

Alaska History *News*

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Hundreds of Cordovans on May 4, 1911, protested the federal government's closure of nearby Bering River coal fields which resulted in the purchase of more expensive Canadian coal. Fashioned after the Boston Tea Party, Cordova's Coal Party made national headlines as coal was shoveled into the bay while the city's sheriff was conveniently called away to Orca Cannery. This year's conference theme, "Rights and Responsibilities," speaks broadly to Alaska's history of determining which peoples and interest groups should have rights, and what responsibilities are attached to those rights. Photo courtesy Cordova Historical Society, 06-25-178.

Diverse Cordova to host 2024 AHS conference

With America facing one of its most consequential elections in history this year, the Alaska Historical Society has adopted "Rights and Responsibilities" as its 2024 conference theme and accepted the invitation of the Cordova Historical Society and Museum to meet in charming Prince William Sound.

The conference is scheduled for October 9-12. Located near the mouth of the mighty Copper River, Cordova's rich history begins as a crossroads for trade and interaction among Eyak, Tlingit, Ahtna and Chugach peoples. The city was founded in 1909 as the terminus for the Copper River and Northwestern Railway to deliver copper ore from the Kennecott Mines for

ship transport. After the railroad stopped operating in 1938, fishing became Cordova's main industry which continues today.

This year's conference theme speaks broadly to Alaska's history of determining which peoples and interest groups should have rights, and what responsibilities are attached to those rights. This year also is the 100-year anniversary of the federal law granting citizenship to Native Americans.

The issue of which peoples and groups should have what rights in Alaska has long colored its history. Alaska women were granted the right to vote in 1913, seven years before the 19th Amendment granted that right to all American women. Disputes over rights have spanned Alaska's

many cycles of resource exploitation—fur trapping, mining, fishing, timbering,, oil and gas development. Hotly contested and close elections in Alaska's history have determined other rights and responsibilities.

Seventy-five years before statehood, Congress set out responsibilities for Alaska with the First Organic Act, which treated the district largely as a colonial economy. Alaska finally secured the rights and responsibilities granted other states with statehood in 1959. Still, disputes have continued—from fish traps and limited entry fisheries to issues including subsistence rights of rural Alaskans, taxation, entitlement to the Alaska Permanent Fund and

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Rights and Responsibilities timely theme of 2024 AHS conference

It felt like the Woodstock of historians, with many of the nation's leading presidential historians in one room: H.W.



Brands, Douglas Brinkley, Doris Kearns Goodwin, John Meacham.

The occasion was the annual Writers Festival in Rancho Mirage, CA, which for the past 10 years has attracted many of

America's top-selling authors, political commentators and historians. Last month, my wife and I scored tickets to the 2.5-day event which sells out faster than a Rolling Stones concert.

This year's timely focus was on improving civil discourse and preserving America's democracy in this divisive election year, topics on which our society also has been focused. Many presenters detailed our nation's experience with bitterly contested elections and politics, but generally agreed this year's challenges are unprecedented.

That's one reason the AHS has adopted the theme of "Rights and Responsibilities" for this year's fall conference in Cordova. One of Alaska's leading historians, Professor Steve Haycox, details on page 10 that Alaska's elections have long affected the rights and responsibilities of Alaskans.

Like millions of other Americans, Alaskans are struggling to understand the rights our political process provides and the responsibilities we have to protect them. One of the Writers Festival presentations was especially informative on that notion.

In his new book, *The Bill of Obligations – The Ten Habits of Good Citizens*, Richard Haass, an international policy expert and former head of the Council on Foreign Relations, looks at domestic political behavior. Haass argues the greatest threat to America is within and that to combat it, the notion of American citizenship must be revised.

He prescribes placing "obligations"—what we refer to as responsibilities—on the same footing as rights. Haass offers 10 obligations of American citizenship to ad-

dress "the growing apathy, anger and violence that threaten us all." His list:

Be informed. We must agree on a basic set of facts because informed voters hold office-seekers and holders accountable.

Get involved. As voting in American elections declines, the basic responsibility of Americans is casting an informed ballot.

Stay open to compromise. Give and take is necessary to build broad support for public policy questions.

Remain civil. "Respect the right of free expression no matter how much we may disagree with what it is we hear or read."

Reject violence. Unlike authoritarian regimes, democracy offers peaceful avenues for citizens to pursue economic and political goals.

Value norms. Unwritten codes of conduct broadly accepted in society are as important as laws to follow and accept.

Promote the common good. Both equality of opportunity and mandates for the common good are critical for American democracy to function.

Respect government service. We should encourage the best and brightest to government service at levels from the military to the so-called "deep state" and protect the media's responsibility to keep it honest.

Support the teaching of civics. Haass says only eight states (not Alaska) require a full year of high school civics education, which he argues is essential to an informed citizenry. On this, the AHS is doing its part to encourage adoption of a civics mandate in Alaska schools (see advocacy report, page 11).

Put country first. Citizens have an obligation to put democracy and country before political party and individuals.

Haass raises the possibility of making Bill of Obligations amendments to the Constitution like the Bill of Rights. But acknowledging we lack the luxury of time for that burdensome process, he calls on influencers to raise the alarm bell about the urgency of the task.

The AHS is trying to do its part through its advocacy about how lessons of history can inform and improve the current public policy debate.

—David Ramseur



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Conservation vs. development focus of third lecture

What history can teach about the relationship between economic growth and stewardship of Alaska's lands and waters is the focus of the next lecture and panel discussion in the Alaska Historical Society's initiative to raise the level of civil discussion in Alaska.

The third lecture in the series entitled, "Conservation and Development: Can They Co-exist?," takes place March 21 at 7 p.m. at the Anchorage Museum. This panel will look to debates spanning issues such as damming the Yukon River to Alaskan responses to oil and gas development, and whether the binary between conservation and development serves the complexities of decisions facing Alaska's residents and lands.

The session is organized and moderated by Bathsheba Demuth, Dean's Associate Professor of History and Environment and Society at Brown University. The author of the award-winning book, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*, Demuth is a former AHS conference keynote speaker.

The panelists include:

- Jen Rose Smith (dAXunhyuu/Eyak), an assistant professor of Geography and American Indian Studies at the University of Washington.

- James Magdanz, an independent researcher specializing in hunting and fishing economies in Alaska.

Last October, the society launched the series designed to combat the often willful distortion of history and create a more productive environment in which to arrive at sound



Trans-Alaska Pipeline workers place pipe on vertical support modules. The balance between resource development and conversation has long dominated Alaska public policy. UAF-1990-129-65, Mumby Trans-Alaska Pipeline Slides. APRCA, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

public policy. By demonstrating how knowledge of history can inform and improve current public policy debate, the AHS hopes to raise the level of discussion so an informed public can encourage decision-makers to draw on history to make fact-based policy that serves the broadest diversity of Alaskans.

The presentations are co-hosted by the Cook Inlet Historical Society and Anchorage Museum, with generous support from the Atwood Foundation. To join virtually, please register here: www.tinyurl.com/CivilDiscourse-3

On the Monday following each of the

Thursday lectures, the society holds a virtual follow-up exchange session hosted in collaboration with OLÉ!, an Anchorage-based educational nonprofit. Join virtually: www.tinyurl.com/FollowupExchange-3

On April 18, the final of the four scheduled lectures is entitled "Alaska: The Canary in the Coalmine for Climate Change." Earlier lectures have focused on Alaska Native sovereignty and the "Americanization" of Alaska.

All the lectures are posted on the AHS website: www.alaskahistoricalociety.org.

—Will Schneider

AHS board launches fundraising effort to address deficit

Like many Alaska non-profit organizations, the Alaska Historical Society is facing increased costs driven by higher prices for printing our quarterly newsletter and semi-annual journal, conference costs and postage. For the first time in years, the society faces a budget deficit for the coming year.

To balance our budget, the AHS Board of Directors has directed belt-tightening where possible, and the Finance Committee is embarking on a new fundraising campaign.

Fortunately, AHS members continue to be generous with membership renewals, and 51 supporters have generously opted for lifetime memberships. Many more have increased their membership levels or con-

tributed gifts beyond membership levels.

To balance the budget, the Finance Committee has recommended these steps to increase revenues:

- **Increase membership rates** – You'll notice effective this year, membership rates were raised modestly. For example, individual memberships went from \$35 annually to \$50 and life memberships from \$600 to \$700.

- **Actively solicit contributions** – We have contacted current and former members reminding them to renew their memberships and encouraging them to move to higher levels of support. Much of this contact is electronic to save postage costs.

- **Ask board members to raise contri-**

bution levels – We are asking our volunteer board members to make meaningful and significant contributions to the society.

- **Develop a fundraising plan** – This will include expanded efforts to seek grants and corporate donations. A board member has stepped up to direct our annual auction of historic items and we hope to expand it to increase revenue.

An enormous thank you to members who have already renewed your memberships for this year and especially to those who have increased your giving. Your commitment to learning, sharing, and exploring Alaska's history is making a difference.

—David Ramsey

All-volunteer society keeps museums strong

In a town with two city-run museums, what's left for an all-volunteer historical society to do?

A lot, it turns out.

"We have become a support group and advocate for the museums and other local historical groups in Ketchikan," said Laurie Pool, president of the Tongass Historical Society.

"We provide financial assistance, volunteer, write letters of support, provide funding matches and go to the city council in support because a lot of times, museum funding is one of the first things on the cutting block."

The Tongass Historical Society (THS) was founded in 1961 by residents interested in sharing and documenting Ketchikan's history. They started by collecting memorabilia and displaying it in local businesses. Today, the THS collection makes up 40% of the holdings of the Tongass Historical Museum and the Totem Heritage Center—two city-owned museums that are open year round with nine paid staff.

THS currently has 103 members. Its funding comes in the form of membership dues and donations.

Most on the THS Board of Directors grew up in Ketchikan, including Pool, who returned in 1990 after college. She is an accountant for her family's construction engineering company.

"Our board is made up of wonderful volunteer community members who are dedicated to preserving our heritage and making sure our community story is told," Pool said.

THS has a seat on the museum advisory board. Pool first filled that seat about eight years ago, when the museum director was trying to revive the then-dormant advisory board.

The museum was "having electrical fires, and the roof was leaking, but more than that, it was kind of a restart on, what is the mission going to be?" Pool remembers. "We realized we needed to make sure we were relevant. And part of that was community outreach."

That outreach today includes an active social media presence, focus on



The Tongass Historical Society board poses with the 1942 Grumman Goose the society is helping to restore. From left: Don "Bucky" Dawson, Mary Henrikson, Judy Henley Berg, Jill Bennett, Susan Carson, Rosie Roppel, Laurie Pool, Dan Eichner, Marvin Hill. Photo by Rick Garner.

an "artifact of the month" in the local newspaper and online, putting more of the collection online and creating community-centered programs and exhibits. An exhibit set to open at the Tongass Historical Museum in March includes photos of and interviews with current waterfront workers. Such exhibits draw in family and friends of those featured and the community at large.

"The staff have done a great job. I can see a huge difference in the 20 years that I've been involved with THS," Pool said. "We used to have exhibits where we wouldn't get very many people. Now we may get 300 in one night."

As a private, non-profit organization, THS can accept monetary donations and then purchase—or help match grant funds to purchase—items such as display cases or additions to the museum collections. In contrast, funds donated by the public to the city museums would go into the city's general fund.

"It's much easier for the museums to come to us than it is to go ask the city for more funding," Pool said.

THS recently helped fund acquisition of a Ravenstail Apron for the Totem Heritage Center, where artists can learn to build their skills and examine original works of traditional art.

Anita Maxwell, Ketchikan Museums director, calls THS support vital.

"As a non-profit, THS is able to advocate for us in a way that a municipality simply can't," Maxwell said. "They have stepped up as a fiscal agent for grants, sponsored events, and provide a wonderful sounding board for new ideas and procedures. We greatly value their partnership."

THS offers a \$5,000 scholarship in memory of Southeast Alaska author, historian, and former THS board member Patricia "Pat" Roppel. It is awarded to an undergraduate or graduate history student focusing on Alaska history.

The society also acts as non-profit sponsor for the "Save the Goose" Project, a decades-long effort to rebuild a 1942 Grumman Goose amphibious seaplane that once flew for Ketchikan-based Ellis Airlines, and later, Alaska Airlines. THS board member Don Dawson coordinates the project, powered mostly by donations and volunteer labor in donated warehouse space. The goal is not to fly the plane again, but to display it publicly when restored. THS has a separate bank account for the project.

Learn more about Tongass Historical Society at www.tongasshistory.org.

—Carol Gales

Alaska's rich maritime and Jewish history have long fascinated Anchorage AHS board member

Photographer, journalist, writer and editor, Penelope Goforth is no stranger to the Alaska Historical Society, having served on its board of directors for nearly three decades. Now in the second three-year term of her most recent stint, Goforth serves on the board's advocacy and Alaska History Day committees.

The daughter of a merchant marine and granddaughter of an Alaska halibut fisherman, Goforth is passionate about Alaska's maritime history. She is the author of *Sailing the Mail in Alaska, the Maritime Years of Alaska Photographer John E. Thwaites*. She has published in anthologies, journals, newspapers and magazines, and has presented papers at numerous historical society conferences.

Penelope blames her sister for enticing her to leave low-paying gigs with underground newspapers in Seattle and seek her fortune in the king crab industry in Dutch Harbor. Her sister lasted three months; Penelope stayed.

She was entranced by the World War II ruins, the Unangaꝯ people's history, the wild west of the commercial fishing industry. After a brief stint working on fish processing ships, cooking, running hydraulics, and cutting bait, she went back to her basics and started *The Aleutian Eagle*, a biweekly paper, with \$5,000 gathered from fishermen at Dutch Harbor's infamous Elbow Room. That, and a photography studio set up in her living room for wedding, graduation, passport and other community photo needs, kept her going.

Goforth got involved in politics and moved to Juneau in 1989 to serve as an aide for State Senator Fred Zharoff. She started hanging out with Gastineau Channel Historical Society folks, and then got involved in the statewide society. She returned to publishing and was editor for Alaska Department of Labor publications such as *Alaska Economic Trends*.

With the internet coming into widespread use, Goforth put her career on hold and earned a master's degree in electronic publishing from New York University. With her new proficiencies, she returned to Alaska, started an online business, but soon returned to state service, living in



Penelope Goforth and female king crab aboard the F/V Hazel Lorraine in the Bering Sea in 1981. Photo courtesy Penelope Goforth.

Ketchikan, Juneau and eventually Anchorage, where she has been moored ever since.

Following her retirement from the state in 2008, a full-time publishing position with a major Buddhist publishing house called her to Halifax, Nova Scotia, one of the oldest ports in the Canadian Maritimes. But Alaska was her home port, and she returned a year later.

Goforth is proud of the Alaska Historical Society's advocacy to keep Alaska federal records archives in the Pacific Northwest and make them accessible through digitization. She is also a passionate supporter of

Alaska History Day—and wants to see its future solidified.

Her current projects include a book on the Jewish founders of the Alaska Commercial Company, based on a recent exhibit she helped curate at the Alaska Jewish Museum. She is also working on a history of the little steamer *Dora*, which delivered people and mail for nearly 40 years in Alaska waters, and organizing her Aleutian photographs. Supported by her beloved cats, she is recovering from some recent health issues.

—Molly McCammon

Cordova conference

Continued from page 1

management of the Exxon *Valdez* oil spill.

The society is issuing a call for papers for presentation at the conference, with proposals due May 31. Please send an abstract of 100 words and two sentences of biography to Rachel Mason, program chair, at members@alaskahistoricalsociety.org. The conference theme echoes the upcoming year's National History Day theme, and

Alaska students and teachers are especially encouraged to consider participating.

Cordova is accessible by Alaska Marine Highway ferry and daily Alaska Airlines flights. The conference will kick off with a welcoming reception the evening of Oct. 9. Papers will be presented Oct. 10-11, with one of the days dedicated to Cordova subjects and presenters. A banquet will be held the evening of Friday, Oct. 11, and closing sessions and tours on Saturday.

—David Ramseur

KETCHIKAN

Historic clock tells time of local history

A clock outside the Billingsley jewelry store on Mission Street was a familiar sight to Ketchikan residents from 1924 to 1954. The clock was first on Front Street in front of the Knox Brothers' jewelry store, and moved to Mission Street when the business moved. When Frank Billingsley took over the business, he had the numbers on the clock face replaced with the letters of BILLINGSLEY. The clock was put in storage when the business closed in 1954, and later donated to the Tongass Historical Society. It now stands in Whale Park. To honor its earlier history, the clock's face was repainted with numbers and the Knox Brothers name.



Mission Street around 1935. Billingsley Jeweler and clock are on the left. Photo courtesy Ketchikan Museums.

Tlingit carver restores Sun totem pole

Tommy Joseph, a Tlingit carver from Sitka, spent several weeks in Ketchikan last fall cleaning, repairing and repainting the Raven Stealing the Sun totem pole located at the Tongass Historical Museum. The pole was commissioned by the City of Ketchikan to honor the Taant'a Kwaan, one of the Tlingit groups whose homeland is the Ketchikan area. It was carved by Dempsey Bob, a Tahltan-Tlingit artist from British Columbia, and Stanley Brown, his nephew apprentice, in 1982.

New exhibit reflects waterfront workers

A new exhibit, *On the Edge: Stories from Ketchikan's Working Waterfront*, opens at the Tongass Historical Museum on March 1. The exhibit explores the people, places and work on the town's waterfront that are central to the island community. It highlights hardworking individuals for whom the waterfront is more than a place of work, it is their passion, lifestyle and heritage.

JUNEAU/DOUGLAS

Tlingit leadership focus of lecture

Tlingit leader Edward K. Thomas spoke last fall about the evolution of Alaska Native leadership from the late 1800s to modern times. He titled his lecture, "Hall of Famers in History: Decades of Leadership." Thomas is past president of the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska and has served as tribal president and on Sealaska Corporation's board of directors. The event, part of a lecture series sponsored by the Sealaska Heritage Institute, was on November 14, which was signed into law as Walter Sobeloff Day in 2014. Dr. Sobeloff was a Presbyterian minister, lifelong advocate for Tlingit people and SHI's longtime chair.

Douglas's diverse history gets attention

The last two issues of the *Gastineau Heritage News* have been devoted to the history of Douglas, Juneau's distinct sister city. The 2023 fall/winter issue contained major articles about the burning of the Douglas Indian Village in 1962 and the building of the Douglas Bridge, completed in 1935. The newsletter is published by the Gastineau Channel Historical Society.

Museum highlights Peratrovich contributions

The Juneau City Museum celebrated Elizabeth Peratrovich Day with a showing of the film *For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska*. There also was a scavenger hunt to find information about Peratrovich in the museum's permanent exhibits and a temporary show of arts-integrated local classroom projects honoring Peratrovich and her contributions to securing civil rights for all in Alaska. Peratrovich, grand president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood in 1945, worked hard to persuade the Alaska Legislature to pass the Alaska Anti-Discrimination Act, signed into law on February 16 of that year.

ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

New film focuses on Attu plant life

A student film crew at the Northern Film School, Leeds Beckett University in the United Kingdom, is working on a film about Scottish botanist Isobel Wylie Hutchison's visit to Attu Island in 1936. Hutchison traveled to Greenland, Iceland and Alaska to collect plant specimens. She was enchanted by Attu and by the Unanga community living there and wrote poetry about her visit. Six years later, the Japanese invaded Attu and its residents were taken to Japan as prisoners. The students have been working with Attu descendants and researchers in Scotland and Alaska to tell about the botanist and the island's significant stories. If you have information to share or would like to know more about the project, please contact Joe Everitt at j.everitt2758@student.leedsbeckett.ac.uk



Hutchison in Inuit gear, 1927. Photo courtesy Library of Scotland.

KODIAK

Class teaches history through arts and cultures

The Kodiak History Museum is partnering with JoAnne Knight to offer a class at Kodiak College this spring, Exploring Kodiak's Histories Through Arts and Cultures. The class counts toward teachers' recertification and is funded through the Munartet Project. The museum is sharing its educational resources and collections with teachers, who are learning how to integrate Kodiak's rich history into curriculum using those resources.

FAIRBANKS

Bronze Felix Pedro bust moves to Pioneer Museum

If you visit the Fairbanks Pioneer Museum, you'll now be able to see a life-size bronze bust of Felix Pedro, the gold miner from Italy whose discovery of gold in 1902 led to the Fairbanks Gold Rush. The bust was cast in Rome in 1952 and sent to Fairbanks as a gift from the Italian people. The artist was Vittorio de Colbertaldo, whose specialty was creating sculptures of Italians who made history around the world. The bust has been housed on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus, but the board of the Pioneer Museum suggested that more visitors and local people would see it if it was moved to their museum. Pedro's bust was welcomed to its new home with a ceremony in December.

Miners commemorate Black History Month

The Mining Hall of Fame observed Black History Month in February with a presentation by Joan Skilbred, who discussed biographical profiles of nine Fairbanks residents of the Black community. Her research established that the Golden Heart City had Black residents from its earliest gold rush days.

Presentations focus on Nenana and curling

Sam Demientieff presented a talk, "Stories of Nenana Town, the SS *Nenana*, and Life on the River," at the Tanana Yukon Historical Society's program in November. Nenana started as a railroad construction site, but what kept it important after the railroad was completed was its role as a hub for river transportation to communities along the Tanana, Yukon and other interior rivers. Demientieff grew up working in his family's freighting business, working on boats and barges, and hauling freight and supplies from Nenana to villages and mining camps.

The society's January program, presented by Karen Spaleta and Ken Hall, was "History of the Fairbanks Curling Club." The FCC was established in 1905 by miners who brought curling to Fairbanks from the Yukon. Early games were played downtown on the frozen Chena River. A club building was constructed on Second Avenue, and in 1935 women were admitted into the club. Karen Spaleta is a relative newcomer to Fairbanks who fell into curling as a way to keep busy during the long winter. Ken Hall is a third-generation Fairbanks resident who curled in high school in the 1970s and whose grandfather, Ed Clausen, was an FCC member in the 1930s.

EKLUTNA

Old St. Nicholas Church slated for restoration

ROSSIA, the nonprofit organization that supports preservation of Russian Orthodox sacred sites in Alaska, recently received a grant from the National Park Service to start restoration of the Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Eklutna, known to be the oldest building in the Anchorage area. Work began last October when the bell tower was lowered to the ground to avoid its collapse. The phased restoration project will include exterior and interior work, guided by a full investigation of the history of the church.



The old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Eklutna. Alaska State Library, Russian Orthodox Churches in America Photo Collection, Watercolor by Sam McClain, ASL-P548-042.

ANCHORAGE

Historic value of Iditarod Trail gets focus

A panel of 20 Alaskans was assembled in 1981 to advise the U.S. Department of Interior on management of the Iditarod Trail from Seward to Nome after it was designated by Congress as a National Historic Trail. Joe Redington Sr., founder of the Iditarod sled dog race, served as chair. Other members included representatives of Seward, Nome and communities along the trail, as well as DOI staff. The Iditarod Trail was used by gold prospectors arriving in Seward by ship to reach the Nome gold fields, and to deliver gold from the Nome, Iditarod and Innoko mining districts to Seward's year-round ice-free port. Parts of the trail had been used by Indigenous people for thousands of years, but today's Iditarod Trail began when the Alaska Road Commission conducted a scouting expedition in 1908. Today, the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance that grew out of the 1981 panel raises awareness of the trail and its importance to Gold Rush and Alaska Native history. Its projects have included marking the route with wood tripods, restoring several shelter cabins along the trail, educating teachers and encouraging local groups to undertake stewardship of sections of the trail.

PALMER

This year's snows nothing compared to 1946

This has been a big snow winter in Southcentral Alaska, and it's been a struggle to keep roads cleared. At least we haven't had to use saws to remove the snow! Janice Quarnstrom Myers, one of the children of the Matanuska Colony, lived on Palmer's 7-mile farm loop. In a recent newsletter of the Palmer Historical Society she remembered the heavy snows of 1946 or 1947. "I remember the snow packing into the big S curve beyond our place and we were out of school for days while the men of the neighborhood used saws to cut the cement-like blocks of snow out of the road and drag them away," she said. "The snow plows and snow grinding blower equipment were helpless against the hard snow." (Colony Kid Tract 121).



School bus in snow, 1948. Photo courtesy Palmer Historical Society, DeLand collection.

Husky Burgers' delicious history celebrated

Resuming their monthly programs after the holidays, the Palmer Historical Society heard Joe Lentz Jr. talk about Husky Burger. The family has served the delicious burgers at the Alaska State Fair in the same historic log cabin since 1964—the longest running food booth at the fair. Lentz never missed a day working there for 58 years. Before the Lentz family started serving the burgers, they were served at the Knik Drive Inn on the Old Glenn Highway, then owned by the Uzelac family. Husky Burger was started to raise money for the Boy Scouts. Husky Burgers are not exclusively at the state fair; they are served at Friday Flings, Pyrah's Pioneer Peak farm festivals and other local events.

Nominate endangered sites by April 12

Preservation Alaska is soliciting applications for its 2024 Ten Most Endangered Historical Properties list. The program, started in the 1980s, has helped save buildings such as the Wasilla Depot. Nominations are due by April 12. The form is available on the organization's website.

WRANGELL

Podcast highlights corruption in early Alaska

Wrangell History Unlocked has produced a new three-part podcast series, *Strange Customs: The Corrupt Collector John Carr*. The series centers on the life of John Carr, a career criminal and fugitive from justice, an ally of a powerful U.S. senator from Oregon, and Fort Wrangell's collector of customs during the 1874 Cassiar Gold Rush. Producer Ronan Rooney says *Strange Customs* is a story about the meaning of law and justice in Indigenous country. More about the podcast and how to listen to it can be found at www.wrangellhistoryunlocked.com/strangecustoms

TENAKEE SPRINGS

Rie Munoz exhibit on tap this summer

The Tenakee Historical Collection and Museum will host a third exhibit of works by renowned Alaska artist Rie Munoz this summer. The exhibit will feature a selection of the artist's paintings and silkscreens that depicted Alaska Native legends. The exhibit will have the text of each legend below its corresponding image.

WASILLA

Award recognizes train depot preservation work

The Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce received a Historic Preservation Award from Preservation Alaska (formerly the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation) in recognition of its work relocating and restoring the Wasilla Train Depot, built in 1917 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building had to be relocated in 2020 due to the Knik-Goose Bay Road realignment project. Amid COVID restrictions and staffing issues, the building was lifted from its foundation and transported to a new

home at 1155 Depot Road, but still adjacent to railroad tracks. Restoration work included historically accurate painting and repair of windows, doors and flooring.



Wasilla Train Depot in 1919. Photo courtesy Alaska State Library, Alaska Railroad Collection.

SOLDOTNA

Genealogy helps connect families to past

The Soldotna Historical Society & Museum held its annual general membership meeting in February. The program that followed was on genealogy. LaShon Evans, with the Soldotna FamilySearch Center, spoke about the center and how it helps people discover and connect their family—past, present and future. Evans is passionate about involving youth and making genealogy engaging to everyone. The Soldotna Museum plans to open May 15.

SEWARD

Article recaps fiery history of United Methodist

The Resurrection Bay Historical Society's December newsletter contained a story from the December 1994 *Seward Phoenix Log* about a fire that destroyed the Seward Memorial United Methodist Church on December 26 that year. The fire started with an electrical short in the basement kitchen that ignited combustible



ceiling material. Firefighters attacked the fire inside the building for 40 minutes, until they withdrew because the roof was in danger of collapsing. The fire was so hot that some of the firefighters'

Methodist Church getting moved to Fourth Avenue. Photo courtesy Resurrection Bay Historical Society

helmet shields melted. The steeple was saved, knocked down by the firefighters' hoses, and is now part of the RBHS's collections. The church was built in 1941 to serve as the chapel at Fort Raymond. In 1946, it was moved to downtown Seward. At the time of the fire, it was used as a Methodist church but also served a Lutheran congregation.

SITKA

Book highlights rich World War II history

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society published *Sitka, Alaska: A Short History* by Rebecca Poulson and Cora Dow. The society's winter newsletter includes an excerpt from the book about World War II in Sitka. Before the war, Sitka had been selected along with Kodiak and Unalaska as a site for a military base to defend against possible Japanese aggression. Navy and army bases were built on separate islands. Building them brought a surge of construction workers and military personnel to Sitka, starting in 1939 when the Navy began construction of an operating base for PBY planes, called "Flying Boats." One building was the boathouse on Japonski Island, built in 1941. It proved too small for the 50 or so vessels that required maintenance and repair, but still stands today and the SMHS continues its work to preserve it. After Japan attacked the Aleutian Islands and occupied Attu and Kiska in June 1942, Sitka became an important stop for PBY planes en route to the Aleutians. A strength of Poulson and Dow's book is telling Sitka's 20th-century history as well as when it was the Russian and first American capital.

— Rachel Mason and Jo Antonson

Judges sought for April History Day competition

Do you have a few hours to help 6th-12th grade students by providing feedback on their history research projects entered in the upcoming Alaska History Day contest?

We are looking for judges from Alaska's history community to review the projects and provide suggestions students can use to revise and improve their projects if they are selected to advance to the National History Day contest.

Contest dates are April 6-10 and results are announced April 12. Our contest is online. Last year 80 students participated from across the state and we expect that number to be higher this year. Student entries in a variety of categories will address the theme "Turning Points in History."

Judges need to:

- Provide information here: tinyurl.com/judgeAHD
- Register in Zfairs: ak.nhd.org
- Attend a judge orientation by Zoom

the week prior to the contest

- Between April 6 and 10, use the contest portal (ak.nhd.org) to review a set of projects based on their merits, setting aside any personal opinions or bias on the topic
- Provide constructive written feedback about each project
- Be part of a judges' team (typically 3 people) to rank projects by consensus, selecting the strongest projects to advance to the national competition

It has been a busy winter for Alaska History Day. In late December, we were selected for a \$10,000 award through the University of Alaska's faculty initiative fund. This will support planning, webinars for educators, program development and coordination.

In January, we released the 2024 Teacher Toolkit and Contest Guide. This 51-page document provides tips, tools, resources and ideas for educators to implement History Day in their classrooms. This project

was supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant through the Alaska Humanities Forum.

Also in January we held our second webinar for educators, focused on how to help students produce high quality projects. Thanks to Heather Damario of West Valley High School in Fairbanks for leading this session, supported by the NEH/AKHF grant and hosted by UAF Department of History.

We are currently developing the programming for the 2024-25 season, including topic guides for next year's theme and planning webinars.

To donate to support AHD, visit www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org/membership which now has a dedicated donation button.

For questions about Alaska History Day, please send an email to alaskahistoryday@gmail.com

—Leanna Williams,
Alaska History Day Co-coordinator

Alaska elections often colorful, controversial

Editor's note: The society asked one of Alaska's leading historians, University of Alaska Anchorage professor emeritus Steve Haycox, to reflect on the history of Alaska elections. Author of numerous books about Alaska, Haycox was named AHS's Historian of the Year in 2003.



The pivotal election approaching in November inspires some reflection on Alaska's electoral history, which, like other states, is complex and varied. Yet some discernable patterns stand out.

One is the shift from Democrat to Republican dominance following the construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline and production of North Slope oil. Another is the difficulty of assuring the opportunity for some Alaska Native people to understand election ballots and to be able to vote.

From statehood until the mid-1970s, Democrats dominated Alaska's top elected offices, holding the governor's chair, the two U.S. Senate seats, and Alaska's lone U.S. House seat¹ for most of those years. Alaska had been so solidly Democrat in the preceding decade it was taken for granted that Alaska's Congressional delegation following statehood would be Democrat, an assumption that proved true.

The new state's political leadership under Governor Bill Egan, facilitating the transition to state governance, was characterized by a high degree of transparency and dedication to policies that would provide services where there had been none, or bringing them under local control. For most of the first decade, Democrats controlled the state House and usually the state Senate. Republicans at the time argued that the Democratic leadership did little to encourage business investment in the state, and wasted money on services not needed. Even Republicans recognized the state's dependency on the federal government.

Though Republicans made something

of a comeback in the 1966 election, putting novice politician Walter Hickel in the governor's chair and electing Howard Pollack to Congress, Egan was re-elected in 1970 and Nick Begich ousted Pollack.

Democrat dominance began to fade with the arrival of "big oil," the authorization of the pipeline in 1974 and through-put beginning in 1977. Following the 1969 North Slope lease sale, oil lobbyists "converged on the state," as Lisa Weisler wrote in

munerative than Democrats wanted, due to Republican opposition.

1972 was the last year an Alaska Democrat was elected to Congress until Mary Peltola was elected in 2022, ironically to fill the seat of the man who was defeated by the missing and presumed dead Nick Begich in 1972.

Oil lobbyists in Alaska conveyed the industry's policy needs: the lowest taxation possible and the least environmental regulation conscionable. Industry organizations contributed heavily to political candidates, mostly Republican, who supported those needs. Industry/Republican political dominance reached its zenith in 2008, the year six sitting or former Alaska legislators, all Republicans, and three industry related persons, were indicted for corruption. There have been several coalition-led legislatures since.

Alaska Native voting has a checkered history in the state, marked by numerous challenges. Alaska Natives had voted in elections at least as early as 1916 and probably earlier. For reasons undocumented, in 1922 Wrangell election judge Leonard Churchill denied Tlingit leader Charlie Jones' (Chief Shakes IV) request to vote. William Paul won judicial recognition of Jones' right to vote the following year, the year before Congress enacted Native citizenship throughout the U.S.

The next year the territorial legislature sought a way around Native voting by passing a literacy test, but the act was effectively vitiated by an amendment grandfathering previous voters.³ But that right to vote was not honored in all places in subsequent years on the grounds that certain applicants were not leading a "civilized"

life.

While assimilation has become a moot point, there are still Alaska Natives who are effectively denied the opportunity to vote. In 1975 extensions of the 1965 Voting Rights

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A memorable event in Alaska's political history was the visit of presidential candidate Senator John F. Kennedy to the Alaska State Fair in Palmer the year after Alaska became a state, when Alaskans would vote for the first time for president. Accompanied by party official Langdon P. Marvin Jr., Kennedy officially opened his "New Frontiers" campaign. He was greeted by Mat-Su Valley homesteader J. V. Kruscavage and donkey "Cindy." UAF-1976-21-55160, Ernest H. Gruening Papers, 1914-[1959-1969] 1974. APRCA, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

2019. After a long and bitter fight, the 1970 legislature produced a stair-step oil production tax which was heavily criticized by Republicans.² The 1973 legislature agreed on a cents-per-barrel tax, among others, but a right-of-way leasing provision far less re-

1. Herman Slotnick and R.E. Chinn wrote several articles summarizing state elections between 1958 and 1970 in *Western Historical Quarterly*, available on JSTOR
2. Published by the Alaska Center: <https://ak-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/>

Alaskas-Oil-Tax-History-3-23-19.pdf
3. Stephen Haycox, "William Paul, Sr., and the Alaska Voters' Literacy Act of 1925," *Alaska History*, Fall 1986
4. Zachary Kaplan, "Unlocking the Ballot: The Past, Present and Future of Alaska Voting

Rights," *Alaska Law Review*, 2020
5. *Toyukuk v. Treadwell; Toyukuk v. Mallott*
6. Alaska Native Voting Rights: A Report of the Alaska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, June 2019

AHS advocates for archives access, education

From making Alaska's federal archival records accessible to encouraging our students to learn more about civics, the Alaska Historical Society is working on issues important to our members. Here's a summary of recent efforts:

• **Federal Archives** To continue its advocacy aimed at keeping federal archives pertaining to Alaska accessible, the AHS has encouraged the U.S. Senate to fund replacement of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) facility in Seattle. A federal appropriations bill pending in the Senate provides \$9 million for design and planning to replace the archives and \$3 million for immediately needed repairs to the existing facility.

In a late January letter to the chair and vice chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, the AHS welcomed the funding proposal and encouraged its passage. The letter also noted Senator Lisa Murkowski's efforts that have provided funding to digitize Alaska records in the National Archives so they can be accessed electronically.

• **Civics Education** The AHS is actively promoting passage of Alaska State Senate Bill

29, legislation sponsored by Senator Gary Stevens relating to civics education. The bill was approved by the Senate last year and is now under consideration by the Alaska House. If passed, the legislation would require high school graduates to complete one semester of a civics education course and get a passing score on a civics assessment similar to that required under the naturalization process for immigrants becoming U.S. citizens.

AHS has written key members of the House encouraging their support of the measure.

• **The Alaska Room** The society also has weighed in favorably on plans to refurbish the Alaska Room at Anchorage's Lousac Library and return it to a historical research facility which is both highly visible and easily accessible to the Alaska public.

A December 2017 flood from a broken water pipe damaged and led to the closure of the rotunda which housed the library's

Alaska collection. This resulted in the relocation of 25,000 books, maps, unique city documents and artwork, which limited public research access to this material.

Last summer, three AHS board members and staff met with library officials for a briefing and tour of the facility. In the fall, several AHS board members and staff attended an open house to learn more about plans for the refurbishment. The municipality has raised funds from a bond proposition, a National Endowment for the Humanities grant and private fundraising to renovate the rotunda. An architectural firm has produced initial design concepts for the renovation, and the remaining funds needed are being sought. Construction hopefully will start in late fall 2024.

The society in January wrote Anchorage Mayor Dave Bronson and members of the assembly to support the project.

—Molly McCammon

Alaska elections

Continued from page 10

Act authorized federal monitoring of Alaska elections to insure that "illiterate or semi-literate" Alaska Natives be provided translators or translations of voting material.⁴ Alleging that the state failed to comply with those provisions, several Native individuals and tribes sued the state in federal court.

As one individual expressed it, "why should I go vote without understanding what I am voting for?"⁵ The court agreed with the plaintiffs and ordered translators and translation of voting material in three census districts. Fully staffing voting places and providing translated materials in a timely manner has been difficult for the state, which remains out of compliance. The civil rights division of the U.S. Justice Department continues to monitor voting in those census districts.⁶

Both of these patterns in Alaska's electoral history await sorely needed complete studies and exposition.

—Steve Haycox

Bear Tooth to screen *Rebuilding Brown*

The recently completed film about an Alaska pioneer, *Rebuilding Brown*, will be shown May 13 at Anchorage's Bear Tooth Theatrepub as a benefit for the Alaska Historical Society. Anne Coray and Steve Kahn, owners and restorers of a historic log cabin at Lake Clark, wrote and directed the production, and Silas Firth edited it.

The film profiles Brown Carlson, who

built the cabin. There are many colorful stories about Carlson, who arrived around 1906 and was one of the early settlers around the lake, and old-timers recount his feats and foibles.

The Alaska Historical Society assisted the directors by serving as fiscal sponsor for the project. Tickets are on sale now at Beartooththeatre.net

AHS seeking applicants for scholarship

The deadline to apply for scholarships to attend the Alaska Historical Society's annual conference is coming up. The AHS awards two scholarships for a graduate or undergraduate college student researching an Alaska history topic or individual employed in an Alaskan cultural organization for less than three years.

Recipients are to make a presentation about their work at the conference. Awards cover travel and lodging costs and a conference registration package. This year's conference will be October 9-12 in Cordova. More information is at www.alaskahistorical-society.org The deadline for applications is May 31, 2024.

Adkins honored for best journal article

Christopher Adkins has been selected by the Editorial Advisory Board for *Alaska History*, the Alaska Historical Society's journal, to receive the Morgan and Jeanie Sherwood Award given for the best article published in each volume of the journal.

A doctoral candidate in history at the University of South Florida, Adkins' article

is in volume 38 (2023) and entitled, "The Canine Crucible of Labor, Love, Killing, and Kindness of the Gold Rush North." It is a revised excerpt from his dissertation which is in progress.

The award, generously endowed by the Sherwoods, is a \$500 prize.



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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AN ODDMENT

Dr. Sanden's Electric Belt a solution for weak men

In the Victorian era electricity offered wonders like power for lighting, for telegraph lines, and for a host of household appliances. And it provided con men and advertising wizards a chance to make a fortune selling a different sort of buzz—the electropathic belt.

This dubious battery-powered therapeutic device delivered an electric charge via discs of silver-coated zinc and copper coils and even came equipped with a pouch called a “suspensory” that stimulated the male genitalia with “electric curative currents.”

The belt purportedly remedied “nervous debility, kidney disease, rheumatism, lame back, sciatica, indigestion, dyspepsia, neuralgia and various forms of liver complaints.” They sold for between \$4 and \$18 and were popular enough that companies in the United States and England offered their own versions.

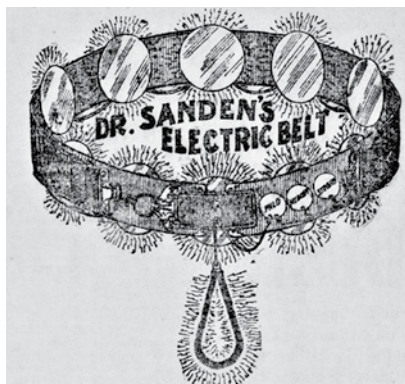
By 1897 this line of quackery had extended to the Klondike gold rush when the Sanden Electric Company targeted stampeders to the Far North with this pitch under the headline “A Pitiful Breakdown”:

In sight of wealth over two hundred men have broken down on the trail while making the overland trip to the Klondike. They have failed because of the lack of sufficient vitality to stand the hardships—the days of hard tramping through snowdrifts and nights of sleepless exposure. It is no place for a weak, nervous man. ... This Electric Belt is a wonderful invigorator, and its warming, soothing force of electricity has a grand effect upon one's energy. It fits a man for the hardest tasks, makes him self-reliant, husky and 'gritty.'

—Chris Allan



Sources: Advertisements “Cures While You Sleep,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 21, 1897; “A Pitiful Breakdown,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Jan. 30, 1898. See also Lauren Young, “The Victorian Tool for Everything from Hernias to Sex—A Vibrating Electric Belt,” *Atlas Obscura*, July 12, 2016.



Above, the illustration from an ad for Dr. Sanden's Electric Belt headlined “A Pitiful Breakdown,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Jan. 30, 1898. At left, an illustration from “Dr. Sanden in Seattle,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Sept. 11, 1897.