



Historic, picturesque Homer is hosting the Alaska Historical Society's annual conference in October. Conferees will have the opportunity to visit several city sites, including historic bars during the traditional bar tour. Photo of Homer and its famous spit courtesy of the Homer Chamber of Commerce.

Diverse topics on tap for Homer conference

A wide variety of topics—from the hippie invasion of Alaska in search of land to dog-sled diplomacy to the experience of Alaska Natives at the Carlisle boarding school—is on tap for the Alaska Historical Society's annual conference in Homer, October 7-10.

Conference registration is now open on the AHS website. Hotel reservations to secure conference rates need to be booked by mid-September at the Aspen Hotel and Moosetide Hotel.

The conference schedule is especially full this year with a day devoted to exploring the expansive work of the late University of Alaska Anchorage historian Steve Haycox. Some dozen scholars influenced by his scholarship will present new research on Thursday. Haycox's widow, Dagmar Phillips, will offer a personal perspective on

his life. The goal of this AHS initiative is to convert the independent research projects into a book for publication in 2027.

All presentations will be at the University of Alaska Kachemak Bay Campus. The conference opens Wednesday, October 7, at 5:30 p.m. with a reception and registration at the Porcupine Theater.

This year's conference features two compelling keynote speakers. Japanese American history educator Sam Mihara will speak of his experience of being imprisoned for three years during World War II at a remote Wyoming internment camp. After his release, Mihara became a rocket engineer for the Douglas Aircraft Company.

The other keynoter is longtime North Slope educator Pausauraq Jana Harcharek, now a Homer resident, who will speak

about the preservation of Native culture and languages. She started her career as a teacher aide working for the Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Instruction and became the North Slope School District's director of Inupiaq education.

This year's conference theme is "New Directions in Alaska History," which explores the impacts of global forces on local communities' experiences, environmental changes and contributions of Alaska Native peoples.

The conference will hold its regular auction of books and other historic memorabilia to raise funds. The annual historic bar tour is scheduled for Friday evening.

To register or find other conference information, visit the AHS website at www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org.

—David Ramseur

Elusive truth, fact and accuracy challenge historians in this AI era

In the current climate of fake news, AI-generated stories and rewriting history to fit political trends, I have been pondering



how elusive truth, fact and accuracy can be, even for professional researchers and writers. I offer three examples from my work in oral history to illustrate. Luckily, in each case I was able to

correct my mistakes—but my first flawed attempts gave me pause.

Years ago I was working on a museum project that introduced students to material culture from the Yup'ik region—in this instance, an *imarnin*, or seal-gut rain parka. I focused on the ingenuity involved in its invention and the high level of skill required to prepare the gut and sew the parka for a specific kayaker.

When I discussed it with Yup'ik interviewer-translator Marie Meade, I learned that my approach would yield only a half-truth. She told me that a knowledgeable Yup'ik would look at an *imarnin* not solely as a utilitarian item of clothing, but would immediately associate it with the work of shamans, who performed most of their ceremonies in or under *imarnitet* (pl.). She recounted traditional stories to illustrate her point. The problem in this instance lay in my limited knowledge and cultural understanding. Essential context was missing.

More recently I wrote a graphic novel for my grandchildren about an ancestor who had immigrated to the U.S. in 1904 as a seven-year-old. He quickly learned English, adjusted to life in New York, went through grade school in four years and became a successful home builder for Broadway producers. I ended the narrative when he got married, since my goal was to help my grandchildren relate, child-to-child, to this ancestor. What I didn't include was his subsequent alcoholism, the break-up of his marriage and his descent into poverty and near homelessness. I told them only the happy parts of his story. I decided to save

the “whole truth” for when they are older.

Last month I wrote a narrative about the time my family lived near Niagara Falls in the mid-1950s. I sent the piece to my siblings for comments. Both corrected details of the story, as follows:

- The stairway (which represented Niagara Falls) down which my best friend and I repeatedly threw ourselves had only one landing, not two.

- These same stairs were not the site of the escape of dozens of baby garter snakes that had been snuck into my brother's dresser, but rather a single snake that slithered down toward our mother as she vacuumed. A few of the snakes later dropped from overhead light fixtures.

- The sound made by an explosion in the basement when my brother and a friend were playing with his chemistry set was not “POW!”, but “WHOOMPH!”

- And it was not an unfortunate mixture of chemicals that caused the explosion, but rather the friend's striking a match to peer into a jar of paint thinner in the basement's dim light.

Several weeks after the explosion, I asked if I could have a chemistry set of my own. “No,” my mother answered, “chemistry sets are for boys.” This part of the story was accurate.

These three vignettes represent complications involved in telling the truth about the past, particularly in the field of oral history. The final example is an inconsequential bit of Americana, but the statement about the chemistry set can add to our understanding of the historical and cultural context of Niagara Falls in 1956. How do we make sense of its impact on a seven-year-old girl? What unpleasant realities does the record uncover? How do we know whether to trust the source?

In these instances, the reason that truth, fact and accuracy were elusive is that they got in the way of the stories I wanted to tell. Similarly, conveyers of fake news are blinded by messages they wish to communicate. Clearly, writers of history need to be open to new information, and they also need to express it in an artful way. I do not find it to be a simple undertaking.

—Patricia Partnow



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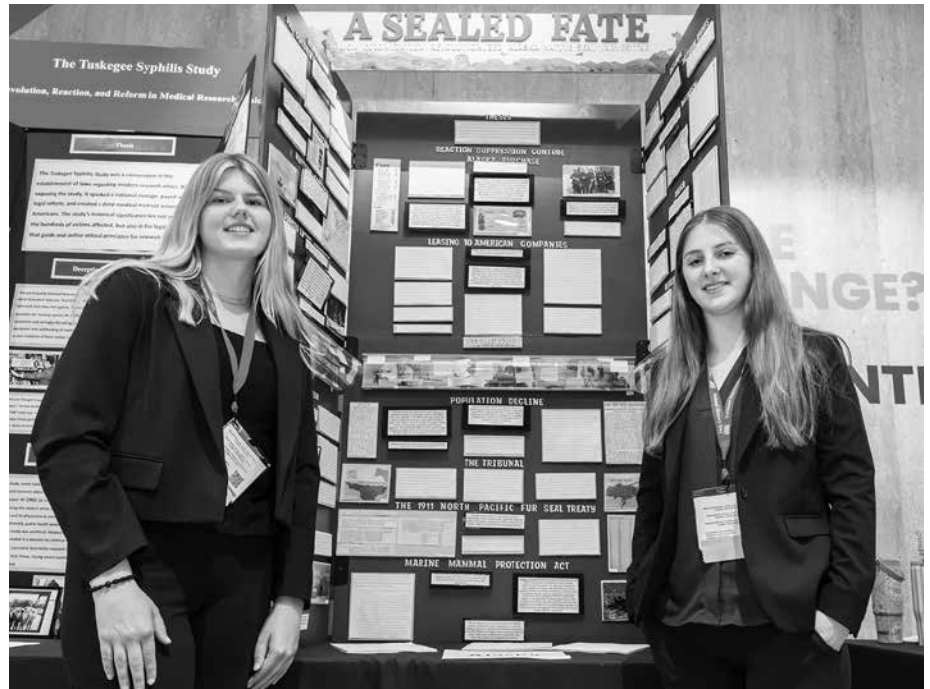
Alaska students shine at National History Day

National History Day 2026 was another exciting year for the Alaska program, with students exploring numerous historical topics and time periods and competing at the national contest.

Twenty-seven Alaska students, three teachers and many supporting family members made the trip to College Park, Maryland, for the 2026 contest, representing just a small percentage of the 2,951 students from around the country and world who participated.

Three Alaska students were selected for national showcases during the contest week. South Anchorage High students Emma Eden and Julia Samuel represented Alaska at the National Museum of American History with their project, “A Sealed Fate: How Colonization Revolutionized Alaska Native Seal Harvesting.” West Valley High (Fairbanks) student Reid Merrill participated in the White House Historical Association’s showcase with his project, “Operation Northwoods: The U.S. Government’s Plan to Propagandize the Murder of Their Own Citizens.”

Unalaska students Wesley Gruenhagen and River Zaachney won the Captain Ken Coskey Naval History Award, sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute, for their junior group website, “Bombardment of Angoon: Reactions to a Cultural Clash and Delayed Reforms.” It examined cultural misunderstandings connected to the 1882 Navy bombardment of the Tlingit village, leading to the U.S. government’s apology nearly 150 years later. Their teacher, Dena Royal, was recognized with a Distin-



Julia Samuel and Emma Eden present their exhibit “A Sealed Fate” at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History’s 2026 NHD Exhibit Showcase. The exhibit received National Honorable Mention and Outstanding Affiliate Entry Senior Division awards. Photo courtesy National History Day.

guished Teacher Award from the National Maritime Historical Society for her work with her Unalaska students on naval and maritime topics.

In a Facebook post congratulating the Unalaska students on their win, Senator Murkowski said: “I’m proud to have played a small part in helping secure that long-overdue apology for Angoon, and even more proud to see outstanding young Alaskans bringing such an important chapter of our state’s history to the national stage.”

NHD recognized other Alaska students at the awards ceremony as well. Madalyn Griswold of North Pole Middle School (teacher Hailey Orozco) received Outstanding Affiliate Entry Junior Division honors for her website, “Forgotten Voices of WWII: The French Women’s Silent Revolution During the German Occupation.” Emma Eden and Julia Samuel of South Anchorage High School (teacher Alissa Wardwell) received National Honorable Mention and Outstanding Affiliate Entry Senior Division for their Senior Group Exhibit, “A Sealed Fate: How Colonization Revolutionized Alaska Native Seal Harvesting.”

A highlight for Team Alaska was meeting with Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan in the historic Committee on Indian Affairs hearing room, giving students an up-close look at a place where many high-level discussions by government officials covered in some of their projects took place.

All of Alaska’s participants worked hard and gained valuable research, project management and presentation skills through their participation at the state and national contests. We are extremely proud of their accomplishments!

—Leanna Williams

Alaska History Day at risk without more donations

As beneficial as Alaska History Day is for Alaska’s students, the program is at risk of ending due to lack of funding. The annual cost of running the program is \$16,500, and without additional financial support, the 2027 contest may not be able to take place. Individual and corporate donors have stepped up to support the cause.

One anonymous donor initially pledged to match contributions up to \$5,000 through August 31. At our request, she has extended that deadline to September 30.

Thanks to this generosity we are closer than ever to covering the cost of next year’s History Day, but we still have a way to go toward our total fundraising goal. As we look toward securing more sustainable, long-term funding, your continued support will help ensure its future and the opportunities it creates for students to connect with Alaska’s history.

Please visit alaskahistoricalsociety.org/save-history-day for the latest updates on our fundraising campaign, or to make a gift.

—Gwen Higgins & Leanna Williams

Keynote presenters



SAM MIHARA

*Mass Injustice Against Japanese
Americans During WWII*

Friday, October 9, 9 a.m.



PAUSAURAQ JANA HARCHAREK

*The Inupiaq Learning
Framework: What We Learned*

Saturday, October 10, 8:30 a.m.

NEW DIRECTIONS *in* Alaska's History

ALASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY • 2026 CONFERENCE

with the DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, KACHEMAK BAY CAMPUS,
KENAI PENINSULA COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA
HOMER, ALASKA • OCTOBER 7-10, 2026

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7

5:30–7:30 p.m. CONFERENCE REGISTRATION & WELCOME RECEPTION – Porcupine Theater, 106 W. Pioneer Ave.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8

8–8:30 a.m. CONFERENCE REGISTRATION – Kachemak Bay Campus

9–9:30 a.m. HAYCOX FESTSCHRIFT
» Dagmar Phillips – My Husband, Steve Haycox

9:45–11:30 a.m. FESTSCHRIFT: Honoring Steve Haycox
» Annalisa Claydon – Of Shearwaters, Whales, and Seals: Some Entanglements of the Bering and Tasman Worlds, c. 1850-1900
» Will Schneider – Wickersham, Dimond, and Gruening: Roots of the Government-Native Relations in 20th Century Alaska
» Holly Guise – “Frontiers” and Inclusion in Alaska Native History
» Pierce Bateman – The Politics of Alaska’s Cold War Subnational Diplomacy
SESSION 1: Land Transformation and Brown Rat Dynamics
» Doug Capra – If You Can Remember the Sixties: The Back-To-The-Land Movement and the Hippie Invasion of Alaska
» Meeri Kataja – Hard Climate, Tough Soil: Developing Alaska Agriculture with Northern European Knowledge
» John Branson – From Tanalian to Port Alsworth
» Christopher Setzer – The Ratting of Alaska: A Cross-Pacific History

11:30–1 p.m. LUNCH on your own
» 12:15 p.m. – Alaska Oil & Gas Historical Society – Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline startup commemoration plans
» 12:15 p.m. – Tim Troll – Sailing Back to the Bay Project

1–2:30 p.m. FESTSCHRIFT: Honoring Steve Haycox
» David Ramseur – Alaska-Russia Relations: The Vital Role of Alaska Native Peoples
» Andrei Znamenski – Alaska in Geopolitical Imagination of Current Russia
» Lisa Weissler – Oil and Alaska Politics: Learning from History
» Phil Wight – Myths and Materialism: Alaska’s Energetic Past and Fractious Future
SESSION 2: Borders, Trade, and Currency
» Viktor Shmagin – The Russian-American Company Against Tokugawa Japan, 1806-07
» Gretchen T. Bersch – Use of Civil War Scrip in Alaska
» Brandon Boylan – Alaska’s Role in Foreign Policy

2:30–3 p.m. BREAK

3–5 p.m. FESTSCHRIFT: Honoring Steve Haycox
(continued on next page)
» Leanna Williams – Flight, Fame, and Frontier Alaska Aviation in the Popular Imagination, 1926-1938
» Charles Wohlforth – First Drafts: The Changing Role of Journalism in Recording Alaska’s History and Establishing its Cultural Narrative
» Ross Coen – Still Searching for that Usable Past
» Bathsheba Demuth – Thinking with Alaskan Land: or Why Alaska is the Best Place to Write Environmental History
» Ian Hartman – Steve Haycox: The Making of an Alaska Historian

3–5 p.m. (continued)	SESSION 3: Trailblazers of the North » Karen Brewster & Judy Bittner – From Seward to Nome: Protecting the Iditarod National Historic Trail » Tyler Kirk – Dogsled Diplomacy: Toward a Visual History of the Intercontinental Hope ‘91 Sled Dog Race and the End of the Cold War » Forest Wagner – Inhabiting the Interior: Winter Ultra-Athletics and the Evolution of the Alaska Trail Experience
5–5:30 p.m.	FESTSCHRIFT – Phil Wight – Presenter and conference attendees roundtable discussion

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9

9–10:30 a.m.	KEYNOTE PRESENTATION » Sam Mihara – Mass Injustice Against Japanese Americans During WWII –
10:30–11 a.m.	BREAK
11 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	SESSION 4: Guardsmen and Grand Slams » Joshua Millard – Baseball’s Northern Front: The Military Influence on Fairbanks Baseball and Alaska’s Most Iconic Game » Kristie Swain – The Alaska Territorial Guard and the Canadian Rangers: Historical Comparison and Contemporary Relevance » John Fournelle & Hilary Hilscher – Herb Hilscher and OSS’s “Black Radio” Aleutian Operation SESSION 5: Stories of Resilience and Recognition » Mary Ludwig – Through the Eyes of a Child: Northern Colonial Intersections » Rebecca Poulson – The Mission: The First Forty Years of Sitka’s Presbyterian Native Boarding School, 1881–1921 » Jane Anvik & Pam Kendrick – Honoring and Preserving the Contributions of Women in Alaska through the Alaska Women’s Hall of Fame
12:30–2 p.m.	LUNCH on your own » 1:15 p.m. – Douglas L. Vandegraft – Historic Bars of Homer
2–3:30 p.m.	SESSION 6: Carvings and Communities » Mark D. Foley – Joe Kakarook’s Scrimshaw Mastodon Tusk: Created for the Alaska Commercial Company » Adam Dunstan – Alaska Native Histories of Cooper Landing, Alaska » Chloe McKay – Latin Cultural Spaces in Anchorage, 1970–Today SESSION 7: Rails, Wings, and Waterways » Larry Talley – Alaska Mailboats » Bryan Taylor – Alaska’s Pioneer Access Roads Program on the Kenai Peninsula » Cynthia Wentworth – Alaska Railroad: Alaska’s Lucky Break » Christie Ericson – Pioneer Aviator Ingrid Pedersen: “A Rare Bird”
3:30–4 p.m.	BREAK
4–5 p.m.	ANNUAL AHS BUSINESS MEETING (in-person and remote)
6:30–9 p.m.	BANQUET at The Kannery, 451 Sterling Highway
9 p.m.	HOMER HISTORIC BARS TOUR – Douglas L. Vandegraft

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10

8:30–10 a.m.	KEYNOTE PRESENTATION » Pausauraq Jana Harcharek – The Iñupiaq Learning Framework: What We Learned
10–10:30 p.m.	BREAK
10:30 a.m.–12 p.m.	SESSION 8: Top-Down History » Tom Kizzia – Birthright Citizenship and the Fourteenth Amendment » Jo Michalski – The Smithsonian Perspective SESSION 9: Preserving the Past, Honoring the Land » Katie Ione Craney & Klara Maisch – C’ulc’ena’ Łuu’ / Gulkana Glacier » Dierdre Bryan & Tom Davis – Exploring Anchorage’s Places and Spaces: Introducing the Public Historic Resources Database » Kaitlin Armstrong, Jeran Pelagiom & Lisa Griswold – Contaminated: The Legacy of Lands Conveyed Under ANCSA
12 p.m.	CONFERENCE CLOSING – Jeff Meyers, Rich Mattson

Annual business meeting set for October 9

The annual business meeting of the Alaska Historical Society will be held at 4 p.m. Friday, October 9, 2026. It will be at the University of Alaska’s Kachemak Bay Campus, 533 East Pioneer Avenue in Homer, during the society’s annual conference. All members are invited and encouraged to participate. A call-in option will be available via Zoom.

The meeting will include a review of the past year’s activities, review of financial affairs and announcement of the results of the election of new members to the board of directors. The ballot will be sent to members in early September. There will be a special discussion on the future of the Alaska History Day program and the Alaska Historical Society’s role with it.

Links to the agenda for the meeting and to participate by Zoom will be on the home page of the AHS website, www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org. The meeting Zoom address is www.tinyurl.com/AHS-2026-1, password is AHS2026.

After conference, stay for the Ritz

The Pratt Museum’s signature event, Ritz Under the Sea, will be Saturday evening, October 10, at the Porcupine Theater. The fundraiser will make a splash with live entertainment, food and drink, and a live and silent auction. Proceeds from the event support the museum’s education programs, community-centered workshops and interdisciplinary special exhibits.

Tickets are \$100. There will be a 10% discount code for AHS conference attendees who stay for the event.

Norge airship made history in Arctic

Editor's note: This year is the 100th anniversary the airship Norge's flight over the North Pole to Alaska. We asked University of Alaska Fairbanks Arctic & Northern Studies Ph.D. student Roman Cain to contribute a remembrance. For questions, a list of further reading and sources, contact the author at rhcain@alaska.edu.



"On the 29th of March [1926] our beloved flag was hoisted on the airship, and immediately after this ceremony the ship was christened the *Norge*. From that time onward, unassailable recognition was given for all time to the fact that the ship and the expedition were Norwegian and none other."

—First Lt. Gustave Amundsen, nephew of Roald Amundsen, *First Crossing of the Polar Sea*

May 1925: Four men sit talking in a smoky, dimly lit room in Svalbard, Norway. Norwegian expeditioner Roald Amundsen, first lieutenants of the Norwegian Navy Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen and Leif Dietrichsen, and American financier Lincoln Ellsworth discuss the possibility of the world's first transpolar flight in a semi-rigid airship.

Amundsen previously attempted flying over the North Pole in an airplane in 1923, in which a crash damaged the plane's landing skids beyond repair. He renewed the effort in 1925 using Italian Dornier Wal flying boats, which had to be abandoned, leaving Amundsen and his crew trapped in the high Arctic for nearly a month. Unlike the speed and unpredictability of an airplane, an airship would allow for more leisurely geographic observations and have a (theoretically) lower chance of potential damage, but not without specific adaptations to the craft's engines, fuel storage and internal structures.

The Svalbard group took notice of *N1*, an airship developed by Italian engineer Umberto Nobile in 1923, and a contract between Nobile and Amundsen was developed for a flight in 1926 with a 17-creature crew: 16 men, including Nobile, Ellsworth and Amundsen, and Nobile's flying companion, a fox terrier named Titina.

After its official purchase from Italy by the Norwegian government, the newly inaugurated *Norge* officially began its voyage on April 12, 1926, traveling first from



Polar explorers Roald Amundsen (left), Lincoln Ellsworth (middle), and Umberto Nobile (right, with dog Titina) pose with part of the airship *Norge*'s crew on June 27, 1926. The group was traveling from Nome to Seattle on the steamship *Victoria* after their transpolar flight. MOHAI, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, 1983.10.10847.

Rome to Svalbard following severe weather delays. From Svalbard, the journey toward the Pole launched May 11.

In a 1960 interview, Nobile explained his biggest concern was not whether the *Norge* would be suitable for the trip, but rather if the unknown environment was something he as engineer could adapt to mid-flight. With limited knowledge of Arctic atmospheric conditions at the time, it was unclear whether the *Norge*'s fuel capacity and structural durability would be enough to counteract potentially strong winds, fog, ice-crust and other regionally specific issues.

At around 7 p.m. on May 12, the *Norge* reached 87°43'N. Some sources describe the "uncommonly fortunate" weather that facilitated an easy, relatively uneventful flight over the Pole. The order was given to plant the Norwegian, American and Italian flags "as near the Geographical North Pole as any human beings can determine with instruments."

Observations commenced for as long as the clear skies continued. Notes were made on two bears seen from the gondola and the unusually choppy, broken pattern of ice floes in the area. However, on the morning of May 13, a cold fog surrounded the *Norge*, halting any observations and making navigation nearly impossible.

As described by Nobile in his inter-

view, it was here that ice freezing along the *Norge*'s propeller would sling off and puncture parts of the balloon, which required hasty patch jobs. The crew eventually sighted the Alaska coast and, due to ongoing damage to the *Norge* from both ice and increasingly poor weather conditions, were forced to land suddenly in Teller, instead of the intended destination of Nome.

The *Norge* venture was a technical success, overshadowing all previous attempts to fly across the Arctic via lighter-than-air aircraft, staying aloft for more than 70 hours and travelling nearly 3,200 miles. Its sister ship, the *Italia*, also designed by Nobile, would crash just two years later in a second attempt to cross the Pole, likely due to adverse weather—proving just how lucky the *Norge* crew had been.

Today, remnants of Amundsen and Ellsworth's airship journey to the Pole can be found in museums in Nome, Anchorage, Juneau and elsewhere. Odds and ends from the airship are still scattered in a couple of buildings in Teller, where a plaque marks the site of the *Norge*'s landing. The site was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, and the *Norge* remains the only airship to successfully complete a transpolar flight of its magnitude.

—Roman Cain

UAF trained historian loves Alaska from afar

Many Alaska Historical Society members may not have met Ross Coen in person, but they certainly know his work as editor of the AHS flagship publication, the journal *Alaska History*. A former AHS board member and president (2011-12), Coen took over the editorship in 2015 from the journal's long-time editor, Jim Ducker.

Over his 10 years at the helm of *Alaska History*, Coen says he has seen changes in the journal's content that reflect broader changes in the field of history. "Alaska history used to be mostly political history," he says, relating to government officials, Alaska's relationship with the federal government and even the state's past Russian history.

"Over the last decade, Alaska history has focused more on social (race and gender) and cultural issues, opening up the field to look at historical figures and events that previously weren't part of the conversation," he said. And even though this focus of Alaska history is not political, it has become politicized and at times, "in our quest to make history more inclusive, we have narrowed it," by publicly determining what are right and wrong perspectives.

Coen was born and raised in a small farming town in North Dakota, where both his parents were teachers. After flirting with college, he dropped out and ended up in Alaska "on a whim," falling in love with the state the day he arrived in Juneau. There he established his residency, allowing him to attend the University of Alaska Fairbanks as a resident.

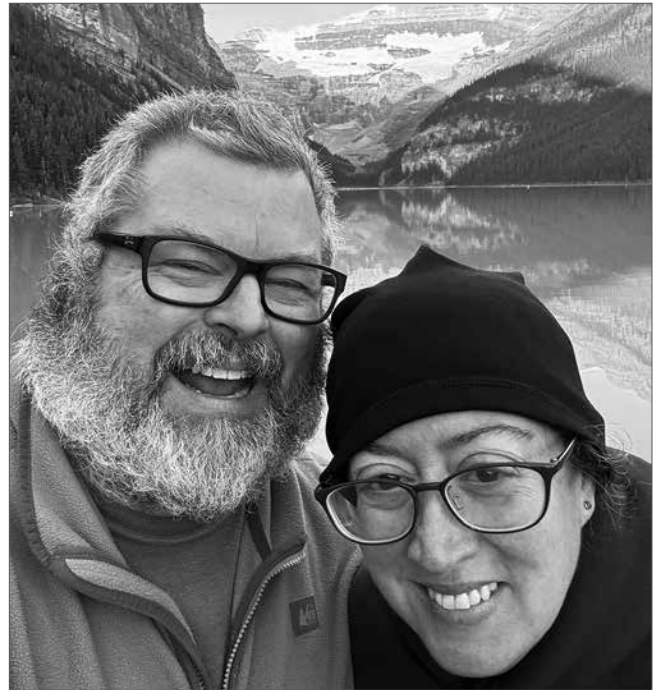
It was at UAF that Coen went from a bachelor's degree in English literature to receiving his master's degree from the Northern Studies program, and where he met and was mentored by the late Terrence Cole, a prominent Alaska historian

"Over the last decade, Alaska history has focused more on social (race and gender) and cultural issues, opening up the field to look at historical figures and events that previously weren't part of the conversation."

and professor. That led to his Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington, and his hire as history professor at UAF.

Coen says Cole really stimulated his interest in Alaska's history. "Alaska history is everywhere and still so alive," Coen says. It didn't hurt that a lot of the main characters involved in the state's early beginnings were still around when Coen started to research and write about the state's past. "You could be having lunch and in walks Vic Fischer or Jay Hammond or Jack Roderick," he said.

Although he moved to the Seattle area permanently and is now a lecturer in history at the University of Washington, Coen has kept his Alaska connections. While teaching courses



Ross and Jessica Coen on a visit to Lake Louise.

such as U.S. environmental history, the history of U.S. citizenship and the history of Washington state and the Pacific Northwest, he also teaches a junior seminar on the history of polar exploration. That's his favorite class, and similar to one he took at UAF from Cole and another great Alaska historian, Mary Ehrlander.

Ross continues to research, write and publish about Alaska individuals and events. His published books include *Breaking Ice: The Epic Voyage of the SS Manhattan through the Northwest Passage* and *Fu-go: The Curious History of Japan's Balloon Bomb Attack on America*.

Coen appreciates that the AHS is independent and not state sponsored and shaped by government as are so many historical societies around the country. The founders of AHS in 1967 wanted the society to be an organization not only for professional historians, but also for any lay person who just loves history. "It is meant to be a society for all Alaskans," he said.

Coen's love for history extends to his love for the *Alaska History* journal, which he runs on a mostly volunteer basis (he receives a small honorary stipend) the same way as the organization: open to anyone, with or without scholarly credentials, but insisting on good research and good writing. Coen oversaw a major overhaul of the size and design of the journal to its current 8½" x 11" magazine format, which has opened up more possibilities in terms of photos and graphics.

Coen and his wife Jessica enjoy hiking and camping and are big fans of musical theater. Coen hosts an old-time country music show on a local radio station and is a huge movie buff.

—Molly McCammon

EAGLE

Karstens broke trail in delivering mail

Harry Karstens arrived in Alaska in 1897 to mine on the Seventymile River. In 1899, he worked as a mail carrier on the Eagle-to-Tanana route, a last-minute replacement for a carrier who had taken his own life after losing the startup money for the mail contract in the saloons. The job required 13 trips each winter by dog team and paid \$75 a month. Since any delay was penalized, carriers had to travel in any weather and temperature. Karstens was the only volunteer for the job. On his first trip from Eagle to Tanana Crossing there was only a little snow, so he went on foot with a backpack, dividing the load of mail with his three dogs. Enduring bitter cold and biting wind, he pioneered a 90-mile route to the Tanana River. At Tanana Crossing he claimed the former mail carrier's supplies. He swapped loads with the mail carrier from Valdez, hitched his three dogs to a sled, and headed back to Eagle where he dropped the incoming mail from Valdez, and then set out down the Yukon for Circle City. Traveling down the river, where roadhouses were about 25 miles apart, was a little easier. After his initial trip, Karstens delivered the mail for another dozen years. He became an expert dog musher, but many times hauled the mail on foot, pulling a sled tied to his waist. Karstens finished his career as the first superintendent of Mt. McKinley National Park. (From the Eagle Historical Society and Museums Newsletter, Spring 2026.)



Harry Karstens starts off for Tanana in 1908 with his dog team. Charles Sheldon collection, UAF-2009-123-659, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

DOUGLAS

Initiative aims to save local cemeteries

The Douglas cemeteries are in dire need of restoration, as many grave markers have disappeared beneath the dense rainforest vegetation. Five years ago, a group of volunteers led by Jamiann S'éiltin Hasselquist began clearing overgrowth, removing trees and locating and documenting fragile markers so descendants can once again find and honor their loved ones. However, the work cannot continue without specialized equipment, ongoing maintenance and financial support. A generous donor pledged \$5,000 for the restoration work, and the Gastineau Channel Historical Society is asking for donations to match (and surpass) that sum. To donate, go to juneauhistory.org.

ANCHORAGE

Oil & Gas Society marks pipeline half-century

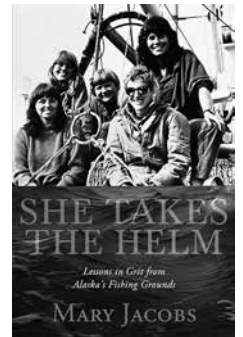
The Alaska Oil & Gas Historical Society is celebrating two important anniversaries to Alaska. On Nov. 2, 2026, at the Anchorage Petroleum Club, it will mark the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Permanent Fund. In Fairbanks, Fox and Anchorage on June 20, 2027, it will celebrate the 50th anniversary of opening of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline. AKOGHS board member Dave Norton presented an overview of the pipeline's history at the Berlin Pipeline Technology Conference in April 2026. AHS board member Phil Wight provided support and Tom Marchesani from Alyeska Pipeline co-presented.

The society's second annual golf tournament was held in Anchorage in August and raised more than \$30,000 for support of the historical society's Voices of the North oral history project.

KODIAK

Memoir profiles pioneering woman seiner

On July 31, the Kodiak History Museum hosted author Mary Jacobs who read from her memoir, *She Takes the Helm: Lessons in Grit from Alaska's Fishing Grounds*. The book tells of Jacobs' journey from working in salmon canneries to becoming a crew member and eventually the owner and skipper of an all-woman salmon seiner based in Kodiak, meanwhile raising her family. Mary Jacobs was a pioneer when female skippers were oddities.



Book cover, showing Mary Jacobs (left) with her all-female crew.

Community seeks permanent museum home

The Kodiak History Museum and the Kodiak Maritime Museum hosted a community discussion on August 12 about the future of the two museums. The History Museum has reached the limits of its collections storage, while the Maritime Museum has never had a permanent home. The two museums are exploring collaborative solutions and seeking guidance from the community. One possibility is to rehabilitate the historic Griffin Memorial Building to provide collections storage, exhibit space and a study center.



The Griffin Memorial Building housed Kodiak's first modern medical center, established in 1940.

Griffin Memorial Building. Photo by Kirsten Dobroth, courtesy KMXT.

KETCHIKAN

Painting shines light on early logging

July's Artifact of the Month for the Ketchikan Museums was a painting by Lawrence "Snapper" Carlson, a Ketchikan boat captain, salvager and artist, of one of his own beach log salvage operations in Behm Canal. Recovering wood washed up on beaches is encouraged by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service because it provides timber for use, clears navigational hazards and reduces pressure on old growth stands by providing an alternative to cutting down live trees. The painting shows Carlson and Neil Ohashi aboard the tugboat *Behmer* as they pull a beach log into the water.



Painting *Easy Logging* by Lawrence "Snapper" Carlson. Photo courtesy Ketchikan Museums.

The *Behmer* was built by prisoners on McNeil Island near Seattle, used by the U.S. Army during World War II and later became one of the first tugs to move timber rafts for the Ketchikan Pulp Mill. When Carlson eventually acquired the vessel, he named it the *Behmer* after a favorite log salvage area.

Swiss brothers address town's thirst for milk

It is not easy to raise dairy cows in Alaska, but as the population grew in Ketchikan in the early 20th century there was a demand for fresh milk. Despite the lack of grazing land and the constant rain



Milk bottle crate. Photo courtesy Ketchikan Museums.

that increased hoof rot and other infections, some intrepid entrepreneurs took on the challenge. Two brothers from Switzerland, Ernest and Walter Anderes, were among the earliest dairymen in Ketchikan. Ernest arrived in 1917 and bought a dairy on Gravina Island. Walter came later and bought a dairy near Saxman. The brothers competed with each other for a few years, then consolidated their interests into the Crystal Dairy in 1930. They produced milk, butter and ice cream until 1953, when they had to sell off their cattle. The dairy distributed milk from out of state until 1970. The Ketchikan Museums' Artifact of the Month for August 2026 is a milk bottle crate from the Crystal Dairy.

JUNEAU

State library lands Statehood grant

The Alaska State Library, Archives and Museums celebrated its 10th anniversary in June in the Andrew P. Kashevaroff Building with a day of festivities geared to families. Director Amy Phillips-Chan said: "It's an active center of educational learning. It's here for the community." To that end, the archives section received welcome news of a \$220,146 National Endowment for the Humanities grant for a two-year project, *Foundations of Statehood: Alaska's Constitutional Development and the Process of Self-Determination and Full Representation*. The project will include processing, description and digitization of written and audiovisual materials of statehood-related records, bringing together resources from multiple record groups. The grant is also for an online guide to the records and development of lesson plans for secondary students to use the materials.

Marketing salmon subject of museum display

This summer, Petersburg's Clausen Museum is displaying the Alaska State Museum's traveling exhibit, *How to Eat Canned Salmon*. Sarah Pederson, Clausen Museum director, was quoted in the July 30 local newspaper: "The exhibit is all about beautiful labels and the little recipe cards that came along with them, and how canned salmon as a product was marketed to the rest of the country that did not have salmon. In the '30s and '40s they launched this great marketing campaign targeted at housewives primarily using beautifully illustrated can labels." Museums and historical societies interested in hosting the exhibit should contact the Alaska State Museum.

SEWARD

Longtime historic trail advocate honored

For years before his passing in 2023, Lee Poleske led a Summer Solstice tour at the American Legion cemetery and did countless tasks for the Resurrection Bay Historical Society. This year, Sue McLure led the tour. An interpretive sign honoring Lee's work to preserve the Iditarod National Historic Trail recently was installed



Statue of Lee Poleske and bench commissioned by the Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers and installed in 2024. Photo by Kris Peck.

at Mile 0 of the trail, adjacent to Lee's bronze statue and bench on the waterfront. On June 7, the Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers posthumously honored Lee with the Golden Tripod Leadership Trail Stewardship Award.

FAIRBANKS

Archives preserves rare 1930s film of Wales

The Alaska Film Archives at the University of Alaska Fairbanks recently completed preservation of two rare films documenting life in the Inupiat community of Wales (Kingigin) during the 1930s. *Eskimo Harvest* and a companion reel of outtakes were filmed by William Albee and Ruth Albee while they lived and taught school in Wales. The films provide a remarkable visual record of daily life, subsistence activities and ocean travel. The original black-and-white, silent 16mm films were donated to the archives by the family in 2024. Preservation was completed with support from the National Film Preservation Foundation. Using the 90-year-old films, professional film laboratories created new film elements and digital copies.

Researchers and the public can learn more through the catalog record created by Rasmuson Library staff. The Alaska Film Archives, part of the library's Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives, is reaching out to regional Alaska Native organizations to share copies of the films and seek guidance on culturally appropriate access and presentation. For more information, contact the Alaska Film Archives at uaf-ak-film-archives@alaska.edu.



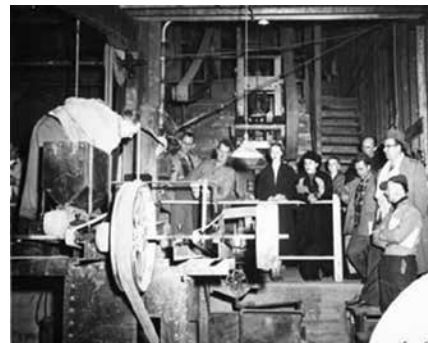
Young people jump between ice floes at Wales (Kingigin), Alaska, circa 1937. Still image from AAF-23809, Alaska Film Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Linguists explore new Alaskan Russian dialect

When the Russians left Alaska in the 1860s they left behind some Russian speakers, especially clergy and lay leaders entrusted with leading Russian Orthodox services. On August 4, the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Museum sponsored a lecture by Mira Bergelson, Andrej Kobrik and Marina Raskladkina of the Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences, entitled "Russian Linguistic and Cultural Presence in Alaska: An Evolving Story." The presenters used several methods, including linguistic fieldwork, interviews and archival research, to determine how much of the Russian linguistic and cultural heritage is alive in Alaska. They concluded that "Alaskan Russian" is a unique variety of the Russian language adapted to Alaska's cultural environment.

Contributions of two mining pioneers shared

Rose Rybachek presented the life stories and accomplishments of two economic pioneers of Alaska mining on May 27 at the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Museum. Earl Beistline (1916-2012) was a professor of mining engineering and an administrator in the School of Mining at the University of Alaska Fairbanks while continuing to practice as a mining engineer. Ernest Wolff (1919-2005) was a prospector and miner before going back to college for a Ph.D. in geology. He was hired as a researcher in 1966 at the Mineral Industry Research Laboratory at UAF, where Earl was his boss. Wolff had a distinguished teaching and research career at the MIREL, publishing the still-valuable *Handbook for the Alaska Prospector* in 1964.



Dean Earl Beistline with a mining class, date unknown. Photo courtesy AMHF.

SOLDOTNA

Three share tales of community's past

On July 2, the Soldotna public library hosted three longtime Soldotna residents who shared their stories and experiences of living on the Kenai Peninsula in the 1950s. Dick Reger, Barbara Jewell and Kearlee Wright each provided a look into Soldotna's past. The event was a joint effort of the Soldotna Historical Society and Homestead Museum, the Soldotna Library and the American Conversation Project. The talks will be available on the American Conversation Project's website (www.americanconversations.org).



Dick Reger, Barbara Jewell and Kearlee Wright, from the Soldotna Historical Society's Facebook page.

HOPE AND SUNRISE

Prospectors find gold, civilization on peninsula

Della Murray Banks and her husband Austin visited Sunrise City in 1897. The previous year, they had been with Homer Pennock's mining company of 74 men who traveled by ship to Kachemak Bay to find gold and founded a tiny settlement on a spit they called "Homer." The Bankses had little prospecting success in 1896, but decided to try again with Homer Pennock in 1897, this time in Sunrise City. They started in Tyonek and had their sailboat towed by the *Perry* to Sunrise. They didn't want to sail on their own, lest they be stuck in the mudflats of Turnagain Arm. Sunrise had a number of cabins and tents, along with stores and a hotel that Della described as "painfully new." The country



The S.S. *Perry* in Knik Inlet, 1898. Photograph taken during the 1898 Cook's Inlet Exploring Expedition led by Edwin F. Glenn on behalf of the U.S. Army. Edwin F. Glenn papers, Consortium Library, Archives and Special Collections, University of Alaska Anchorage.

was bustling with mining activity, with some miners earning a reported \$100 a day. Della and her husband camped in a lovely spot surrounded by flowers and berries. They bought mountain sheep meat and found it a welcome change from their usual bacon and canned corned beef. Decades later, living in California, Della wrote a series of articles about her Alaska adventures for *The Alaska Sportsman*. Her memories of trips to Homer and Sunrise City were published in an article entitled "Homer's Gold Seekers: Hope Springs Eternal," in January 1946. (From the Hope and Sunrise Historical Society's Summer 2026 newsletter.)

STATEWIDE

Permanent Fund gears up for 50th anniversary

The Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation is preparing to mark the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Permanent Fund. Alaska voters approved the Permanent Fund in 1976, and in 1977 the fund received its first deposit, \$734,000 in oil revenues. The APFC is collecting photos, quotations and story materials from across the state about the initial days of the fund. Selected materials will be used in its annual report, anniversary video, website and social media. In addition to historical materials, the APFC is looking for people with expertise in photography, videography, or historical research, who may be considered for paid project opportunities. To learn more, visit apfc.org/media-project/.

—Rachel Mason and Jo Antonson

Society monitors archives, historic preservation threats

Update on archives move

Some of Alaska's federal historic records stored at Sand Point in downtown Seattle will be moved out of the Northwest. The *Seattle Times* reported this in July along with noting that the National Archives is moving toward erecting a new facility within the city in a transition that could take years.

According to the office of U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski, the records to be moved this year are not the archival records including those from Alaska, but the recent records an agency is to keep for a set period of years before being transferred to the archives or destroyed following a records retention schedule.

"That facility will remain open and our Alaska archival records will not be affected," said Karen McCarthy, one of the senator's senior legislative assistants. The National Archives continues to work with the General Services Administration to upgrade the Sand Point facility and to find a better site in or near Seattle for the perma-

nent archival records there, she said.

The *Times* said the National Archives records at Sand Point include "a dive into Pacific Northwest history and culture, from the Forest Service teletypes sent when Mount St. Helens exploded in May 1980 to 1890s hand-drawn sketches of the Aleutian Islands. Some families have traced their own histories among the 14-foot-high shelves. The repository spans military, land, court, tax and census records, and significant treaty documents relating to the 272 federally recognized tribes in Alaska, Washington, Oregon and Idaho."

The Alaska Historical Society has worked with other Pacific Northwest states to oppose Trump administration efforts to close the archives since his first term.

Historic preservation act in danger

Nationally, history advocates are ringing an alarm bell about a federal advisory panel's proposal to substantially water down the National Historic Preservation Act, which has been in place for 60 years to protect historic and cultural sites, includ-

ing those of Indigenous peoples.

In July, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation voted (16–5, with two abstentions) to advance revisions of the regulations that implement the Section 106 process of the act, also known as the review and compliance process. Rather than taking into account comment from Council members, advocates, tribes and the public, the draft revisions were developed and presented in secret, released before the Council's own deadline for internal feedback and "fundamentally guts the process that has protected historic properties since 1966," reports Cultural Heritage Partners, a nonprofit advocacy group.

At stake are irreplaceable landmarks, sacred sites and neighborhood landmarks which could be altered or destroyed to fast-track federal projects. The Partners group is considering litigation, coordinating messaging among affected groups and urging local historic groups to advocate publicly. The AHS is considering weighing in.

—Molly McCammon

American Revolution subject of Sept. 17 talk by top colonial historian



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Continuing programs to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the U.S., the Alaska Historical Society is pleased to be sponsoring with the University of Alaska Anchorage Honors College, Department of History and Consortium Library, a Polaris Lecture by Dr. Serena Zabin on historical research into the American Revolution.

Zabin is a professor of history at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, and author of the prizewinning *The Boston Massacre: A Family History*. She was featured in Ken Burns and Lucy Worsley's recent public television programs on the American Revolution.

Zabin's talk is at 6 p.m. Thursday, September 17, in UAA Consortium Library Room 307 and available via Zoom (www.tinyurl.com/Zabin-lecture).

AN ODDMENT

Muybridge comes to town

When Eadweard Muybridge came to Alaska in 1868 he brought his camera and a portable darkroom he dubbed Helios' Flying Studio. He had recently adopted the pseudonym Helios, after the Greek sun god, and was under contract with the U.S. Army to capture images of Alaska's scenery and military forts. When his ship reached Sitka, an observer commented on the gifted eccentric and his good luck:



The photographic artist 'Helios' ... had come to Sitka with dismal forebodings that the fog would so obscure the face of nature as to render his art valueless; but now he has struck a streak of sunshine and was determined to make

pictures while it lasted. With shirt-sleeves rolled up, and hair on end, he trotted his flying studio through the town while the daylight lasted, and was enabled to get a number of excellent views.

In just three days, Muybridge took 21 photographs—some of the first ever taken in Alaska—that illustrate Sitka's transition from Russian outpost to American town. Muybridge would later become famous for his landscapes of Yosemite, his photographic studies of animal motion, and early work in motion-picture projection.

—Chris Allan



Source: Quotation from "Going to Alaska," *Alta Daily California*, September 11, 1868.



Above: Sitka from the Russian governor's garden. Bancroft Library, Long Mountain College Collection of Stereographs and Other Photographs by Eadweard Muybridge. Left: Muybridge portrait. Museum of Fine Arts Boston (1991.435). Right: Studio logo. California State Library, California History Section Picture Catalog (Stereo-1026).

