan, who brought a group of Tsimshian people from Canada to create a new community. Since its beginning, Metlakatla has been cut off from traditional language and culture, and its residents have struggled to maintain connections with their own or other Indigenous groups.

Now, according to a Feb. 13 National Public Radio story by Raegan Miller, Metlakatla residents have launched the Annette Island Reserve Historical Archive, to be housed at Metlakatla High School. The Metlakatla Indian Association contracted with an archivist, Caitlin Steinberg, to develop the archive for photos, recordings and transcripts of interviews with Metlakatla elders and families, and other historical documents.

The archive is for the whole community but is to have a special emphasis on transfer of knowledge to the young people. High school students will interview and gather photos from their parents, grandparents and other Metlakatla elders. A "Coffee with Elders" program for informal meetings between youth and elders has started. As the archive becomes established, Steinberg will train and mentor a local resident to be the lead archivist.



Metlakatla School in 1915. Photo from National Archives and Records Administration, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

ANCHORAGE

Fourth Avenue Theatre gone forever

Those of us who lived in Anchorage in the early 1980s remember going to movies at the luxurious Fourth Avenue Theatre. Opened in 1947, the iconic historic building has not been used as a theater for almost 40 years. After a long, hard-fought struggle to preserve the iconic historic building and many years on the list of 10 most endangered properties, the Fourth Avenue Theatre has finally been destroyed. Sadly, much of the unique décor created especially for the theater was not salvaged. Gold leaf ceiling decorations, rosewood panel walls, mahogany planks and leaded glass mirrors all went to the landfill.



Fourth Avenue Theatre with demolition underway. Photo by Darrel Hess.

JUNEAU

Peratrovich civil rights legacy celebrated

The Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp 70 and the Juneau-Douglas City Museum celebrated Elizabeth Peratrovich Day Feb. 16. The day recognizes Peratrovich, who spoke to the Alaska Territorial Senate about racism and injustice, on the day Alaska's Equal Right Act was signed into law. The museum aired the film *For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska*, and offered a scavenger hunt to find information about Peratrovich throughout the museum; copies of *Sisterhood: The History of Camp 2 of the Alaska Native Sisterhood*; and a drawing for an Elizabeth Peratrovich dollar coin.

Help wanted at Last Chance Mining Museum

The Last Chance Mining Museum, operated by the Gastineau Channel Historical Society, is located just outside downtown Juneau above Gold Creek. The museum is in the Compressor Building, one of the last remaining original buildings of the former gold mining camp. The camp was established by the Alaska Juneau Gold Mining Company in the early 1910s and was operated until 1944. The GCHS is looking for volunteers to staff the museum during the visitor season, typically from mid-May until mid-September. Those interested please email juneauhistory@gmail.com.

Opportunity to help clean up communities

The William G. Pomeroy Foundation, based in Syracuse, N.Y., is asking Alaskans to participate in National Historic Marker Day 2023, a volunteer community service event, scheduled for April 28, 2023. The annual event started in 2021, and last year nearly 400 people from classrooms and civic groups, neighborhoods and families in 35 states participated.

The organization's website, www.wgpfoundation.org, has registration information, a volunteer kit (that includes student lesson plans), and information about participant benefits. Participation would complement National Historic Preservation Month which is in May, and serve as a suitable addition to the cleanup days many Alaska communities hold each spring.

Help compile historic properties list

Preservation Alaska is compiling its annual Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties in Alaska list. The list includes properties that need restoration or are threatened from natural disasters or human actions. The organization has helped preserve places on the list through small grants that help leverage funding from other sources. The nomination form is at www.alaskapreservation.org and needs to be submitted by April 10.

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA

Choss loved or hated in the watershed?

Before European settlers arrived, the Indigenous people who lived and traveled in Alaska had names for the mountains, lakes, rivers and trails that formed the landscape. Settlers gave different names to these features and landmarks. The Choss Lore project seeks to collect all official and unofficial geographic names between the Susitna and Copper rivers, unearth the stories behind them, and celebrate the history of human interaction with this small part of the world. The name "Choss Lore" comes from the abundance of choss—a brittle, low-quality rock known for crumbling—in the Susitna and Copper watersheds. According to the project's website, nobody is expected to love choss, yet the term is used affectionately by local mountaineers who take fierce pride in their challenging and "substandard" home ranges. Choss Lore is a self-deprecating name chosen to indicate a devotion to these lands. Local historian Gerrit Verbeek presented findings of the Choss Lore project to date at the Palmer Historical Society's February History Night.

HAINES

125th anniversary of shipwreck marked

The Eldred Rock Lighthouse Preservation Association and Sheldon Museum have produced a new exhibit, "A Mystery Lies Beneath the Waves: Legend of the Clara Nevada." The ship left Skagway, reportedly with 160 passengers, 40 crew, Klondike

gold—perhaps as much as 800 pounds—and possibly an illegal load of dynamite. The schooner ran aground on an uncharted rock just north of Eldred Rock Island, about 35 miles south of Skagway, on Feb. 5, 1898. Only one body was ever recovered.

There were reports at later dates of some survivors. Part of the mystery is whether the incident was an accident or a robbery gone wrong. Another mystery is whether there's still gold left in Lynn Canal, though many searches have yet to find it. The shipwreck led to the establishment of Eldred Rock Lighthouse, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, which the preservation group is restoring.

During the exhibit's opening weekend, the Lynn Canal Community Players read a play written by Dan Henry and Pam Randles in 2001, "The Strange Fate of the Clara Nevada." It was broadcast on Haines radio station KHNS. The exhibit includes part of the ship's helm, a porthole, a brass siding piece and a model of the lighthouse. The exhibit will be on display until April.

The preservation group hopes to open the lighthouse for public tours and rentals in 2025. More information, including how to get involved with restoration through volunteering or membership, is at www.eldredrocklighthouse.org/history-eldred-rock.



Sue York, Eldred Rock Lighthouse Preservation Association executive director, and board members Justin Fantasia and Jonathan Wood examine a broken door at the lighthouse in April 2019. Photo by Alex McCarthy, Juneau Empire.

FROM CANADA

Yukon By Yukoners share local history

Yukon's heritage sector conference, *Yukon By Yukoners*, came together in a new way in October 2022 after two years of pandemic-induced separation. The hybrid conference was held in multiple communities to celebrate the work that Yukoners are doing to study, conserve and share their culture and history. The three in-person venues were Whitehorse, Dawson City and Tagish, and online attendees were connected via Zoom. In addition to the live conference sessions, two pre-recorded sessions were shot on location in Fort Selkirk and Watson Lake. The conference included an evening of storytelling featuring a wide range of speakers, many of whom would not consider themselves part of the "heritage sector," who shared their experiences and perspectives as Yukoners.

—Rachel Mason and Jo Antonson

AN ODDMENT

The brief rise and dramatic fall of Fishwheel, Alaska

On Oct. 12, 1949, a Fort Yukon trapper named Clifton Carroll pulled his fishwheel out of the Yukon River for winter storage and found several shiny fragments in the frozen muck on the axle. Closer examination revealed them to be gold nuggets “as big as peas”—there weren’t many, but maybe they signaled a fortune was nearby. Carroll kept this news secret for a few days, but it leaked when he sent the gold away for assaying.

At that point, Fort Yukon locals brought the news to Fairbanks where Jack Daum, a reporter for the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, began writing stories that spread via the Associated Press across the country. The headline “Gold!” caught the attention of many Alaskans who dreamed of a second Klondike.

Describing gold-seekers rushing to what they called Discovery Island, near where the nuggets were found 22 miles upriver from Fort Yukon, Daum wrote, “On one occasion I counted eight planes on the ground and five in the air waiting to land.” He also announced that the blossoming tent city along Yukon River beaches would be called “Fishwheel.”

Within days the camp had close to 200 inhabitants, a clothing store, and a coffee shop that served donuts and sandwiches. “Here on the edge of the Arctic Circle are gathered a group of bearded, agile men wearing lumberjack boots, coonskin caps and representing every profession from air plane pilot to tile setter,” Daum wrote. “They are bound together by the common hope of quick easy riches.”

But gold fever cooled as the new arrivals spent their first nights in subzero temperatures and heard the verdict from the assayers at the University of Alaska—Carroll’s sample included three gold nuggets, worth about \$2, and one piece of brass.

Grumbling began immediately, along with hasty departures. Had the ground been “salted” to spark a stampede? Was the whole thing a hoax promoted by



pilots and roadhouse owners hoping to profit from a boom? Daum, who had staked his own mining claims, reported by radio from Fishwheel that “arguments and near fistfights flared along the Yukon yesterday and Wednesday.” In the same story, a Fairbanks plumbing shop owner was quoted saying, “Why, there’s more gold in my mouth than has been found at Fishwheel.”

By Oct. 28, just 16 days after the gold discovery, ice forming in the Yukon River caused floods that submerged Fishwheel under six feet of water and forced the 50 remaining residents to retreat to higher ground.

Days later, the story of the short-lived stampede appeared in *Time* magazine and Alaska’s Department of Mines

Above: A postcard showing the “original nuggets found in Fishwheel discovery.” Left: A press photograph taken Oct. 24, 1949, showing (l-r) Solomon Flitt, Joe Hirst and Sam Gamblin of Fort Yukon at the Fishwheel gold camp. Photos courtesy of Chris Allan.

issued a report stating that “all mining engineers regard the reported strike as fantastic.” The report also explained that rumor-mongering and outright lies had made their research difficult, concluding, “Many important phases of the affair have been so obscured and complicated by practical jokes and other equally unfortunate factors, that they will remain forever the subject of speculation.”

To view press footage of the stampede from the UAF Film Archives, search YouTube for Yukon River Fishwheel Stampede #1 and #2.

—Chris Allan



Sources: Jack Daum, “Fishwheel! Mushrooming in Gold Strike,” *Nome Nugget*, Oct. 24, 1949; “Hoax! Cry No Remedy for Gold Fever,” *Spokane Chronicle*, Oct. 27, 1949; and Arthur E. Glover, “Investigation of the Reported Gold Discovery at ‘Fishwheel,’ Alaska,” Alaska Department of Mines, College, Alaska, 1949.

Accepting scholarship applications for 2023 AHS conference

Students or those starting a career in public history and interested in Alaska history can apply for a scholarship from the Alaska Historical Society to attend the organization's annual meeting and conference, Oct. 4-7, 2023. Awards include travel costs (or an honorarium if the meeting is virtual) and a conference registration package.

Applicants must be an upper division undergraduate or graduate student with a course of study related to Alaska history. Beginning professionals must be engaged in Alaska history or cultural studies work and have been so employed fewer than five years.

Applicants are expected to attend the entire meeting and make a presentation. If interested, please submit: 1) a letter with a statement of eligibility and an explanation of how attending the meeting will enhance your academic or professional development, 2) a title and abstract of proposed presentation, and 3) a résumé.

The application deadline is May 31. Electronic submission is preferred. Applications should be submitted to members@alaskahistoricalociety.org or via regular mail to AHS Awards, P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, AK 99510.

Fishwheel souvenir available through AHS

The Alaska Historical Society is offering members (first come, first served) envelopes created by "A.L. & Mike Lintner," postmarked Oct. 27, 1949, and printed with a picture of Clifton Carroll's fishwheel. The text says, "Original Commemorative Envelope—Fishwheel Gold Strike, October 1949." If you are interested in one (or more than one!), please send your request to Alaska Historical Society, P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, AK, 99510-0299 or to members@alaskahistoricalociety.org.



Advocacy panel welcomes civics ed bill, tracking funding for state historical efforts

Tracking budgets and legislation in the Alaska Legislature will be a priority of the Alaska Historical Society's Advocacy Committee in the coming months as a new committee chair takes the helm. New AHS board member Molly McCammon, a long-time Alaska journalist, political advisor and clean oceans advocate, assumed leadership of the committee this fall.

The committee will be following Senator Gary Stevens' Senate Bill 29, promoting civics education in high schools and establishing an Alaska Civics Education Commission, as well as budgets for the Alaska historic preser-

vation program and historical commission, state museums and archives and University of Alaska history programs and archives.

The committee hopes to meet soon with new Municipality of Anchorage librarian Virginia McClure to advocate for continued support for an Alaska Room at the Loussac Library. Members also are seeking an audience with newly elected Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom, who chairs the Alaska Historical Commission, to urge creation of a state commission to oversee Alaska's celebration of the 250th U.S. anniversary.

—Molly McCammon

Grant eases access to history materials

Accessing primary source documentation of Alaska history just got easier recently with two new projects online and a grant to expand government document access through the Alaska Library Catalog.

Guide to Sources for the Study of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, a three-volume set in fully searchable PDF format, is available on the Alaska Historical Society website at www.tinyurl.com/AHS-ANCSA and through Scholarworks at www.tinyurl.com/Scholar-ANCSA.

This important contribution to the history of Alaska Native studies includes archival sources, a bibliography, and a teaching resource.

Another new resource, dubbed "cuttlefish recordings," is now available to listen to via the University of Alaska library catalog at www.tinyurl.com/cuttlefish-1 and

on the Digital Repository website at www.tinyurl.com/cuttlefish-2.

Produced by Unalaska City School history teacher Ray Hudson, these 55 recordings document Unanga history and culture through discussions with elders, songs, speeches, narratives of World War II experiences and Russian Orthodox services.

Alaska Resources Library and Information Services (ARLIS) recently announced a new grant-funded project, *Extending Electronic Access to Alaska's Heritage: Providing Digital Access to Government Materials on the Natural and Cultural Resources of Alaska, the Arctic, and Northern Regions*. It will make electronic documents integral to Alaska's natural and cultural heritage widely available through the Alaska Library Catalog.

—J. Penelope Goforth

Nome teacher named to AHS board

Nome high school teacher Mike Hoyt, with roots in both the Tlingit and Iñupiaq cultures, has been appointed to a vacancy on the Alaska Historical Society Board of Directors. Hoyt is in his third year teaching in Nome, having previously taught in Juneau.

On his Iñupiaq side, his great-great grandmother is from Diomedé but moved to Deering when she married. Hoyt's Tlingit names are Aak'wtaatseen and Gashx, and he is from the Teeyhitaaan clan from Wrangell.

Hoyt lived in Oregon, Washington and Southeast Alaska before moving to Nome in 2018. In his social studies and language classes, he has students explore what is knowledge, how stories told reflect one's understanding of the world, and how studying history is a way to look at challenges people have faced and overcome.

He also was a panelist in "Teaching ANCSA at 50," a session at last year's AHS conference.



Alaska residents, when you file for your Permanent Fund Dividend please consider donating to the Alaska Historical Society through the Pick.Click.Give. program. The society dedicates the money raised to the scholarships it awards every year to students and beginning professionals to attend and participate in the annual AHS conference. Advance thank you to our supporters!

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Alaska as “air crossroads” means balloon espionage nothing new for our skies

The recent arrival of a Chinese balloon (or balloons, plural?) over the United States seemed to surprise many people. After all, it’s rather low-tech for an espionage operation, if that’s what it was actually for. Moreover, an unmanned balloon’s flight cannot be controlled once released. Why launch one when you have no idea whether it will accomplish its mission? Perplexing, indeed.

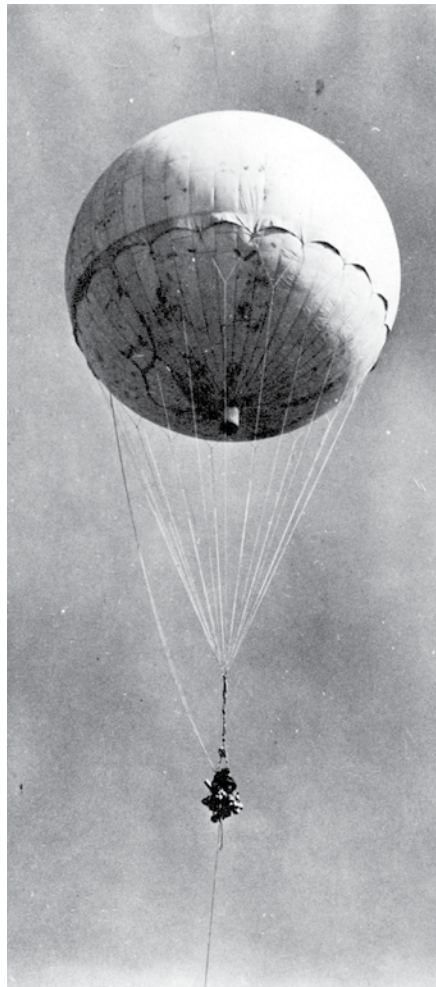
And yet, historians know there are antecedents for just about everything. We’re rarely truly surprised.

The use of balloons for espionage and warfare goes back to the very invention of lighter-than-air lanterns by the Chinese in the 3rd century AD. In the western world, manned balloons were first used for military purposes in the French Revolution. In the U.S. Civil War, both the Union and the Confederacy sent tethered balloons aloft to observe enemy positions.

Here in Alaska, roughly three dozen Japanese balloons armed with explosives arrived during World War II. The balloons landed across the territory, from the Aleutians to the Yukon Flats. As I described in *Fu-Go*, my 2014 book on the Japanese offensive, many of the devices were tracked and recovered by the Alaska Territorial Guard.

That the Chinese balloon drifted over Alaska while a second object was shot down off the Arctic coast demonstrates again that our position as the “air crossroads of the world” has multiple meanings.

—Ross Coen



Japanese fire balloon of mulberry paper reinflated at Moffett Field, CA, after it had been shot down by a Navy aircraft January 10, 1945. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

Be a judge for Alaska History Day

What is National History Day?

It is the Alaska statewide contest for National History Day. NHD is a year-long academic program focused on historical research, interpretation and creative expression for students in grades 6-12.

When is it? Judging for Alaska History Day will be April 3-10, with results announced April 14, 2023.

Who can be a judge? You! We are looking for educators, historians, librarians, and others interested in serving as judges for our contest, which is online. You need not be an expert in a topic to be a judge.

Why be a judge? This is an excellent way to help students gain crucial skills: problem solving, critical thinking, research and reading skills, self-confidence, and more.

What does an AHD judge do?

After orientation you will review student projects and offer constructive feedback, then work with fellow judges to rank entries.

Sign up! Fill out the judges’ information form at www.tinyurl.com/AHDjudge. You will also need to register as a judge at <https://ak.nhd.org/> to gain access to student entries. Then watch for emails with updates and scheduling!