

Alaska Historical Society



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National Author, Environmental Historian to Open Fall History Conference **Professor Bathsheba Demuth to Highlight Award-Winning Book, “*Floating Coast*”**

A cutting-edge environmental historian whose first book won numerous national awards will be the keynote speaker at this October’s Alaska Historical Society’s annual conference, which is co-sponsored this year by the Cook Inlet Historical Society.

Brown University Professor Bathsheba Demuth will speak on the topic, “History from a Dogsled: The Yukon and the Stakes of Telling the Past,” at 7 p.m. Oct. 6 at the Anchorage Museum. Her presentation will be followed by a book-signing for her book, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*. Her talk also will be live-streamed by the museum.

This year’s multiple-day history conference will focus on the theme, “Conflicting Visions of Alaska History.” From the first European exploration of Alaska, the region’s history has been subject to widely diverse and often conflicting accounts, from Russian coercion of Alaska Native peoples in the sea otter trade to conflicts about oil development and Native land claims. Numerous presentations over portions of six days will focus on those issues. Other conference workshops will focus on Native American boarding schools, Alaska Native land claims and community-based history.

At Brown, Demuth is an associate professor of History and Environment and Society where she specializes in the lands and seas of the Russian and North American Arctic. Her interest in the north began when she was 18 and moved to the village of Old Crow in the Yukon, where she spent several years mushing, hunting, fishing, and otherwise learning the ways of the taiga and tundra.

Floating Coast was named a best book of 2019 by *Nature*, *National Public Radio*, *Kirkus Reviews* and *Library Journal*, among others. Demuth holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Brown, and master’s and doctorate degrees from the University of California, Berkeley. Her writing has appeared in publications from *The American Historical Review* to *The New Yorker*.

A current Carnegie Foundation Fellow, she is working on a book about the environmental pasts of the Yukon River. When not in Alaska, she lives in Rhode Island.

About her Alaska conference presentation, she said: “Ask someone from the Lower 48 what they know about the Yukon River, and most will invoke the Klondike gold rush, or perhaps the writing of John McPhee. Even in Alaska, celebrations of extraction frequently overshadow public commemoration of other, particularly Indigenous, histories. This talk looks at the intertwined, co-dependent lives of people, dogs and salmon along the 19th century Yukon for examples of how to tell more capacious, polyvocal narratives—and the stakes of doing so for and about Alaska, a place where the politics of who speaks the past has bearing on present conflicts over land, meaning, and the possibilities of the future.”

In addition to kicking off the AHS conference, Demuth’s presentation will be part of the Cook Inlet Historical Society’s regular lecture series at the museum. Following Demuth’s presentation, the rest of the conference runs Oct. 7-8 and 13-15 and will be virtual through the Crowdcast streaming application. Conference registration is \$50 and opens August 1.