Celebrated speakers highlight Cordova conference

Two high-profile speakers are confirmed for the Alaska Historical Society’s 2024 annual conference in Cordova, scheduled for Oct. 9-12 with registration to open Aug. 1.

Former Alaska lieutenant governor and national climate change expert Fran Ulmer will open the conference as the keynote speaker on Oct. 10. Ulmer will call upon her distinguished career spanning roles as policy analyst for Gov. Jay Hammond, Juneau mayor, state legislator, chancellor of the University of Alaska Anchorage and more, to address the conference theme of “Rights and Responsibilities” with direct application to Alaska historical issues.

Currently an associate fellow at Harvard University’s Belfer Center, Ulmer was appointed by President Clinton to the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission and by President Obama to the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling and as chair of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission.


Currently a senior counselor with Cenview Partners, an international investment banking advisory firm, Haass is the author of 14 books on American foreign policy. The recipient of the State Department’s Superior Honor Award and the Presidential Citizens Medal, he holds master’s and doctorate degrees from Oxford University.

Continuing the successful practice at last year’s Kenai Peninsula conference where one day is devoted to the history of the host community, Oct. 12 will be Cordova Day. Cordova Historical Society President Barclay Kopchak will kick off Saturday’s presentations. She worked as an education coordinator for the Chugachmiut Corporation developing Native heritage-themed curricula and was a 30-year “temporary employee” of Prince William Sound.

Please turn to page 5
AHS planning to build on successful Critical Issues Lecture Series

Two years ago, troubled by the willful distortion of history which has contributed to the increasingly divisive civil discourse in our state and nation, the Alaska Historical Society launched a new initiative. The brainchild of former AHS President Will Schneider, we organized a series of four panel discussions focused on major public policy issues facing Alaska.

In April we concluded the series and, with all modesty, pronounce it a success. The sessions featured 14 experts from Alaska and beyond on issues from climate change and Native sovereignty to development vs. conservation and the “Americanization” of Alaska. More than 400 people participated in-person or online, and the sessions remain available on the AHS website. We built new partnerships with organizations such as the Cook Inlet Historical Society, Anchorage Museum, League of Women Voters and OLÉ!, an Anchorage-based educational nonprofit.

The series would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Atwood Foundation, which allowed us to cover travel costs for our speakers.

As we reflect on what we called the Critical Issues Lecture Series, the fundamental question is: did we heighten the level of public discourse?

As we head into one of the most divisive national elections in our nearly 250-year history, Americans and Alaskans remain frustrated with our public conversation. It has deteriorated to the point where sensible public policy is not only enormously challenging, but often unachievable.

At the national level, consider the issue of border policy where a congressional compromise was finally reached but ultimately rejected because immigration is a better political wedge issue for some than a solution. In Alaska, increased state funding for education was reduced because of the politics of public dollars for private schools.

Our goal with the lecture series was to demonstrate how knowledge of history can inform and improve the current public policy debate. We’d like to think those who participated came away knowing more about the issues and better informed to educate others in their communities.

We are encouraged enough by interest in the series to broaden the initiative in three ways. First, we’re capitalizing on this year’s conference theme, “Rights and Responsibilities,” with two high-profile speakers. Our keynoter, former Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer, will reflect on her long public service career to discuss contemporary issues with a focus on climate change.

And we’re elated to be joined by a leading foreign policy expert, Richard Haass, whose new book I profiled in this space in the last issue. Haass eloquently argues the greatest threat to America is internal and we must revise the expectations of American citizenship with 10 “habits of good citizens.”

Second, we propose to broaden our support of Alaska History Day by assisting Alaska history teachers and their students with monetary support for the production of lesson plans on the 2025 National History Day theme of rights and responsibilities.

Finally, we’re seeking support to bring in a prominent American historian to deliver a free-to-the-public lecture in spring 2023 on how the theme of rights and responsibilities is reflected at the national level.

University of Texas at Austin history professor H.W. Brands, has tentatively accepted our invitation to travel to Alaska to deliver this lecture and meet with Alaska history students. Brands is the author of more than 30 books on U.S. history and his work has twice been selected as finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

As this newsletter heads to the printer, we are extending the deadline for proposals to present papers at this year’s conference in Cordova to June 15. Please consider a presentation which reflects this year’s theme to help us make the conference another productive and memorable one.

—David Ramseur
250th anniversary, federal archives, civics education remain focus of ongoing AHS advocacy efforts

- Senator Murkowski named to America250 Commission U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski has been appointed to America250, the nonpartisan entity charged by Congress with planning for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The Alaska Historical Society wrote the senator a letter of congratulations and urged her to focus on Alaska’s vital role to the nation over the past two centuries.

“This includes helping secure a new international order through the Lend-Lease program in World War II, providing America membership in the Arctic and leading the nation in establishing basic civil rights for all,” the AHS wrote. “Alaska’s involvement should include a focus on our diverse population, especially Alaska’s Native people and their rich culture. Through our landmark land claims settlement, Alaska helped make our Native peoples among the most powerful Indigenous people in the world.”

If a special task force is created in Alaska, the AHS said it should broadly represent our state, with historical experts, business and political leaders and Native groups. The society also recommended Alaska’s commemoration include Alaska-based activities, such as student competitions, targeted social studies curricula, heritage tourism and a lecture and panel discussion series like that organized by AHS.

- Federal archives Senator Murkowski’s language that continues to hold the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) accountable for digitization of Alaska records is in the FY24 Appropriations Committee report, as is the language prohibiting the Public Buildings Reform Board from selling the current Sand Point, Washington, facility until all digitization is complete. The senator’s office has indicated she will continue to request this language in the FY25 budget.

- Anchorage Loussac Library’s Alaska Room A March open house attended by Alaska Historical Society executive director Jo Antonson and board member Pennelope Goforth was for review and comment on the plans for the remodel. The 95% complete plans should be done by June and library staff hope to seek construction bids by late summer, which should give a better idea of the final amount of funding needed (probably close to $2.1 million). The AHS will continue to follow progress on this important resource for Alaska’s history and research community.

- SHPO update State of Alaska Historic Preservation Officer Judy Bittner reports level funding for her office in the 2025 operating budget, with matching funds in the capital budget for federal historic preservation grants. The office is still understaffed and underfunded but surviving. On the federal side, the national program has been reauthorized until September, but proposed funding in the FY 2025 President’s budget reduces program funding. There are efforts to get Congress to restore the program funding.

In the meantime, federal agencies such as the National Park Service are consolidating historian staff and making reductions to programs that protect cultural and historic programs.

- Civics education Senate Bill 29, sponsored by Sen. Gary Stevens, requiring civics to be taught as part of public high school curricula, appears to have died in the final day of the legislative session. The bill has received wide support, including from the AHS, and passed the Senate but failed to make a final vote in the state House.

- Truth and Healing Commission House Joint Resolution 17, sponsored by Rep. C.J. McCormick, urging the U.S. Congress to pass the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, unanimously passed the Senate May 10 and is awaiting transmittal to the governor. The sponsor statement reads: “The impact of Indian boarding schools on the Indigenous population is vast and far reaching, it has induced trauma for an existing generation of people and has largely gone unrecognized by the State of Alaska. The prevalence of unmarked grave sites at known boarding schools, cemeteries and undocumented missionary schools across Alaska illustrates the imperative for acknowledgment and reconciliation efforts to be prioritized within Alaska.”

—Molly McCammon

Climate change driving Alaska weather patterns

University of Alaska Fairbanks climate specialist Rick Thoman explains Alaska’s historic weather pattern trends April 18 at the Anchorage Museum. He was one of the panelists in the final of AHS’s four-part Critical Issues Lecture Series. All of the presentations were designed to model critical thinking and civil discourse and provide information on issues important to Alaskans. The lectures are available on the AHS website.
MUSEUM/HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROFILE

State-of-the-art facility houses Nome collections

Where can you push a button to hear music from an old church organ, pull a winch operator’s control lever to launch a film about gold dredging, finger caribou sinew thread, sit in an old phone booth to dial up a story from Nome’s past, and stroke samples of Alaska hare and Arctic ground squirrel skins?

Nome’s Carrie M. McLain Memorial Museum offers these and many more interactive experiences in a spacious facility that opened in 2016. With 3,281 square feet of gallery space and 2,815 square feet of storage for its burgeoning collection, the museum is six times larger than the one that had served Nome since 1967.

Former city clerk Carrie McLain, who had arrived in Nome as a child with her family in 1905, began collecting Nome history memorabilia in the 1940s. “Carrie McLain and others realized that Nome had a unique history and started collecting things, started asking people who had lived in Nome if they had things they’d want to donate,” said Cheryl Thompson, museum director since fall 2023.

The original city museum occupied the basement of a building constructed with Alaska Purchase Centennial funds. The 1,000-square-foot space was soon filled with exhibits. The museum collection grew significantly around the time of Nome’s centennial and began filling city overflow spaces around town.

The building’s location on the south side of Front Street—with just a granite sea wall to protect it from violent Bering Sea storms—proved a liability. City officials sought funding over a period of two decades for a larger and safer facility. In 2011, the state legislature approved $16 million for a building to house the city museum and library as well as a cultural center run by Kawerak, Inc. The building is named in honor of Richard Foster, who was the area’s state representative from 1984 to 2009 and passed away in 2009.

Thompson, who has been in Nome since 1984, worked at the museum as an aide and collections assistant from 2009-2017. In 2015 staff began the process of carefully packing exhibits and collection items in preparation for moving.

Storage at the new museum is “top notch,” Thompson said. Twenty-one large cabinets, shelving units, and racks mounted on rails maximize space for the museum’s 12,000 photographs, 15,000 artifacts, and historic recorder’s office volumes. There is also a research room and large room for processing collection items.

“The museum’s long-term exhibit, *Nome: Hub of Cultures and Communities Across the Bering Strait*, showcases historical and cultural objects from the region and revolves around five main themes: subsistence and the environment, mining, the built landscape, transportation, and sustainability. Visiting exhibits or items from the collection are rotated into a 340-square-foot special exhibit gallery.

Nome was established at the Snake River mouth after gold claims were staked in nearby creeks in fall 1898. Gold found in the beach sands in 1899 drew some 20,000 people to the area in summer 1900. The town’s population soon fell to about 5,000 permanent residents and has fluctuated ever since.

Prior to the gold rush, the area, known as Sitnasaug, was used by Inupiaq families gathering food. An exhibit displays artifacts discovered near the Snake River mouth in 2005 by workers digging a channel while expanding the harbor. Volunteers helped excavate two house pits, a hunter’s cache and a trash midden dating back several hundred years.

A popular exhibit is taxidermied sled dog Fritz, who co-led the team driven by Leonhard Seppala during the 1925 race to bring antitoxin to Nome to stop a diphtheria outbreak. Five children died before the 674-mile, six-day relay involving 20 dog teams delivered the serum. Fritz and Seppala’s favorite lead dog, Togo, led Seppala’s team over the longest leg of the relay.

A 41-ounce gold nugget found in 2003 at a mine 50 miles northwest of Nome was recently purchased and donated to the museum. Other holdings range from exquisite walrus ivory carvings to diaries kept by early missionaries, miners and other residents.

“I am amazed at how many more things are still coming into the museum,” Thompson said.

Visit the museum Tuesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Admission is free.

—Carol Gales
AHS BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Fairbanks historian and new board member captivated by balanced environmental policies

It makes sense that a history professor is drawn to the Alaska Historical Society Board of Directors. That’s certainly the case for Philip Wight, an assistant professor of history at the University of Alaska Fairbanks since 2020 and one of the board’s newer members.

Although he grew up on the east coast (Pennsylvania, Canada and Ohio), Wight has long been fascinated with Alaska’s extraordinary history — and not just the textbook history taught in classrooms, but the ways history is interwoven in the daily lives and landscapes of Alaskans. “Even though the settler history of Alaska is fairly recent, it feels more consequential than that of east coast U.S. history,” he said.

Wight found Ohio suburban life rather boring. But he was always interested in history, especially hearing stories from his grandfather, a World War II veteran. He also was intrigued by politics, so an undergraduate degree in history at the University of Maryland — close to the Washington, D.C., political hub — made sense.

After a few years working on political campaigns, he faced a decision of law school or continuing with history. A master’s degree in history at Ohio University in Athens at its contemporary history institute deepened his interest in environmental history. The Deep-Water Horizon oil spill and Al Gore’s Inconvenient Truth documentary reinforced that interest. Seeing 250 people chain themselves to the fence outside the White House, protesting the Keystone Pipeline, blew Wight away by their sacrifice. “Had that ever happened before in American history?” he asked himself.

And that brought him to Alaska to study the Trans-Alaska Pipeline (TAPS) — often considered the first major environmental battle in contemporary U.S. history, which became his dissertation topic at Brandeis University in Boston. Wight has published articles on the controversies and consequences of the pipeline (www.tinyurl.com/Wight-TAPS) and is now working on a book he hopes will be published in time for the pipeline’s 50th anniversary in 2027.

Wight is married to Stephanie Wight, a pediatric physical therapist, and has a 2-year-old son, Elias. He loves cycling, hiking, packrafting, skiing, cabin trips, gardening and projects with his hands, including tinkering with renewable energy. His other “causes” besides the AHS are environmental nonprofits in Alaska. He has been involved with the Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AKPIRG) for nearly five years.

One of Wight’s major interests in serving on the AHS board is to help with Alaska History Day. His involvement with the National History Day program during his high school years in Ohio helped cultivate his love for history, and he hopes that will happen with students in Alaska.

“It’s important for students to pursue projects that deepen their understanding of history and teach them how to look at primary sources and ask questions,” he said. “We need to keep up our support of that program.”

—Molly McCammon

Cordova conference

Continued from page 1

Community College.

To ensure a broad diversity of presentations, the call for papers deadline has been extended to June 15. If you wish to present at the conference, please send an abstract of 100 words and a couple of sentences about yourself to Rachel Mason, program chair, at Rachel_Mason@nps.gov.

This year’s conference theme, “Rights and Responsibilities,” speaks to Alaska’s history of conflict and challenges about which peoples and interest groups should have rights — and the responsibilities tied to those rights. Alaska’s history is rich with such disputes, ranging from resource development and the right to vote to hotly contested political races.

Cordova is accessible by the Alaska Marine Highway ferry from Whittier and Valdez and daily on Alaska Airlines. The conference will begin the evening of Oct. 9 with a reception and conclude the afternoon of Oct. 12. The conference hotel is the Reluctant Fisherman.

—David Ramseur

University of Alaska Fairbanks history professor Phil Wight plans to produce a book marking the 50th anniversary of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline. Photo courtesy of Phil Wight.
KETCHIKAN

Tides dictated unique early baseball rules

Baseball was a popular sport in Ketchikan in the early 20th century, but it was hard to find a level playing field. The tide flats at the mouth of Ketchikan Creek seemed the best spot for a field, but playing in a tidal zone had unique challenges. The size of the ball field depended on whether the tide was high or low, and players always had to deal with mud or debris from the last tide. If a ball was batted into water so deep it couldn’t be retrieved, the hit was declared a home run. In the early 1920s a dedicated space for a ball field was developed further upstream, in a part of Ketchikan known as Nickeyville, near the present-day intersection of Schoenbar and Park avenues. The field is named after Norman “Doc” Walker, a pharmacist who also served as Ketchikan mayor and as a territorial senator. The original grandstands were replaced in the 1950s after a fire destroyed them. When the field was renovated in 2023, the grandstands were demolished. To celebrate the legacy of Walker Field, local artist Brian Elliot repurposed wood from the grandstands into commemorative plaques.

Baseball game on Ketchikan tidal flats circa 1905. Photo by Harriet Hunt, donated by Forest J. Hunt. THS 62.4.1.29. Photo courtesy Ketchikan Museums.

SITKA

Number of endangered clan houses dwindling

Sitka Indian Village was listed this year not only as one of the Eleven Most Endangered Historic Properties in Alaska, but also on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s list of the Eleven Most Endangered Historic Properties in the U.S. The village once had more than 40 Tlingit clan houses, but only eight stand today and even fewer are currently in use by the clans. The former village, located along the waterfront north of downtown Sitka, is now part of a commercial district that includes shops, restaurants, and a seafood processor. The clan houses traditionally served as gathering places for meetings, potlatches and other ceremonies.

Iconic wood fishing boats documented

The annual meeting of the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society featured a panel discussion on wood fishing boats of the Northwest Coast. The first half of the program was a panel of Sitkans, moderated by Eric Jordan, who talked about building, repairing and fishing the iconic wood boats. In the second part of the program, audience members shared their own stories and posed questions to the panel. Photo displays and an illustrated handout told the history of Sitka’s wood boat fleet and showed how the boats are made and repaired.

ANCHORAGE

A musical about William H. Seward

A musical about William H. Seward? The complex and controversial statesman is well known for his role in the 1867 treaty that ceded Alaska from Russia to the United States. The Cook Inlet Historical Society wrapped up its speaker series this year with a one-hour program of songs, instrumental music and dramatic readings to tell more about Seward—his life, role as Secretary of State during the Civil War and early Reconstruction and the 1867 treaty that led to Alaska’s jeering designation as “Seward’s Folly.” The May 16 event, produced and coordinated by Anchorage musician and music professor Laura Koenig, included program host Kate Egan, soprano Mari Hahn and the Shake City String Band, an Alaska group whose specialty is symphonic folk fusion.

Alaskan prepared ice cream, king crab for royals

In 1964, prominent Alaskan Herbert Hilscher came up with a unique marketing plan for Alaska king crab in Europe. He proposed to send live king crabs to the Aquarium of Oceanographic Institute of Monte Carlo to be distributed to other aquariums in France, England, Germany and Belgium. The idea was to showcase Alaska’s finest seafood and acquaint more Europeans with the giant crabs. Matanuska Maid General Manager George Ed Smith got wind of the king crab shipment and asked Hilscher if he could send along some Matanuska Maid Neapolitan ice cream to Prince Rainier and Princess Grace in Monaco. Hilscher agreed, and he escorted both the king crabs and the ice cream to Monaco on Air France. From the Palmer Historical Society March/April 2024 newsletter, with information from The Frontiersman, March 26, 1964.

Society reports on first Matanuska homesteads

The first homestead in the Matanuska Valley was taken out by Tex Cobb in 1911. Cobb brought a civil engineer with him to survey the boundaries of his site. The second homesteader was John Bugge in 1914. The same year, Roy Cornelius came to the Matanuska Valley and selected land north of Finger Lake after hiking over the trail from Old Knik. After proving up on his homestead, Cornelius took out another homestead at the north end of Trunk Road. Cornelius Lake is named for him. August J. Swanson was the fourth person to receive a patent to a Matanuska Valley homestead, in 1918. Swanson Elementary School is named after him. John August Springer was the fifth homesteader, receiving his patent in 1920. In 1935, Springer sold part of his homestead property to be divided into Colony tracts. The Springer roads are named in his honor. This from the Palmer Historical Society May/June 2024 newsletter.
KODIAK

Artist re-interprets portraits of ancestors

Sugpiaq artist Cheryl Lacy has used watercolors to reinterpret 19th century portraits of Sugpiaq/Alutiiq people made by Russian artist Mikhail Tikhanov, who visited Kodiak in 1818. The originals were intended as scientific illustrations to show the facial features, clothing and adornment of the indigenous residents of the Russian colony. Lacy’s paintings add scenic backgrounds and small changes such as flowers in the subject’s hand. While most of the originals showed the subject from the front and from the side like a scientific specimen, Lacy’s reinterpretations combine the two perspectives into a three-quarter view, bringing portraits of her Sugpiaq ancestors to life. Lacy’s portraits are part of the Alutiiq Museum’s collections in a set entitled “Our Ancestors.”

Historic bars over last century get attention

An exhibit entitled Kodiak’s Historic Bars: 1899 to Today opened May 3 at the Kodiak History Museum. Co-curated by Douglas Vandegraft, Toby Sullivan and Jim Ramaglia, the exhibit illustrates how bars have been part of Kodiak’s social glue for more than 100 years. It’s even been said that the bars were the first businesses in Kodiak to re-open after the 1964 earthquake.

SEWARD

Lydia Jacoby exhibit celebrates Olympic swimmer

The Seward Museum is unveiling a Lydia Jacoby exhibit—in time for this summer’s Olympic games—to recognize the young woman who was a Seward high school student and won a gold medal in the 100-meter breaststroke at the Tokyo Olympic games in 2021 and is on the U.S. team to compete in Paris this summer. In addition, the local Tsunami Swim Club will be featured in the Windows of History in the atrium of the Library and Museum Building.

Early round-the-world flights documented

In April 1924, Seward was one of several Alaska communities visited by aircraft from the Round the World flight expedition. For each leg of the world tour, four pilots traveled with four mechanics with only emergency rations and one change of clothes, and without radios or shelter equipment. They communicated with one another with Morse code and arm signals, and by rocking the plane from side to side. One of the planes arrived in Seward on April 13, traveling from Sitka after waiting out a storm in the Gulf of Alaska. The flight from Sitka to Seward took 7 hours and 44 minutes. The pilots and mechanics stayed at Seward’s Van Gilder Hotel for two days. The next stop was Chignik, and after that, Unalaska. As the planes continued to Japan, they were accompanied by the U.S. Coast Guard cutters Haida and Algonquin. From the RBHS April 2024 newsletter, Pages from the Past, from an article in the April 12, 1924, Seward Gateway.

PRINCE OF WALES ISLAND

Historic boatworks threatened by demolition

The number one place in Preservation Alaska’s 2024 list of the Eleven Most Endangered Historic Properties in Alaska goes to the Wolf Creek Boatworks, near the communities of Hollis and Kasaan on Prince of Wales Island. The boatworks began in 1939 as the Twelve Mile Arm Boat Shop, powered by the power of Wolf Creek, building wooden boats from local timber. The Romey family bought the property in 1994 and restored and maintained the equipment, which continues to be operable for boat repair and cleaning. The boatworks currently is under threat of demolition because the landowner, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, is pharsing to log the area where they stand.

WILLOW

Long-awaited museum opening takes place

On May 27, the Willow Historical and Wildlife Museum had a long-awaited grand opening ceremony and ribbon cutting. Mat-Su Borough Mayor Edna DeVries led the dedication and ribbon-cutting. The museum, in the original community center building that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is located at 23612 W. Willow Community Center Circle off the Parks Highway. Congratulations!
Communities invited to help form state historic preservation plan

The Alaska Office of History and Archaeology/Alaska State Historic Preservation Office is engaging with a wide range of individuals, professionals and organizations interested in preserving Alaska’s cultural resources. The ideas and recommendations gathered during the planning process will be used to update issues, goals, objectives and strategies that comprise the state historic preservation plan and will guide actions statewide for the next 10 years.

The office is reaching out to the public through stakeholder workshops across the state, hosting an interactive Story Map, holding online virtual webinars and using Meeting-in-a-Box materials for small group conversations about historic preservation in Alaska.

The Meeting-in-a-Box materials are available to historical societies and other interested groups to encourage people in the most geographically hard-to-reach places to participate in the planning process. The groups are asked to meet this summer and send comments no later than August 31.

To learn more, visit www.tinyurl.com/SavingOurPast or contact Maria Lewis: maria.lewis@alaska.gov or 907-269-8717.

ANCHORAGE

Haul Road construction celebrated

The Alaska Oil and Gas Historical Society organized in 2022 and just completed its first traveling exhibit to commemorate the 50th anniversary of construction of the Haul Road (now known as the Dalton Highway). The gravel road from interior Alaska to Prudhoe Bay was constructed in just five months. The society is seeking photographs, diaries, newspaper clippings and artifacts to tell the story of Alaska’s oil and gas development for the museum the group plans to create. The pop-up exhibit is at the Petroleum Club in Anchorage, opening on the 50th anniversary of the start of construction, and will be in Fairbanks in the fall to mark the anniversary of the completion. To get a guest pass to view the exhibit in Anchorage, contact Rebecca Logan, RLogan@alaskaalliance.com.

YUKON TERRITORY

Group documents First Nations land rights

An organization focusing on Yukon First Nations self-government has compiled treaties relating to rights to land, self-governance and economic development, along with first-hand and historical accounts of the impact of those treaties on Yukon First Nations people. Mapping the Way is a public education initiative created and run by the 11 self-governing Yukon First Nations, the Council of Yukon First Nations and the governments of Yukon and Canada. Its mission is to increase understanding of Yukon First Nations Final and Self-Government Agreements, and the benefits these agreements bring to all Yukoners. Learn more at www.mappingtheway.ca/our-stories.

FAIRBANKS

Professor recalls father of Alaska agriculture

“The Making of an Alaskan Plant Wizard: The Life and Times of C.C. Georgeson” was the title of a Feb 21 program in the Tanana Yukon Historical Society’s 2023-24 lecture series. Charles Christian Georgeson was born in Denmark and came to Alaska in 1898 as a special agricultural agent, charged by the Secretary of Agriculture with assessing the agricultural potential of the Alaska territory. He established Alaska’s first agricultural experiment station in Sitka in 1898, and six more in Kodiak, Kenai, Rampart, Copper Center, Fairbanks and the Matanuska Valley. Pat Holloway, a retired horticulture professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, presented the lecture.

Mining museum details history of two cats

Continuing its series of regular lectures this past year, the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame hosted a program in May by Joan Skildbred and Jim Gibertoni about the early histories of a 1911 Holt 60 HP Gas Cat and a 1929 Caterpillar Fifteen Traction Engine that were brought in and operated in Interior Alaska.

JUNEAU

Sourdough stories kick off museum day

To kick off the 2024 visitor season on May 18, International Museum Day, the Last Chance Mining Museum invited bakers and storytellers to share their best sourdough baked goods and stories. The event included tastings and prizes. The Last Chance Mining Museum is operated by the Gastineau Channel Historical Society.

Museum offers historic preservation grants

The Juneau Douglas City Museum is seeking applicants for its Juneau History Grant. Any individual or group with a good idea for preserving or sharing Juneau’s history and culture, who has the time and energy to follow the project through to completion, is encouraged to apply. Past projects have included live performances, publications, community signage or memorials and digitization of historical information. Projects are typically funded at $400-$1,200, but the committee will consider all worthy projects within its ability to subsidize them. Application deadlines are April 3 and October 1 of each year. To apply, go to www.juneau.org/library/museum or call 907-586-3572.

PETERSBURG

Exhibit celebrates pets of the past

To celebrate the Petersburg Humane Association’s 25 years of service, the Clausen Museum has developed an exhibit celebrating the pets of Petersburg, using photographs from their archives of local people with their dogs, cats and other pets. The project recognizes the many contributions of the Petersburg Humane Association to the welfare of the community’s animal population over the years.

— Rachel Mason and Jo Antonsen
Diverse topics examined in History Day competition

Historical developments from the 1964 Alaska earthquake to Mars Rovers were among the topics researched by 160 students competing in this year’s 34th Alaska History Day held April 6-10, 2024. Contest participants included students from schools in Fairbanks, Eielson Air Force Base, Delta Junction, Tok and Anchorage.

Project categories included documentary, exhibit, performance, website, and paper at the junior and senior levels (or middle and high school levels, respectively). Fifty volunteer judges from Alaska and around the nation volunteered hundreds of hours, reviewing projects and commenting on student research.

The contest also sets the stage for the National History Day (NHD) national contest, scheduled for June 9-13 in College Park, Maryland, where the organization will celebrate its 50th anniversary. State champion projects are invited to participate in the contest, with about 40 Alaska students, four teachers and family members planning to make the trip this year. Students will present their research, meet young historians from around the country, visit Washington, D.C. and meet with Alaska’s congressional delegation.

Two Alaska teachers were recognized as the NHD Behring Teacher of the Year Award nominees for Alaska: Dena Royal of Yakov Netsvetov School in Atka and Heather Damario of West Valley High School in Fairbanks. Both teachers demonstrated excellence in historical education in their classrooms, and mentored other teachers new to teaching History Day. Each received a $500 award and will be considered for the national award, announced at the NHD contest.

It will soon be time to shift gears to the 2025 program season, with the theme of “Rights and Responsibilities.” History Day coordinator Leanna Williams has been working with AHS board members, archivists, historians, historical societies and community members to develop a list of thematically relevant topic ideas in Alaska and circumpolar history. By promoting topics in Alaska history and identifying primary and secondary sources, the program encourages students to consider critical topics that impact their communities and state, developing skills that will serve them outside of the classroom and as future leaders.

Work also is underway planning webinars and informational sessions designed to help encourage teachers to incorporate the History Day project framework into their classrooms. The program’s new website, funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant through the Alaska Humanities Forum, should be ready soon and will serve as a central point for program information, classroom materials and research help.

The AHS offered two special award prizes for projects on Alaska history topics this year. Both prizes were awarded to documentaries:

- **Junior Category (Grades 6-8)** Deacon Lawrance and Gabriella Wulukiewicz, “The Trans-Alaska Pipeline: The Project That Changed the Last Frontier Forever,” teacher Rachel McNeil, Rogers Park Elementary, Anchorage.
- **Senior Category (Grades 9-12)** Benjamin Gilbert, Jaxon Freeman and Kegan Sewall-Lau, “The Glacier Pilot: Shaping Alaska’s Future,” teacher Alissa Wardwell, South Anchorage High School.

Alaska History Day also granted special awards for projects on women in history and maritime history. The Women in History Award, sponsored for the second year by an anonymous Alaska teacher, was awarded to Abigail Griffie and Kalia San Nicholas of Clark Middle School in Anchorage for their exhibit “Women’s Suffrage.” Their teacher was Natalie Moten. The final award was presented by the National Maritime Historical Society for a project relating to maritime history. It was awarded to Ellie Poulson of West Valley High School in Fairbanks for the documentary “The Attack of Pearl Harbor: A Day which will Live in Infamy.” Heather Damario was the supervising teacher.

—Leanna Prax Williams

**Correction**

An article in the Spring 2024 Alaska History News incorrectly stated that Nick Begich ousted Howard Pollock in his election to the U.S. House in 1970. Democrat Begich beat Republican Frank Murkowski in that general election. Pollock opted not to seek re-election to the U.S. House and lost his bid as the Republican nominee for governor that year.
TAPS's impact begs for examination

By DERMOT COLE

As the frenzy that accompanied construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline peaked in 1976, Fairbanks reporter Ben Harding wrote that the biggest boom in Alaska's history had "remarkably little effect on the attitudes of permanent Fairbanks residents."

He wrote in the *All-Alaska Weekly* how he had spoken with an anthropologist, I think it was Mim Dixon, who wondered why the pipeline seemed like something people already wanted to forget.

"But she was puzzled that, unlike the DEW line, the building of the Alcan Highway or the construction of Ladd and Eielson Air Force bases, the pipeline had not made its way into the history of Fairbanks," he wrote.

Most Fairbanksans were glad to see the extra money, Harding said, but the "public perception was that pipeline construction was wallowing in a morass of inefficiency and using dollar bills as backfill."

I think the short-lived boomtown atmosphere and all that came with it—crowded streets, Teamsters Union power, big paychecks, telephone busy signals, crime and more—was too fresh to allow the luxury of folklore to take root. It was traumatic. People were shell-shocked.

The Fairbanks broadcaster who became a public relations man for Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., Larry Carpenter, wrote a confidential memo to his bosses saying the typical Fairbanks resident regarded the pipeline as a "necessary evil, which he doesn't mind knocking because he knows it won't suddenly go away and take its dollars with it."

Fifty years ago on April 29, 1974, the Fairbanks broadcaster who became a public relations man for Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., Larry Carpenter, wrote a confidential memo to his bosses saying the typical Fairbanks resident regarded the pipeline as a "necessary evil, which he doesn't mind knocking because he knows it won't suddenly go away and take its dollars with it."

Fifty years ago on April 29, 1974, the oil companies began construction of what is now named the Dalton Highway, signaling the start of pipeline construction, a period in which the words “pipeline impact” entered the daily language of Alaskans. It was like the weather, something that people talked about every day.

The oil giants spent $10 billion on the pipeline, including the cost of financing, an unimaginable sum, which would be on the order of $60 billion in today's dollars.

As the decades passed, the construction era came to be thought of as a 1970s equivalent of the mad stampedes for gold in the Klondike and those that led to the creation of Nome and Fairbanks.

Built in three years and two months, the pipeline had a peak employment of 28,072 and did more to shape the state of Alaska than all the gold rushes combined.

People who lived in Fairbanks, Anchorage or Valdez at the time never forgot stories about the Tulsa welders who rioted when they didn't get a choice of steak or lobster, the wild tales of life in pipeline camps and the truck drivers who earned more than the governor, paychecks boosted by endless hours at time-and-a-half or double time.

The charged atmosphere on Second Avenue in Fairbanks and Fourth Avenue in Anchorage made cash registers ring.

There was one famous rooming house in Fairbanks where 45 people shared a two-bedroom house, sleeping in shifts, a house that found its way onto “60 Minutes” when Mike Wallace came to town.

I was a UAF student during pipeline construction, living in a tiny cabin downtown, where the kitchen was uphill from the living room, sharing the space with several relatives and friends. It was always cold inside during the winter.

Tens of thousands of new arrivals—no one knows how many—floated into and out of Fairbanks and Anchorage to seek pipeline work. Turnover was extreme and no one had to ask why.

Janitors and dishwashers could make five times as much on the pipeline as in Fairbanks or Anchorage. Retail jobs had to be filled over and over again.

In a Safeway store in Fairbanks in one month in 1975, 90 people were hired for a workforce of 75. The owner of the Pastime Restaurant claimed to have a 1,000 percent turnover in one year with a staff of 20.

For the past few months, I've been thinking about that period in our history and spending many hours in the University of Alaska Fairbanks Rasmuson Library archives preparing for a course I taught this spring for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute about the construction of the pipeline.

Twenty-seven years ago, I attempted to make sense of the social, cultural and economic impacts of the construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline. It was one of the books I wrote while working as a newspaper columnist at the Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner*.

I managed to tell some of the story in that book, skimming the surface. It was not nearly enough to convey the intensity of the experience, the magnitude of the enterprise or what tens of thousands of temporary workers brought to Alaska.

My twin brother Terrence never allowed me to forget the name of my tome: *Amazing Pipeline Stories: How Building the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Changed Our Lives*. 

Continued on next page
Help us honor those who promote Alaska history

The Alaska Historical Society is inviting nominations for its annual awards to individuals, historical societies and public institutions for notable research, writing and promotion of Alaska history. Special exhibits, historic walking tours, sign projects, oral histories, anthologies, digitizing archival materials, creating a website and commemorating an anniversary are among projects that have been recognized in the past.

Nominations are due August 19, 2024. The awards are:

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

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

EVANGELINE ATWOOD AWARD – given to an individual for significant long-term contributions to Alaska state or local history. Atwood was an AHS founder.

BARBARA SMITH PATHFINDER AWARD – given for indexing or preparing guides to Alaska historical material.

Other awards include:

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

TERRENCE M. COLE STUDENT AND BEGINNING PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS are cash awards given to help individuals attend the AHS’s annual conference. Cole taught at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and led its public history program.

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

A nomination should have sufficient detail and supporting materials. It should be submitted to the AHS Awards Committee, by email to members@alaskahistoricalociety.org or(546,429),(977,445) by mail to P.O. Box 100299, Anchorage, AK 99510. Nominations for the Ducker Award must include a copy of the publication for the committee’s use.

Pipeline days
Continued from page 10

Trans-Alaska Pipeline Transformed Life in America’s Last Frontier.

Yes, the title promised a great deal more than the author delivered, but amazingly enough a book packed with mildly interesting stories has sold more copies than all my other books combined.

My brother always joked that it should be a series, followed by More Amazing Pipeline Stories and Even More Amazing Pipeline Stories.

At this half-century mark, we should do more to preserve the history of the madness that took over Alaska in 1974 and the madness of a different kind that emerged when oil riches beyond what anyone had expected began to flow into state government. So much of it remains unexamined and misunderstood.

Many in the 1970s figured that the pipeline might last until 2000 or so. It was asking a lot to expect anyone to think 50 years ahead.

The pipeline and the oil industry infrastructure on the North Slope and beyond have long since become part of the everyday fabric of life in Alaska. Most Alaskans give little thought to the invisible river of oil that flows through the 800-mile pipe, except when something goes wrong.

In 1994, the American Society of Civil Engineers placed the trans-Alaska pipeline on its list of “Seven Wonders of the United States,” saying its design and construction had been “one of history’s most difficult engineering feats.”

Others saw it not as a marvel of technology, but a permanent scar on the landscape. While boosters downplayed the pipeline to say that it occupied only 12 square miles, those who did not want industrial development said it was more like a scratch across the Mona Lisa.

The environmental safeguards built into the project because of federal government demands have helped ensure a high standard of performance on the 800-mile pipeline, but the Exxon Valdez disaster in 1989 exposed a glaring weakness in the tanker segment of the oil transportation system.

We have yet to come to grips with all that happened after the construction workers went back to Texas, Oklahoma and Ohio. The real “pipeline impact” took place not when the streets of Fairbanks were choked with yellow Alyeska Chevy pickups, but when oil began to flow to Valdez in 1977.

The gold rushes of 125 years ago have been chronicled by many historians and are well understood. The oil rush that began with the discovery of the largest oil field in North America in 1968 is a far more complicated situation and is not well understood.

The half-century mark is an opportunity to take a look back not only at those construction days, but also at the far more difficult question of how unprecedented oil wealth changed Alaska for better or worse. This task should not be left to the Alaska Oil and Gas Historical Society, an industry group.

Dermot Cole, who has been a reporter in Alaska for nearly 50 years, is the author of several books and of the political blog Reporting from Alaska, which can be found at www.dermotmcole.com. He admits historian Terrence Cole was right in saying his pipeline book was not amazing. He can be reached at dermatmcole@gmail.com.
AHS seeking new board members

The Alaska Historical Society is seeking candidates to serve on its 15-member board of directors. Terms are for three years and limited to two consecutive terms. Directors meet four to six times a year; most meetings are virtual.

The directors elect society officers, set policies and oversee operations. Each director is expected to serve on committees such as advocacy, newsletter, communications, conference planning and awards, and to attend board meetings and the annual conference.

Please consider serving on the board or recommending someone to serve. This year, three board members are completing their second terms. If interested or to make a recommendation, please send an email by August 19 to members@alaskahistoricalsociety.org.

Generous donors respond to AHS fundraising campaign

In last quarter’s newsletter, the Alaska Historical Society announced a campaign to fill a deficit in our 2024 budget driven by various increased costs such as printing and conference expenses. AHS members were quick to respond with membership renewals, increases in level of membership, and generous donations.

We greatly appreciate those who responded so quickly to help us keep our budget in the black.

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