

# Alaska History News

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## Diverse topics well received at conference

About three dozen presentations on Alaska history ranging from the treatment of Alaska flag designer Benny Benson to the impacts of environmental change were delivered during the Alaska Historical Society's annual conference in October. With enormous assistance from the Kenai Peninsula Historical Association, the conference was the first large face-to-face gathering of the society since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Up to 80 people attended all three days in person, with another 40 coming for Saturday's "Kenai Peninsula Day" and up to 35 tuning in via Zoom. The main conference site at the Kenai Peninsula College was spacious and well equipped, coffee breaks hosted by local historical societies allowed ample opportunity for casual discussion, and local public officials who welcomed attendees were gracious and informative.

Keynote speaker Diane Hirshberg, director of the University of Alaska's Institute of Social and Economic Research, delivered a compelling presentation about the history of Alaska's education system especially as it affected Native peoples. Many Alaska Natives suffered multi-generational trauma from early forms of educational discrimination, she said.

For decades after America's purchase of Alaska from Russia, Native children could only attend separate, inferior schools. That poor treatment continued under 19th-century boarding schools in which many Natives were forced to leave their communities and abandon their language and culture. Hirshberg said centuries of misguided educational policy toward Alaska Natives continues to have consequences today.

This year's conference theme, "Connections and Disconnections in Alaska History," spoke to historical processes that have created wealth and opportunity for many



Keynote speaker Diane Hirshberg helped focus the conference on the history of Alaska's education system, especially as it affected Native peoples.

Above: An early 20th century view of the Native school at Golovin. Photo courtesy Alaska State Library, Dr. Daniel S. Neuman. Photographs, 1911-1920, ASL-PCA-307. Left: A bulletin board display in a hallway at the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School in Anchorage. Photo by Diane Hirshberg.

while causing profound losses of lands and livelihoods for others.

As part of the program, Anne Coray and Steve Kahn showed their just-completed film, *Rebuilding Brown*, a project the AHS assisted and promoted. It tells the life of Brown Carlson, one of the first settlers around Lake Clark, and documents Anne and Steve's challenging undertaking to restore his cabin.

The AHS is now seeking possible venues for its 2024 conference. Any Alaska community or historical organization interested in working with the society to host next year's conference, please email conference coordinator Rachel Mason at [Rachel\\_mason@nps.gov](mailto:Rachel_mason@nps.gov). Suggestions of themes and possible speakers and panels also are invited.

—Rachel Mason,  
Conference Committee Chair

# Legacy of Alaska founder Vic Fischer underscores value of civic discourse

Among the many unique appeals to life in Alaska is meeting in-person those who helped found our state. Sadly, the



opportunity to meet the last living author of the Alaska Constitution passed a few weeks ago with the death of Vic Fischer, just seven months short of his 100th birthday.

Elected a Constitutional Convention delegate in 1955 at age 31, Vic may best be remembered for helping produce what's broadly considered the nation's best state constitution. Yet this renaissance Alaskan accomplished so much more: establishing our university's Institute of Social and Economic Research think tank; helping unify the city and borough of Anchorage; sponsoring progressive state laws from abolition of the death penalty to construction of women's shelters; and demonstrating the value of productive civic discourse.

One of my most cherished memories of Vic was hanging with him in Russia, buck-naked.

The son of an American foreign correspondent and Russian linguist, Vic spent part of his childhood in Stalinist Russia. Half a century later as Mikhail Gorbachev opened up the Soviet Union, Vic was among the first Alaskans to step foot in the Russian Far East after four decades of prohibited contact.

Appointed in 1989 to head up the University of Alaska's Soviet affairs office, Vic began an average of 10 trips a year to Russia, where he discovered grim conditions in the isolated Chukotka region just 55 miles across the Bering Strait from Alaska. Life was especially disastrous for Russian Natives, many teetering on the edge of survival.

Vic dedicated himself to improving their lives. He formed an unlikely alliance with U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens and together they funneled more than \$26 million through Alaska to support economic, cul-

tural and educational projects in Russia over nearly 20 years.

After visiting the Soviet Union several times as press secretary to Gov. Steve Cooper, I was bit by the Russia bug around the same time. Over the next two decades I lived in and traveled to Russia more than a dozen times, sometimes overlapping with Vic.

Once after a long day of meetings in the remote Far East community of Yakutsk, I joined Vic in the local custom of retreating to a "banya" with our Russian counterparts. For much of the night we circulated between a steam room so hot it felt like your lungs would ignite to a teeth-chattering ice bath, hydrated with cold vodka and warm beer.

In nothing but our birthday suits, we swapped stories of lives in our respective countries and established friendships that transcend international politics and continue today.

For the better part of a century, Vic witnessed Russia's evolution: Stalinist purges, World War II, the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR and Putin's police state, and foreign invasions. Vic's advice I remember best was: "regardless of how bad it gets, keeping talking."

As the Alaska Historical Society continues its work to improve Alaska's civic discourse in an environment of the often-willful distortion of history, I can think of no better wisdom.



I'm honored to have been elected by the board to a third one-year term as the society's president, along with these other new officers: Kaila Pfister, vice president; Patricia Partnow, treasurer; and Angie Schmidt, secretary.

Our priority list for the coming year is ambitious, including: continuing our efforts to improve Alaska's civic discourse; redesign of the AHS website; stronger efforts to recruit and retain board members; another successful in-person fall conference to learn from each other; continued support of Alaska History Day; and planning for AHS's contributions to commemorating the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding.

As always, we welcome your participation with the Alaska Historical Society.

—David Ramseur



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Native sovereignty and how it affects Alaska development and Native rights was the topic of the Alaska Historical Society's first critical issues lecture. It was moderated by Will Schneider (left), and included Alex Cleghorn, Rosita Kaaháni Worl and David Case. Photo by Jim Magdanz.

## Sovereignty and “Americanization” focus of critical issues lecture series

Two major public policy issues facing Alaska—Native sovereignty and the “Americanization” of Alaska—were the subjects of two Alaska Historical Society-sponsored lectures over the past month.

Three leading experts in Native law debated the often contentious subject of Native sovereignty on Oct. 19, moderated by AHS board member Will Schneider. A month later, on Nov. 16, three experts in Alaska history discussed the contradictory relationship between Alaskans and the federal government, moderated by University of Alaska Anchorage history department chair Ian Hartman.

Both sessions were held at the Anchorage Museum in partnership with the Cook Inlet Historical Society and with financial support from the Atwood Foundation.

The Critical Issues Lecture Series was launched as part of the society's effort to raise the level of public discourse in Alaska by focusing on a fact-based understanding of history.

Native sovereignty is widely misunderstood and debated in Alaska, with far-reaching implications over such issues as subsistence and resource development. The experts who debated included Alex

Cleghorn, attorney and Alaska Native Justice Center chief operating officer; legal scholar and author David S. Case; and Tlingit scholar and anthropologist Rosita Kaaháni Worl.

The three recapped the long history of sovereignty and arguments over what it means for Alaska Native self-government and management of public services such as health care and law enforcement.

The issue of the Americanization of Alaska was discussed by Ross Coen, a lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Washington; Mary Ehrlander, emeritus professor of history at the University of Alaska Fairbanks; and Charles Wohlforth, a former *Anchorage Daily News* reporter and author of books about Alaska, science, history and the environment.

They considered Alaska's love-hate relationship with the federal government. On one hand, Alaskans complain broadly about federal overreach and barriers to development, yet Alaska is more reliant on federal dollars to boost the state's economy than any other state. The panel pointed out that Alaskans are fiercely protective of the Permanent Fund dividend while Alaska oil development is on a downhill

### Future lectures

#### Conservation and Development Can Co-exist: Historic Examples

**LECTURE**

March 21, 2024 • 7 p.m.

**FOLLOWUP EXCHANGE**

March 25, 2024 • 4 p.m.

#### Alaska: The Canary in the Coalmine for Climate Change

**LECTURE**

April 18, 2024 • 7 p.m.

**FOLLOWUP EXCHANGE**

April 22, 2024 • 4 p.m.

slide. Today, a growing number of Alaskans favor preserving the state's wilderness, which is attractive to residents and visitors alike.

All the lectures are being followed by an online session the Monday after the program, hosted by OLE, an Anchorage nonprofit group which offers education classes.

—David Ramsey

# Society recognizes 15 Alaskans, groups for outstanding contributions to history

Two prominent Anchorage historians who wrote the ground-breaking book, *Black Lives in Alaska: A History of African Americans in the Far Northwest*, were named historians of the year by the Alaska Historical Society at the society's conference banquet in Kenai on Oct. 7.

University of Alaska Anchorage history professor **Ian C. Hartman** and public historian and *Anchorage Daily News* columnist **David Reamer** were awarded the **JAMES H. DUCKER HISTORIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD**. It is named for longtime Alaska historian James Ducker, who served for 30 years as editor of the society's journal, *Alaska History*.

The book, published by University of Washington Press, opens with little-known accounts of Black whalers and fugitives from slavery who came to Alaska in the mid-1800s. It details Blacks in Alaska's gold rushes and their service in Alaska with the military during World War II and the Cold War, and discusses the racial mistreatment Blacks encountered in Alaska and their actions to achieve their civil rights.

The authors involved many Blacks who live and work in Alaska today. The society said the work is well and carefully documented and details important but little-known historical developments in Alaska. The award carries a \$500 cash prize.

Other awards announced at the AHS annual conference include:

**THE ESTHER BILLMAN AWARD** The **Anchorage Park Foundation** and the **Native Village of Eklutna**, with special recognition of **Aaron Leggett**, won the Esther Billman Award for the Anchorage Indigenous Place Names Project. The partnership project started in 2018 to install markers throughout the Municipality of Anchorage to acknowledge the Indigenous names for geographic places. The most recent is "Nuch'ishtunt"—the place protected from the wind—installed at Point Woronzof. Other markers have been installed at Potter Marsh, Westchester Lagoon, Muldoon Park and the mouth of Ship Creek.

The project could not have been possible without Aaron Leggett's leadership. Leggett is curator of history at the Anchor-



**Ian Hartman (top photo) and David Reamer** were honored with the 2023 James H. Ducker Historian of the Year Award.

age Museum and president of the Native Village of Eklutna.

Billman was the longtime curator of the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka. The award recognizes a society, museum, government agency or organization for a project contributing to Alaska history during the past year.

**THE EVANGELINE ATWOOD AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE** Seward historian, author and columnist **Doug Capra** was awarded the Evangeline Atwood Award for Excellence for his books, plays, articles and newspaper columns that contribute to documenting and interpreting the history of Seward and the eastern Kenai Peninsula.

The award remembers a founder of the Alaska Historical Society who wrote, supported and advocated for Alaska history from the 1940s into the 1990s. Capra taught history at Seward High School and worked as an interpreter at Kenai Fjords National Park.

**THE ELVA SCOTT LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY AWARD** The **Alaska Jewish Museum** was awarded the Elva Scott Local Historical Society Award for its virtual exhibit, *From Purchase to Prosperity: The Jewish Founders of the Alaska Commercial Company*, co-curated by Leslie Fried and J. Penelope Goforth.

Scott was a founder of Homer's Natural History Society and Pratt Museum, and after moving to Eagle was newsletter editor, tour guide and officer of its historical society. The award recognizes a historical society or museum for its programs, newsletter, publication or a significant recent accomplishment.

The Jewish Museum exhibit looks at Alaska's history through West Coast risk-taking Jewish businessmen who engaged in commerce following the departure of the Russians and established a company that still operates in Alaska today. The exhibit tackles the complicated relationship between Western commercial enterprise and diverse Native peoples and the impact of colonialism on them.

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS TO ALASKA HISTORY AWARD** The society made four Contributions to Alaska History Awards, which recognize individuals and groups for projects, publications and other efforts that have significantly promoted and added to understanding Alaska history.

- **Ketchikan Museums** was recognized for its newsletter and website's Artifact of the Month column. The feature is a highlight of the quarterly email newsletter from the Tongass Historical Museum and Totem Heritage Center. Each Artifact of the Month has a photo of an object used in Ketchikan, often related to a current exhibit, and a story about how it was used.

- Fairbanks historians **Leanna Prax Williams** and **Rebecca Heaton** received the award for coordinating and advocating for Alaska History Day. The program, in partnership with National History Day, has promoted learning and applying historical skills to Alaska students for over 30 years. Williams and Heaton, who worked with the Fairbanks History Fair for more

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## 2023 AHS awards

*Continued from page 4*

than five years, stepped up to undertake coordinating the state competition. Entries nearly doubled this year and at least 800 students participated in some way.

• Anchorage educator **Alice Tower Knapp** received a Contributions to Alaska History Award for her book, *On Track!: The Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage*. A retired school librarian and lifelong Nordic skier, Knapp spent her COVID-19 years going through scrapbooks, newsletters, photographs and administrative records of Anchorage's Nordic ski association that started in 1964. She details early races and hosting national competitions, the popular backcountry and Junior Nordic programs, the growth of ski jumping and biathlon programs, and various club events.

• Fairbanks historian **Chris Allan** was recognized for a long list of significant contributions to the AHS over the past two decades. His contributions include writing 14 engaging articles that have been published in the journal *Alaska History*, authoring the regular oddments in our newsletter, generously providing content for our website including eight Eyewitness Series booklets that showcase voices of the past, finding beaver logs and making auction donations.

Allan served two terms on the AHS Board of Directors, was president for two years, oversaw a redesign of the website, and is frequently called on to answer obscure inquiries. He works for the National Park Service as historian for Gates of the Arctic and Yukon-Charley Rivers parks and preserves.

**THE MORGAN AND JEANNE SHERWOOD AWARD** This year's recipient of the Morgan and Jeanie Sherwood Award for best article in the last volume of *Alaska History*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Alaska Historical Society, went to **Ray Hudson** for his article, "The Imaginary Frontier and Its True Poverty: The Aleutian Islands at the End of the Nineteenth and Beginning of the Twentieth Centuries."

Hudson lived and taught at Unalaska for about 30 years and has written articles and published books about the people and place. The late Professor Sherwood was a longtime Alaska historian and he and his wife endowed the award with a \$500 annual prize.

**SPECIAL AWARD:** The society also presented a special award to acknowledge the enormous contributions of board member **Rachel Mason**, an Anchorage National Park Service historian. Mason has served as an officer, program chair, awards chair,

member of the newsletter staff and in about every other capacity with the society.

Her historical research is often of difficult research topics. Three of her groundbreaking studies include Seward's red light district, coordinating publication of Nick Golodoff's memoir about the Attuans internment in Japan during World War II, and documenting the "lost Aleutian villages" to which Unangan residents taken to Southeast Alaska internment camps during World War II were not allowed to return.

**THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD** The final award is the President's Award, known as the Beaver Log because it comes with an authentic log felled by an Alaska beaver. This year's award went to **Kaila Pfister**, a new member of the AHS board.

She was recognized for excellent service including her efforts to have the society use technology to spread the word about Alaska history via the society's website and Facebook postings, and overseeing technology at the annual conference which was both live in-person and Zoomed. Pfister also has served on the logo and journal redesign committees and will be leading the organization through a redesign of its website this coming year.

—David Ramseur

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## Turning Points theme of History Day competition

Alaska History Day is gaining momentum going into the 2024 contest season. The contest will be held virtually at the beginning of April, allowing communities from all regions of the state to participate without need for travel.

Participant numbers are expected to grow again this year as four new schools are planning to enter projects. The program will need more judges than last year, so please contact [alaskahistoryday@gmail.com](mailto:alaskahistoryday@gmail.com) to sign up.

A lot of work goes on behind the scenes in the fall. The coordinators regularly connect educators with the materials and resources they need to succeed at this project-based learning program with their students. Work is ongoing at developing a teacher guide/toolkit, holding webinars for educators and planning at both state and national contest levels. And the coordinators continue to pursue grants and long-term financial support to provide educators and students much deserved program stability.

This year's theme is "Turning Points in History," giving students the opportunity to analyze how various events and developments change the course of human events. We are excited to see how students interpret that theme.

Alaska history certainly presents many instances of turning points through its history. Over the summer, AHS members and other community partners conducted a tremendous crowd-sourcing project on identifying topics based on the theme. Some will be familiar to most students of our region's history, such as the 1867 Treaty of Cession and 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Others are more closely identified with a particular region or community such as the 1959 closure of the King Island School and 1974 election of Filipino Thelma Buchholdt.

We are deeply grateful for recent contributions to Alaska History Day from around the state. Thanks to Fairbanks ed-

ucator Heather Damario for leading an introductory webinar this month titled "History Day: Teaching Research Literacy." Thanks to Bruce Parham for reviewing the topics guide and making valuable suggestions.

Thanks to David Ramseur and Will Schneider of the Alaska Historical Society and to the Anchorage Museum for help preparing a submission on an Alaska topic for a future National History Day theme book. Thank you to the National Park Service, Alaska Region, for financial support of the program.

There are many ways to help with Alaska History Day, such as serving as a judge; helping brainstorm topics for future contest years; sponsoring a special award; or donating to AHS with a memo line "History Day" to support the program. For more information, contact [alaskahistoryday@gmail.com](mailto:alaskahistoryday@gmail.com).

—Leanna Prax Williams  
Coordinator, Alaska History Day

# IN MEMORIUM: 16 Alaskans honored for enormous contributions to our state

**Editor's note:** At its annual conference in October, the Alaska Historical Society celebrated the lives of Alaskans who died during the year who contributed to our state's history and betterment. Enormous thanks again to Ron Inouye and Angela Schmidt for compiling these summaries of lives well lived.



**SALLY JO (BONNETT) COLLINS (1939-2022) MCGRATH** Sally Jo was founding editor of the weekly *Kusko Courier* and of the Tochak Historical Society in McGrath, and a key player in the development of the McGrath Museum, which was renamed the Sally Jo Collins Museum in her honor in 2019. In 2000, she and husband Ray published *Dichinaneek Hwa'ana: A History of*

*the People of the Upper Kuskokwim Who Live in Nikolai and Telida, Alaska for Denali National Park and Preserve*. In 2010 the couple was inducted into the Nikolai Edzeno' Tribe in recognition of their years of service.



**DON CORWIN (1953-2023) KODIAK, SKAGWAY, EAGLE** Don was a master carpenter whose work through the National Park Service helped preserve and restore Alaska's gold rush and gold mining history. From about 1977 through the early 2000s, Don performed building restoration work in Skagway for the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, becoming the

park's preservation specialist in 2006. In recent years he was the seasonal maintenance worker for Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve.



**GLORIA OPAL DAY (1922-2023) VALDEZ** Gloria was president of the Valdez Historical Society and was appointed by Governor Egan to serve on the Alaska Mental Health Board. She was a charter member of the Pioneers of Alaska, Valdez Igloo, and served as an officer many times. She was instrumental in initiating preservation of the Valdez Pioneer Cemetery.

Gloria served with distinction in the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary in Valdez as the flotilla commander for many years.



**JOSEPH E. HARRIS (1940-2022)**

**KENAI** Long-time member of the Kenai Historical Society, Joe was serving on the KHS Board of Directors until his death. He was deeply involved in the preservation of historical objects around the Kenai Visitors and Cultural Center, including those that depict the history of the local fishing industry. Joe was also instrumental in the

creation of the Kenai Historic Cabins Park and continued his involvement on that project, restoring and maintaining each cabin and preparing the park for the annual opening each summer.



**WILLIAM RAYMOND "BILL" HUNT**

**(1929-2022) FAIRBANKS** Born in Seattle as the youngest of 13 children, Bill went on to earn a Ph.D. in history in 1967 through the University of Washington. He became a history professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and wrote 15 books, including *Dictionary of Rogues, North of 53°, Arctic Passage, To Stand at the Pole, Stef, Distant*

*Justice* and *Whiskey Peddler*. In retirement he continued to write and lived in Washington, Texas, Arizona and Colorado. He returned to Alaska for a stint as historian for the National Park Service.



**OLIVER AVEOGAN LEAVITT (1943-2023) UTQIAĠVIK**

Oliver was a whaling captain, devoted public servant and advocate for the North Slope Iñupiat. Throughout his life Oliver served in many leadership positions across the state and was a key player in the negotiation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. He was treasurer of the Arctic Slope Native

Association for 24 years, a board member of the Alaska Federation of Natives for 28 years and the first president of the North Slope Borough Assembly. He was also a member of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission and a founding director of the First Alaskans Institute. Oliver was also known for his commitment to his community as a deeply knowledgeable whaling boat builder and whaling captain.



**DAVID TERENCE "TERRY" MCCABE (1935-2023) ANCHORAGE** David was employed by the First National Bank of Alaska and managed their branch bank in Nenana. In 1962 he earned a master's degree from Harvard Business School. Back in Anchorage in 1964, David founded the Alaska Mortgage Group, a private financial partnership that provided a source of ven-

ture capital in the new state with its expanding and undeveloped economy. David was a member of the Alaska Purchase Centennial Commission in 1967 and helped found the Hope and Sunrise Historical Society.



**EUGENE "BUZZY" PELTOLA JR. (1966-2023) BETHEL** Gene was a pilot, fisherman and Alaska Native leader who was praised for embodying the spirit of Alaska. He was the husband of Alaska's sole representative in Congress, Mary Peltola. Of Yup'ik and Tlingit descent, Gene spent more than 30 years working for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service before becoming

regional director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Alaska, serving in that position from 2018 to 2022. He served as vice mayor and council member for the city of Bethel between 2010 and 2012 and sat on various Alaska Native village corporation boards.



**BOB PENNEY (1933-2023) ANCHORAGE** Bob, a business and sportsman, arrived in Anchorage in 1951 to manage a lumber yard. He successfully pursued many real estate business opportunities, established the real estate brokerage firm Penco Properties and helped found the Alaska Resource Development Council. He was active in Anchorage civic affairs. Of

particular concern were the Kenai River king salmon, resulting in the formation of the Kenai River Sportfishing Association.



**FLORENCE MATFAY CHRISTIANSEN PESTRIKOFF/KUUKULA (1937-2023) KODIAK** For over 30 years, Florence contributed to heritage programs in Kodiak, working to revitalize Alutiiq speech and expand understanding of cultural traditions. She helped to teach the first Alutiiq classes at Kodiak College in 1990 and later mentored a new generation of Alutiiq speakers

in partnership with the Alutiiq Museum. She was the original voice of the *Alutiiq Word of the Week*. She sat on the Alutiiq New Words Council, developing vocabulary to help the Alutiiq language grow with the times. In 2009 Florence was honored with the Margaret Nick Cook Award, a Governor's Award for the Arts, for her work preserving the Alutiiq language.



**LEE ERNEST POLESKE (1937-2023) SEWARD** Lee was president of the Resurrection Bay Historical Society and volunteer director of the Seward Museum. Along with fellow schoolteachers, he helped to create the Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers, a non-profit organization to promote the history of the original gold rush-era Iditarod Trail. He organized and compiled the

Seward area obituary index, which led to the tradition of Summer Solstice Cemetery Tours, starting in 2006. The Alaska Historical Society recognized Lee's many years of research about Seward and Resurrection Bay. He served on the Alaska Gold Rush Centennial Commission and was awarded the Seward Historic Preservation Award in 1998 and 2008. In 2007, Museums Alaska presented him the Volunteer of the Year Award.



**THELMA ARLENE SCHRANK (1948-2023) SLANA** Thelma managed the Ellis family roadhouse, Duffy's, at Slana. For many years she took aviation observations for NOAA. In 1983 she began a 36-year National Park Service career at the ranger station at Slana, the northernmost portion of the newly established Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. In 2022 Thelma received the

Harry Yount Lifetime Achievement Award from the NPS Rangers Association for all her help to new rangers and the park service. Her knowledge of the Slana area places and people and willingness to share it was invaluable to visitors and rangers alike.



**JOSEPH ENGASONGWOK SENUNGETUK (1940-2023) ANCHORAGE** An Iñupiaq artist originally from Wales, Joe created etchings, paintings, illustrations, masks, sculptures and writing. A recurring theme of his art was the impact of colonization and the conflict between Western and Iñupiaq worldviews. His artwork has been exhibited at venues around the globe. Joe

taught art at Mt. Edgecumbe High School and Sheldon Jackson Junior College in Sitka, and was an Elder in Residence at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage for its art program. His autobiography is titled *Give or Take a Century: An Eskimo Chronicle*. He was a regular columnist for the *Anchorage Gazette* and *Anchorage Daily News* between 1989 and 1994. As a senior member of the University of Alaska Chancellor's Select Task Force on Native Higher Education and through other positions of leadership, he helped to shape policy and implement ideas to benefit Alaska Native youth and Alaskan artists.

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# AHS notes progress on efforts to preserve Alaska history

The Alaska Historical Society continues to press local, state and federal decision-makers on issues affecting Alaska history. We've seen progress on two issues, but little movement on another.

## NEW BUILDING ON TAP FOR NARA SEATTLE

In October, National Archivist Colleen Shogan said a new Seattle-area building to house federal archival material from the Pacific Northwest, including Alaska, is on the drawing board. She told a Seattle radio station of a \$9 million item in a congressional bill to replace Seattle's aging federal archives building.

"The full legislation has not been passed for fiscal year 2024," Shogan told KIRO Newsradio. "But there should be funding to support the planning for a new facility and the National Archives will work with the General Services Administration, who will help us select a site and make plans for a new building."

In her post just since May, Shogan is the first woman to serve as national archivist. She said the existing Seattle facility, a deteriorating, World War II-era building, faces \$80 million worth of deferred maintenance.

Three years ago, the AHS joined with other regional historical organizations during the Trump administration to stop its plan to close the existing federal archives building and move its records further from Alaska to possible sites in California or Oklahoma.

Shogan also said the agency continues efforts to digitize archived records. The AHS has worked closely with U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski to speed up digitization of Alaska records which can be accessed online.

## STATE STILL NOT MOVING ON SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

There's no progress to report on Alaska's plans to participate in the national semiquicentennial, the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding. A federal commission is encouraging states to establish commissions. So far 41 states and territories have done so, but not Alaska.

Last summer, AHS offered a plan to the Alaska Historical Commission, chaired by Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom. Despite a positive reception from her and the commission, there has been no state action.

In July, the federal commission chair wrote Gov. Mike Dunleavy encouraging Alaska's involvement and offering the prospect of \$10,000 in "seed" money. The AHS only became aware of the letter in October since Dunleavy's office did not distribute it to state agencies or historical groups.

The society continues to consider ways to participate in the 2026 celebration, including the possibility of adding lectures to its critical issues series to focus on Alaska's role in the nation and highlighting the topic at its annual conference.

## ANCHORAGE LIBRARY'S ALASKA ROOM GAINING STEAM

The AHS is encouraged by progress to refurbish the Alaska Room at Anchorage's Loussac Library, with the goal to return it to an historical research facility that is both highly visible and easily accessible to the Alaska public. The library scheduled an open house for Nov. 16 to unveil a proposed design of the Alaska Room and seek public comments on the plan.

Last July, three AHS board members and staff met with library officials for a briefing and tour of the room, which had been shut down following a December 2017 flood. The flood resulted in the relocation of much of 25,000 books, maps, unique city documents and artwork, limiting public research access to this material.

Library staff told society officials that approximately \$1.6 million raised through a 2021 bond proposition, a national grant and private fundraising was available or committed for the project. An architectural firm has produced initial design concepts for the renovation, with construction slated to begin in fall 2024.

We were also heartened to hear the municipality is trying to establish a new archivist position to assist Alaskans with their library research. Adequate staffing is critical to full use of this incredible trove of Alaska history.

—David Ramseur

## In Memorium

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### BILL SHEFFIELD (1928-2022) AN-

**CHORAGE** Bill was the fifth governor of Alaska, from 1982 to 1986. Originally from Spokane, Washington, he moved to Alaska in 1953 and entered the hotel industry. As a Democratic governor, Bill's term was marked by a slump in oil prices which forced him to make significant budget cuts. In 1983, he successfully pushed a change

ensuring that Alaska would operate under a single time zone, except for the far western reaches of the Aleutian Islands, and helped consummate transfer of the Alaska Railroad to Alaska. After his governorship he continued to be active in Alaska politics as president of the state-owned Alaska Railroad from 1997 to 2001 and director of the Port of Anchorage from 2001 to 2012.



### JAMES L. SIMPSON (1924-2023)

**SEWARD, WASILLA, KETCHIKAN** Raised at the Jesse Lee Home in Seward, James attended Seward High School, Chemawa (Oregon) Indian School, Lewis and Clark College, and the University of Washington, where he earned his Ed.D., making him the first Alaska Native with an earned doctorate. His years of K-12 teaching and administration included Wasilla

and Ketchikan. He became the first director (1960-1975) of the Ketchikan Community College, then joined the University of Alaska Southeast faculty until retirement in 1980. He served on the Ketchikan City Council. In 2008 he authored *Jesse Lee Home—My Home*.



### ALFRED FOREST WRIGHT (1925-2022)

**MINTO, FAIRBANKS** The renowned aviator was born in Tanana Crossing and spent his life in communities along the Tanana River. As a child in Minto, Al became interested in airplanes and later used his Army GI bill to obtain his pilot's license. Al became one of the first Alaska Natives to own a flight service, operating Wright

Airways, Nenana Air Service and Wright Air Service in Fairbanks.



# CONFERENCE 2023

Moments from the AHS gathering on the Kenai Peninsula



1) The Kenai Peninsula Historical Association celebrated its 50th anniversary with cake. 2) A silent auction raised nearly \$3,000 for AHS operations. All photos by Kaila Pfister.



3) Pierce Bateman charms the audience with a focus on the history of Anchorage as a post-World War II global passenger crossroads. 4) The Kenai Community College was well suited for conference presentations. 5) The Salamatof Tribe Duheldiht Youth Services drummers perform at the opening reception. 6) David Ramseur, AHS president, recognizes Rachel Mason for years of work as AHS conference chair.

## Explosion sets back work on historic Fairview Inn

As much of Talkeetna slept at 6:15 a.m. on Aug. 29, 2023, a huge explosion rocked Main Street, blowing out windows, damaging building siding and scattering debris 100 feet.

The explosion of a propane tank attached to the Talkeetna Tako food truck caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage to local businesses and homes,



New owners had started repairing the historic Fairview Inn prior to the earthquake this fall.

and the truck itself was blown to smithereens. Just across the street, the windows of the 100-year-old Fairview Inn blew out of their frames. Fortunately, no one was injured in the catastrophe.

The Fairview was built in 1923, opening the month before President Harding's visit to Alaska. Then only hotel in Talkeetna, it opened during the Prohibition era and did not serve alcohol or even have a bar until about 1934.

Over the years it became Talkeetna's "living room," where locals gathered for warmth and conversation with neighbors. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984 and is also a contributing building to the Talkeetna Historic District created in 1993.

Henrik Wessel and his business partner, Hans Axelsson, purchased the Fairview last year and worked to revive the exterior and make the building safer. They dug around the failing foundation to study how to replace old rotting logs and crumbling cement.

The front door almost fell off in the explosion and has since been removed. The

"Hippies Use the Side Door" rule of the 1970s now applies to everyone as the side and back doors are the only ones in use. Wessel discovered no Alaska companies and only one in the Lower 48 that can produce new wood frame windows, estimated at \$50,000.

Talkeetna's community response was fast and furious. Volunteers appeared soon after the explosion to replace the glass and clean the Fairview and Main Street before throngs of tourists showed by mid-day. By evening the Fairview was operational.

Unfortunately, the Fairview was not the only building damaged. All the adjacent buildings also were affected. All owners are hopeful the food truck and property insurance will cover damages.

Wessel, a former mountain climber, purchased the Fairview for the love of the historic bar. He speaks of it as "a money pit," but knew he was signing up to save the historic structure. Work continues at a furious pace as nighttime temperatures dip to 10 degrees.

—Sue Deyoe

## MUSEUM/HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROFILE

# People, not equipment, are focus of museum

If you visit the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Museum in Fairbanks, don't expect to see a lot of old mining equipment.

"We don't have the space for that," said Tom Bundtzen, a geologist and president of the all-volunteer non-profit that operates the museum. "We're focusing on human beings. People."

Bundtzen and a handful of others involved in resource extraction in the state founded the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation in 1997. Since then the group has inducted 134 people into its hall of fame: miners, geologists, mining engineers, government scientists, lawyers, administrators, educators, journalists, aviators and more.

Their stories tell the history of mining in Alaska.

"People who have never been really appropriately recognized, we are recognizing them," Bundtzen said. "We're giving them a second life, so to speak."

The foundation usually hosts two induction ceremonies annually—one in Anchorage during the Alaska Miners Association convention, the other in Fairbanks. They have also held ceremonies in Juneau and in Nome.

Each ceremony has a theme. The fall 2022 ceremony honored individuals who made big impacts on modern mining operations. In March 2023 the group focused on people active in mining in the early years of the Alaska-Yukon Gold Rush. The fall 2023 theme was people involved in developing and extracting critical and strategic minerals.

The foundation's board selects inductees, many of whom are nominated by members of the public. A carefully researched biography of each inductee is printed in the ceremony program and later appears in the foundation's newsletter and on its website.

Plans and funding for a museum didn't come together until 2014, when the foundation opened a small museum in a leased historic building in Fairbanks. The building was sold in 2017, however, and the museum was forced to close.



Joan Skilbred's talk about the Great Tanana Raft Race was so popular that she presented it twice at the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Museum. Photo courtesy Tom Bundtzen.

The museum was to reopen in 2020 in a leased building at 406 Cushman Street, but COVID-19 delayed that opening until April 2022.

Twice as large as the original museum, the new facility accommodates all 134 inductee plaques, exhibits on aspects of mining history around the state, a rock and ore collection, a few items of mining equipment related to inductees, and a store selling books and souvenirs. A new, high-quality laser theater will allow museum visitors to select and view historic mining films. Captioning is being developed for old films with poor sound quality.

There's also space for the foundation's Wednesday night history lectures, which have drawn up to 75 people. Topics have included "Wimbish and Cooper: A Gilmore Creek Murder Story," "The Great Fairbanks Wood Famine" and "Roshier Creecy: A Black Man's Search for Freedom and Prosperity in the Koyukuk Gold Fields of Alaska."

"We invite people to lecture not just on strictly mining themes, but other historical themes," Bundtzen said. "Most of the presenters are just local people, historians, maybe even amateur historians, or just people knowledgeable about

some topic that they want to talk about."

The foundation's website takes stories of hall of fame inductees to the world. Zoom is further expanding the organization's base. At the March induction ceremony, Zoom enabled a presenter in Ireland to share the story of inductee Bridget M. Aylward, who had been active in the Fortymile region prior to the Klondike discovery and is honored in Ireland for establishing charitable organizations there with wealth she had obtained from Fortymile gold. Ninety people gathered at the museum to watch the presentation.

"It worked out beautifully," Bundtzen said. "We've decided from now on we're going to Zoom our inductions."

The foundation is funded primarily by donors and proceeds from a gaming permit. Museum admission is free, with donations accepted. Groups that use the museum as a meeting space also give donations.

Though museum hours are supposed to be 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, that's not always possible with an all-volunteer staff. Visit [www.alaskamininghalloffame.org](http://www.alaskamininghalloffame.org) at any time.

—Carol Gales

# Departing board member Mike Hawfield promoted historical appreciation through community participation

A midlife crisis brought Mike Hawfield to Alaska in the 1990s, and a passion for local history and stories brought him to the Alaska Historical Society board, from which he recently retired after nine years of service.

The midlife crisis was prompted by the death of Hawfield's first wife from cancer. They were living in Indiana, where he had a long history directing and running education programs for museums and historical societies. Hawfield's background is in history, with an undergraduate degree in history from Lynchburg College in Virginia (today, the University of Lynchburg), and graduate programs from the University of North Carolina and University of Virginia, and later work as an educator in Virginia, North Carolina and Indiana.

He found his niche embracing local history through producing living history programs, public programs, columns in local papers, and radio and TV shows. He came to appreciate the value of sharing history with a broader community by using well-researched stories of the fascinating adventures, events and individuals that make up a community's history, rather than producing rigorous, analytical academic papers.

Hawfield's first stint in Alaska was as a low-level deckhand on a longliner out of Homer fishing for halibut—a Chesapeake Bay-style boat called the *Lady Jean*. He spent time getting to know Homer and especially its Pratt Museum. He returned to Indiana to write books, but the Pratt's call for a development director in 1996 lured him back, driving in mid-winter with a dog, cat and good friend.

While at the Pratt, Hawfield also taught history at the University of Alaska's regional campus in Homer. Both increased his appreciation for local history—and the use of 3-dimensional objects and photos to tell stories. That led to his involvement with other museums as executive director of Museums Alaska and then the Rasmuson Foundation's manager of its art acquisition fund, helping local museums throughout the state select and purchase Alaska artwork.



**Mike Hawfield paddles in Price William Sound on a calm day. A lover of Alaska outdoor activities, the retiring Hawfield plans to continue contributing to his community through Habitat for Humanity and the local library and museum. Photo by Beth Graber.**

Hawfield joined the AHS board in 2014 and served as treasurer during his two terms. He also served several terms on the state's Alaska Historical Commission.

Hawfield is most proud of his involvement in the society's Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act 50-years project. He developed the educational component of that initiative, including identifying curricula and other resources for teachers at all levels as well as for community use. All those materials are now accessible on the AHS website.

Hawfield was born in Santa Barbara, California, but spent most of his early years in Bethesda, Maryland. His first wife and his daughter both died of breast cancer, leaving him two granddaughters who still live in Indiana and attend Indiana University in

Bloomington. When he came to Alaska, he met Beth Graber, an English professor at the Homer campus of UAA, and they have enjoyed a wonderful marriage since, joining both their extended families.

In his free time, Hawfield loves the outdoors—camping, travel and hiking, and serving on the Friends of the McNeil River Bear Sanctuary board. He's now most interested in building—not fine woodworking—sheds, barns and decks, and wants to be more involved in Habitat for Humanity. Hawfield plans to continue those hours he previously spent on AHS activities doing things to help other people, whether it's Hospice of Homer, the local library or the Pratt Museum.

—Molly McCammon

## Time to renew your AHS membership

As the calendar year ends so do annual Alaska Historical Society memberships. You can renew online at [www.alaskahistoricalociety.org](http://www.alaskahistoricalociety.org) or send a check to AHS, P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, AK 99510. Consider giving a gift membership to a colleague, friend, or family member. Annual individual memberships are \$35/year, a family memberships is \$45/year, and a patron membership is \$100/year. End-of-the-year donations also are welcome. In advance, thank you!

## FAIRBANKS

### Rich 120 years of railroad history celebrated

In celebration of American Archives Month in October, the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives at University of Alaska Fairbanks welcomed the public to an open house dedicated to Alaska's rich railroad history. About 100 visitors were treated to a captivating showcase of historical photographs, films, maps, recordings and memorabilia, all preserved in the archives at UAF. Items from UAF's Alaska Native Language Archive were also featured. Highlighted collections shed light on the pivotal role that railroads have played in Alaska's development over the past 120 years. For more information, visit <https://library.uaf.edu/aprca>, or contact the archives to receive its newsletter.



Assistant Archivist Fawn Carter shows off a collection of historical railroad photos to visitors during an open house at the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives. Photo by Sarah Lewis, APRCA, UAF.

### Local scoundrels and scandals profiled

The Alaska Mining Hall of Fame recently hosted lectures about two different notorious figures of the gold rush era: a bandit who preyed on travelers to the goldfields, and a mining claim broker, lawyer and party boy who became embroiled in a national scandal. One presentation was about the Blue Parka Bandit, whose name was Charles Hendrickson. He committed robbery after robbery, and law and order at the time was inadequate to catch him. In the other presentation, the audience learned about LeRoy Tozier, who moved from his work as a claim broker in the Klondike to become a brilliant defense lawyer in Fairbanks—with an affinity for low-life. Both lectures were presented by Joan Skilbred as part of the AMHF's Wednesday lecture series.

### Lecture details fossil fuel alternate

The October lecture at the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame featured Paul A. Metz, professor emeritus of UAF Geological Engineering, entitled "Black Sand to Clean Energy." He talked about the process and potential to use Alaska magnetite through oxidation to produce hydrogen. The combustion of hydrogen results in the production of energy and water vapor without any greenhouse gas emissions and should be considered as an alternative to using fossil fuel.

### Role of energy and ecology explored

The Tanana Yukon Historical Society's October program featured Phil Wight, who titled his talk "Pillars of Smoke: Energy and Ecology in Interior Alaska, 1902-2022." Looking at how energy resources, technologies and policies evolved over the years, Wight believes Fairbanks is at an energy inflection point similar to ones in the 1920s, 1950s and 1970s.

## JUNEAU

### Society explores importance of lighthouse

A landmark of the Klondike Gold Rush is the Sentinel Island Lighthouse. Many who sought to make their fortunes in the Yukon gold fields came to Skagway by boat along the Inside Passage. During 1898, there were more than 300 maritime accidents along the waterways of southeast Alaska. Work began in 1901 to build the Sentinel Island Lighthouse in Lynn Canal. Even with a lighthouse, however, the coastal waters off Alaska were treacherous. In 1918, the *Princess Sophia* struck a reef in Lynn Canal, only four miles from the lighthouse, and the tragic accident killed all aboard except for a dog. The Gastineau Channel Historical Society now manages the lighthouse. GCHS President Gary Gillette gave a presentation at the society's annual meeting earlier this month about work to preserve the lighthouse over the last 25 years.

### Apology issued for shutting down church

In 1963, the Memorial Presbyterian Church in Juneau, headed by the Rev. Dr. Walter Soboleff, was closed without explanation by the larger Presbyterian church. Soboleff took over the church in 1940 and preached in both English and Tlingit. While all were welcome, most of Memorial's parishioners were Tlingit, and the closure meant the loss of a place of worship for Alaska Native Presbyterians. Despite their grief at the loss of the church building, the parishioners continued to meet and Soboleff continued to preach. This year, on October 8, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Northwest Coast Presbytery and Kunéix Hídi Northern Light United Church held a service of acknowledgement and apology, presenting healing blankets to former members and family. The next day, the church presented checks to the Sealaska Heritage Institute and the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida to use for language preservation in partial reparation for closing Memorial Presbyterian.

### Excellence in Chilkat weaving recognized

Juneau artist Lily Hope received the 2023 Marie Darlin Prize recognizing her outstanding Chilkat weaving and widely sharing her knowledge of it. Hope's mother, Charissa Rizal, and artist Kay Parker trained her in Chilkat weaving. She mentored 30 apprentices between 2020 and 2022 in Ravenstail and Chilkat weaving. During the COVID-19 pandemic she adapted her workshops to be given online, allowing students from across Alaska, Canada and the Lower 48 to learn from her. The \$5,000 prize is given by the Juneau Douglas City Museum, the Friends of the Museum and the Juneau Community Foundation and recognizes contributions to regional social and culture history.

## Museum honors Filipino workers

An exhibit about the Filipino community in Juneau opened at the Juneau-Douglas City Museum in October. Entitled *Mga Kuwento: Filipinos of Juneau*, the exhibit celebrates the contributions of Filipinos to Alaska history. Filipinos who began coming to work in Alaska canneries around 1900 were called Alaskeros. Some also found work in Juneau's gold mines. As more Alaskeros stayed year-round, a permanent Filipino community grew in Juneau. At first the Filipino workforce was almost entirely male, and some Filipino men married local Tlingit women. After World War II, more women arrived from the Philippines. The museum exhibit is accompanied by a podcast series that explores the lives of Filipino immigrants and the succeeding generations.

## KETCHIKAN

### Museum salutes daily life photographs

The Ketchikan Museums' Artifact of the Month in September was a page from the college notebooks of photographer Paulu Saari, whose photographs documented much of Ketchikan life in the 1950s and 1960s. Saari served with the U.S. Coast Guard in Ketchikan during World War II. After the war, he went to college at the University of Houston in Texas to study photography. Returning to Ketchikan in 1950, Saari worked as a freelance photographer, taking group photos for organizations, sports teams and businesses, as well as of buildings in the town and boats in the fishing fleet. From 1955 through 1966, he worked for the *Ketchikan Daily News* as a staff photographer.



Paulu Saari in his darkroom at the *Ketchikan Daily News*. Photo courtesy *Ketchikan Daily News*.

## ANCHORAGE

### Interviews highlight Filipino contributions

The Anchorage Museum also opened an exhibit about Filipinos in Alaska in October. Titled *Mana: The History We Inherit*, a series of panels profile Filipinos who live and work in several Southcentral Alaska communities. *Mana* is the Tagalog word for inheritance. The curators, Shayne Nuesca, Tasha Elizarde and Joshua Albeza Branstetter, interviewed Filipinos who worked in hospitals, canneries, education and government, specially addressing how they have created tight-knit Filipino communities in the towns where they live.

## Lecture explored frontier social mobility

The Cook Inlet Historical Society launched its 2023-24 speaker series with a program by Talis Colberg on the role of the frontier in social mobility and opportunity. Colberg spoke about M.D. Snodgrass who took advantage of frontier opportunities during his 60 years in Alaska during the 20th century to become a key player in the creation of many institutions new to Alaska. Those include agricultural experiment stations and what would become the Alaska State Fair. For four of its lectures this year, CIHS is partnering with the Alaska Historical Society in the inaugural season of its Critical Issues Lecture Series, "Enhancing Alaska's Civil Discourse."

## SEWARD

### Articles recall challenges to sea terminus

Seward was founded in 1903 with the goal of making it the sea terminus for a railroad to Interior Alaska. There was pressure to build quickly, and the founding fathers were hard-pressed to obtain enough lumber and coal to build the town. According to 1905 articles from the *Seward Gateway*, reprinted in the October Resurrection Bay Historical Society newsletter, the steamship companies couldn't keep up with the demand for shipments of lumber to Seward. The Kenai Lumber & Fuel Company was incorporated in October 1905 to trade on a large scale and keep adequate stocks of lumber and coal on hand.



Kenai Lumber and Fuel Co. is in foreground, left of the dock, July 1906. Photo courtesy Resurrection Bay Historical Society, RBHS 51.27 cropped.

## KODIAK

### Lectures explore Sugpiaq/Alutiiq ancestors

The Alutiiq and the Kodiak History museums teamed up this fall to present a lecture series about recent scientific and historical work in the region, with a focus on collaboration between researchers and community members. In the first lecture, "Storytelling and Archaeology: Uncovering the Past Together in Old Harbor," Hollis K. Miller (SUNY Cortland) and Allison Pestrikoff-Botz (Old Harbor) described how community members and archaeologists worked together to learn about the experience of Sugpiaq/Alutiiq ancestors during the tumultuous times of Russian arrival and occupation. Miller's dissertation uses evidence from archaeology, oral history and historical sources to understand what happened after 1784 when Grigorii Shelikhov and his men subdued local people through violence and established the settlement they called Three Saints Bay.

## Never-seen 20th century artifacts displayed

A new exhibit at the Kodiak Museum, *Objects Uncovered*, features 14 objects from the museum's collections and archives and associated stories. Many of the objects have never before been on display. Among the objects are a kayak constructed in the early 1900s and a traditional Filipino garment. Visitors to the exhibit are invited to add their stories. The objects and stories will be on display until spring 2024.

## SOLDOTNA

### Community celebrates 75th birthday

The Soldotna Historical Society was a big part of the recent AHS annual conference, and the Soldotna Homestead Museum was open for tours on October 8 following the end of the conference. Visitors to the museum were able to see a display marking Soldotna's 75th birthday, built by Dale Dolifka and a crew of volunteers. Soldotna opened for homesteading in 1947, giving veterans a 90-day head start before non-veterans were able to select property and file claims. Also in 1947, trees were cleared to build the Sterling Highway and the present-day location of Soldotna was chosen as the place to build a bridge over the Kenai River. The post office opened in 1949, and several businesses started.



Bridge over the Kenai River, 1952. Photo by Les Anderson via Wikipedia; public domain.

## PALMER

### Giant leeks, horseradish rival Mat-Su cabbages

Everyone knows about the big cabbages produced in the long summer days and rich soil of the Matanuska Valley. But who knew Alaska also has some of the biggest leeks and horseradish in the world? The Palmer Historical Society's newsletter reported that among the prize-winning produce growers at the 2023 Alaska State Fair were Deb Blaylock of Palmer, with a 17.25-inch hot pepper; Theresa Phillips of Palmer, with a 28.5-inch leek; Roger Francisco of Anchorage, with a 2.18-pound rhubarb stalk; and Ezra Mielke from Wasilla, with a 5.58-pound horseradish. But let's not forget about those giant cabbages. Scott Robb of Palmer won the grand prize this year with a cabbage weighing 113 pounds! Robb still holds the world record for the largest cabbage ever grown for the 138.25-pound monster cabbage he entered in 2012.

### Barn preservation garners national attention

At the November History Night, the "Barn Sisters," Sarah Lorimer and Jennifer Johnson, talked about saving Matanuska Colony barns. They impulsively purchased two barns at an auction, then bought two acres of land to which to relocate them, catching the attention of the Magnolia Network and getting them featured in an episode of "In With the Old."

## Couple explores crafts of yore

Jack Horner and Laura Sampson started the Palmer Folk School in 2019. Their motto is "Remembering the Old Days in New Ways." The couple offer classes in blacksmithing, leatherwork, carving, foraging and other traditional skills for children and adults. Laura has a blog and website called Little House Big Alaska, which she uses to teach modern women to cook traditional foods in a new way. Horner and Sampson recently shared some of their experiences with the school at the Palmer Historical Society's October History Night.

## WRANGELL

### Podcast wins national recognition

Preservation Alaska's annual meeting in October concluded with Ronan Rooney of Wrangell introducing his five-part "Rise and Fall of the *Star of Bengal*" podcast series about a 1908 shipwreck in Southeast Alaska waters. The project was recognized earlier this year with an Award of Excellence by the American Association for State and Local History. The series can be found on *Wrangell History Unlocked*, a podcast started in 2020 that has episodes on this history of one of Alaska's oldest towns that has been important in Alaska Native history and the development of Alaska.

## HAINES

### New Sheldon Museum director welcomed

The Sheldon Museum has a new director, Brandon Wilks, after three years of operating without one. The museum has struggled since the Haines Borough cut the director's position due to loss of revenue during the pandemic. In 2021, management of the museum transitioned from the borough to the board of directors of a nonprofit organization, the Haines Sheldon Museum. Wilks comes to the museum from his position as education coordinator for the Haines Borough Library.

## EAGLE

### Local historic artifacts spruced up

Over the summer a Rasmuson Foundation grant from Museums Alaska helped the Eagle Historical Society hire a conservator from Anchorage, Sarah Owens, to evaluate, document and clean the fabrics and fibers in St. Paul's Church. Sarah cleaned priest's vestments, liturgical items and the moose hide drapes, and gave workshops on Care and Preservation of Family Heirlooms and Care of Skins, Leathers & Hide. In other summer project work, several society members evaluated the customs house and determined that after a good cleaning next spring it can be opened again for tours. The group managed to provide daily walking tours, helped organize the 4th of July activities, and hosted a pie social over the summer. Next summer the group plans to repair the roof on the Jim Scott Archive building. Also on the project list is providing information and possibly some artifacts for a display in BLM's visitor center at Tok to generate interest in driving the Taylor Highway to visit Eagle.

## SITKA

### Rehab continues on historic boathouse

The Japonski Island boathouse was built in late 1941 as part of the Sitka Naval Air Station, as the U.S. geared up its defenses against a possible Japanese attack on Alaska. The boathouse served as a repair facility for army and navy craft. After the war, the boathouse was used for maintaining boats and ferries between Mt. Edgumbe and the town of Sitka until a bridge was built in 1972. Members of the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society and other volunteers are working to rehabilitate the boathouse for active use as a boathouse and as an educational and interpretive center. This year they put new siding on the southeast face and corner and foam insulation around the windows. Contractors put basic wiring and plumbing in the new addition, insulated the walls and installed vapor barriers.

## YUKON

### Beading project takes top honors

The Yukon/Stikine Regional Heritage Fair was held online in 2023, with participation from schools in the communities of Mayo, Faro, and Dawson City. The student projects were videos representing primary source research such as conducting personal interviews or visiting an important historic site. Ms. Noseworthy's grade 4/5/6 class at J.V. Clark School in Mayo won three awards (Best Historical Content, Best Overall, and Parks Canada People's Choice Award) with their project entitled "Yáw' Segaw: Beads and Needles." The students interviewed local beaders to find out how they learned to bead and why beading is important in their culture. The Heritage Fair is sponsored by a partnership of the Yukon Heritage Resources Board, Parks Canada, Canada's History and the Department of Education.



Volunteers put siding on the Japonski boathouse. Photo courtesy Sitka Maritime Heritage Society.

### Carcross hotel remembered for colorful history

The Caribou Hotel in Carcross is an enduring reminder of the Klondike Gold Rush. Its story includes destruction by fire, a former owner who haunts the building and a cursing parrot. The hotel was originally constructed in Bennett, B.C., in 1898 as the Yukon Hotel. In 1901 William Anderson bought the hotel and planned to move it to Caribou Crossing (Carcross). Dawson Charlie, one of the discoverers of gold at Bonanza Creek, bought it in 1903, had it floated by barge to Carcross, and renamed it the Caribou. After Charlie died in 1908, Bessie and Edwin Gideon bought the hotel, rebuilding it in 1910 after the building was de-

stroyed in a fire on Christmas Eve, 1909, that also burned down a nearby store and the railroad station.

Bessie, who died in 1933, is now said to haunt the Caribou as a ghost, making noise by slamming doors, walking on creaking floors and occasionally appearing in a window. Among the most famous residents of the hotel was Polly the Parrot, a foul-mouthed male parrot who lived there from 1918 until his death in 1972. The Gideons agreed to take care of Polly in 1918 while his owner, James Alexander, went Outside. Unfortunately, Alexander died in the wreck of the *Princess Sophia*. During construction of the Alaska Highway in World War II, the Caribou Hotel housed military and private road construction workers. Since 2008, the Caribou Hotel has been a Designated Yukon Historic Site.



Above: The Caribou Hotel in 1965. Left: A 1930 ad for the Caribou Hotel. Both photos courtesy Murray Lindberg.

## DAWSON CITY

### Gold Rush told through Indigenous eyes

Tr'ondëk-Klondike is the most recently named UNESCO cultural world heritage site. Near Dawson City, Yukon, it is made up of eight different locations along the Yukon and Blackstone Rivers. The site, listed in September 2023, tells the story of the Klondike Gold Rush and colonialism, with a focus on the experiences of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. The application presented the site as a unique case study in colonialism and the adaptive responses of Indigenous communities. UNESCO's World Heritage Program is intended to protect the world's most irreplaceable and vulnerable natural and cultural resources. It is the second UNESCO site in Yukon, following the 1994 listing of Klugane/Wrangell-St. Elias/Glacier Bay/Tatsenshini-Elsek as a natural world heritage site.

—Rachel Mason and Jo Antonson



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!



## ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## New AHS logo better reflects organization

The reviews have been overwhelmingly positive about the Alaska Historical Society's new logo, introduced at the October annual conference.

This spring, the society embarked on an effort to redesign our dated logo, which many believed was confusing and more reflective of the Russian czarist era than the broad diversity of Alaska history we strive to represent.

We contracted with Anchorage graphic designer Emily Tallman of Poetica and spent the summer fine-tuning numerous concepts. The AHS board unanimously and enthusiastically approved the new logo, which Tallman calls a Raven Spiral.

In Alaska, ravens are widely found, believed to be clever and adaptable and, in some Alaska Native cultures, considered the creator of the world and of daylight. Our Raven Spiral faces forward, its wings in a spiral formation signifying movement and the dynamic nature of time. Its wings also suggest pages in a book, the means by which much of Alaska's history is stored and conveyed.

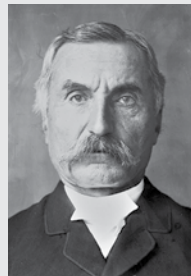
The new logo will be used on our publications and website, which is slated for an overhaul this coming year.

—David Ramseur

### AN ODDMENT

## Juneau: The man and the city

Joseph Juneau, co-founder of Alaska's capital, was a restless spirit. Born in 1836 in Montreal, Quebec, he left as a young



man to farm and mine in California before moving to Montana. In 1874 he came north to discover gold at Windham Bay in southeast Alaska, mined in the Cassiar goldfields

for five years, and was among the first to find gold near Sitka. George Pilz, another inveterate wanderer, was also in Sitka and hired Juneau and a miner named Richard Harris to prospect along the coast near Taku Inlet. With the help of the local Auk Tlingits, they discovered gold in Gastineau Channel and sparked a stampede. Juneau's share however was modest and fleeting, as he explained, "I was fairly fortunate ... for I made about \$40,000 there. Of course I didn't keep it all, for it's hard to live in a country like that and not let your money go. Living is high and everything you do takes cash."

When it came to one's legacy, however, he was luckier. As the mining camp blossomed into a rustic town, its name was an open question—some used Takou (after nearby Taku Inlet),

Harrisburg (after Richard Harris), and Rockwell, after Navy commander Charles Rockwell of the U.S.S. *James-town*, who came from Sitka to assist with opening the new camp. A rivalry grew between Harris and Juneau over the name, and the question was, according to witnesses, settled in a saloon. Here one of the town's oldest residents sets the scene:

*You see, while we was considerin' the merits of Harrisburg as a name for the camp, why, Harris he stood the liquor for the hull crowd, and all the time we was talkin' of callin' it Juneau, why, Joe he kept the boys ginned up: so between 'em there wasn't no need to hurry about decidin'.*

Juneau may have won the naming-honor, but he was broke and eventually left to mine near Circle City on the Yukon River. He joined the Klondike rush a few years later, ran a restaurant in Dawson City, and passed away on May 13, 1899.

—Chris Allan



Sources: *San Francisco Call*, December 20, 1896, 27; *Sun and New York Press*, July 2, 1899, 20; and R.N. DeArmond, *The Founding of Juneau* (1967). Photo courtesy Alaska State Library, Winter & Pond Photographs (P87-2369).