

Memorials

Alaska Historical Society

October 7-9 and 14-16, 2021 | *“Communities Remembered and Imagined”*

Trefon Angasan, Jr.

1947-2020

Alutiiq elder and leader Trefon Angasan, Jr. succumbed to complications of COVID-19. Born the 3rd of 10 siblings in New Savonoski, he lived in the Bristol Bay region and was active in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 and the subsequent Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

Trefon lived a subsistence lifestyle and worked summers at the Alaska Packer's regional canneries. He attended Sheldon Jackson Boarding School and College.

Angasan provided leadership at the US Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bristol Bay Native Association, Bristol Bay Native Corp., the Alaska Board of Fish, the Alaska Federation of Natives, and the Alaska Native Justice Center. His strong advocacy resulted in the restoration of Native subsistence rights in Katmai National Park for the Native descendants of the 1912 Novarupta volcanic explosion.



Rita Blumenstein

1936-2021

Traditional Yup'ik healer and spiritual leader, Rita Pitka Blumenstein grew up in Tununak listening to stories and learning traditional skills from her mother, grandmother, and elders. Very early, her healing skills were acknowledged as she assisted with births and developed her botanical, manipulation, and energy skills.

Rita worked as a midwife in western and northwest Alaska. As her traditional healing skills became more acknowledged by medical practitioners, the Southcentral Foundation certified her as the first Alaska tribal doctor. She served in the behavioral health department of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, retiring in 2019. Rita was inducted into the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame in 2009.

Rita's grandmother foretold a time when she would later be asked to sit on a council of 13 grandmothers. As an elder she joined a community of indigenous healers and culture bearers on the *International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers* which represents a global alliance for prayer, education, and healing for Mother Earth.



Neal Brown

1938-2021

Physicist and consummate bottle rocket guru, Neal B. Brown knew his polar atmospheric sciences, helped researchers learn even more about the Aurora Borealis, and enjoyed teaching kids and adults about science.

Neal became the first director of the University of Alaska Fairbanks' "Poker Flat Rocket Range" in 1971 where global researchers launched over 219 rockets during his 18 years there. Establishment of the rocket range signaled the emergence of Alaska as a significant international Arctic academic and science research center. He and "Poker Flat" thrust Alaska into the global "history of science".

As science and technology evolves in the northern latitudes, the 1998 Kodiak Launch Facility now known as the Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation Pacific Spaceport continues that trend.

Always available to speak to teachers and students, upon retirement in 1995 Neal developed the Alaska Space Grant Camp where young people would build and launch model rockets. His curiosity and enthusiasm was contagious. A scientist who "educated" kids and the general public about auroras and rockets, Neal was the model on how we learn about Alaska and its place in the "history of science".



Robert Charlie

1927-2020

Born at a Minto Flats muskrat camp, Robert M. Charlie lived a subsistence Athabascan lifestyle. He lived his early years in what is now referred to as Old Minto. As an adult he taught himself to read and write. He spent 10 years in Tanacross, several years as postmaster, and eventually settled in North Pole.

Robert worked as a water treatment specialist for Eielson Air Force Base and the Trans-Alaska pipeline but was most proud of his earlier work on the Alaska Railroad steamboats *Alice*, *Yukon*, and *Nenana*, hauling Yukon River freight. He was a delegate to the first Tanana Chiefs Conference meeting. His passion was making music; he was a founder and long-time board member of the Athabascan Fiddlers Association.

Robert was a cultural and language specialist for the Minto Flats Mapping Project and advocated for recognition the University of Alaska Fairbanks was built on traditional Athabascan lands—Troth Yedda. As an elder, for 25 years he shared his experiences, skills, and knowledge with youngsters at the Old Minto Cultural Camp which he created on the Tanana River.



Terrence Cole

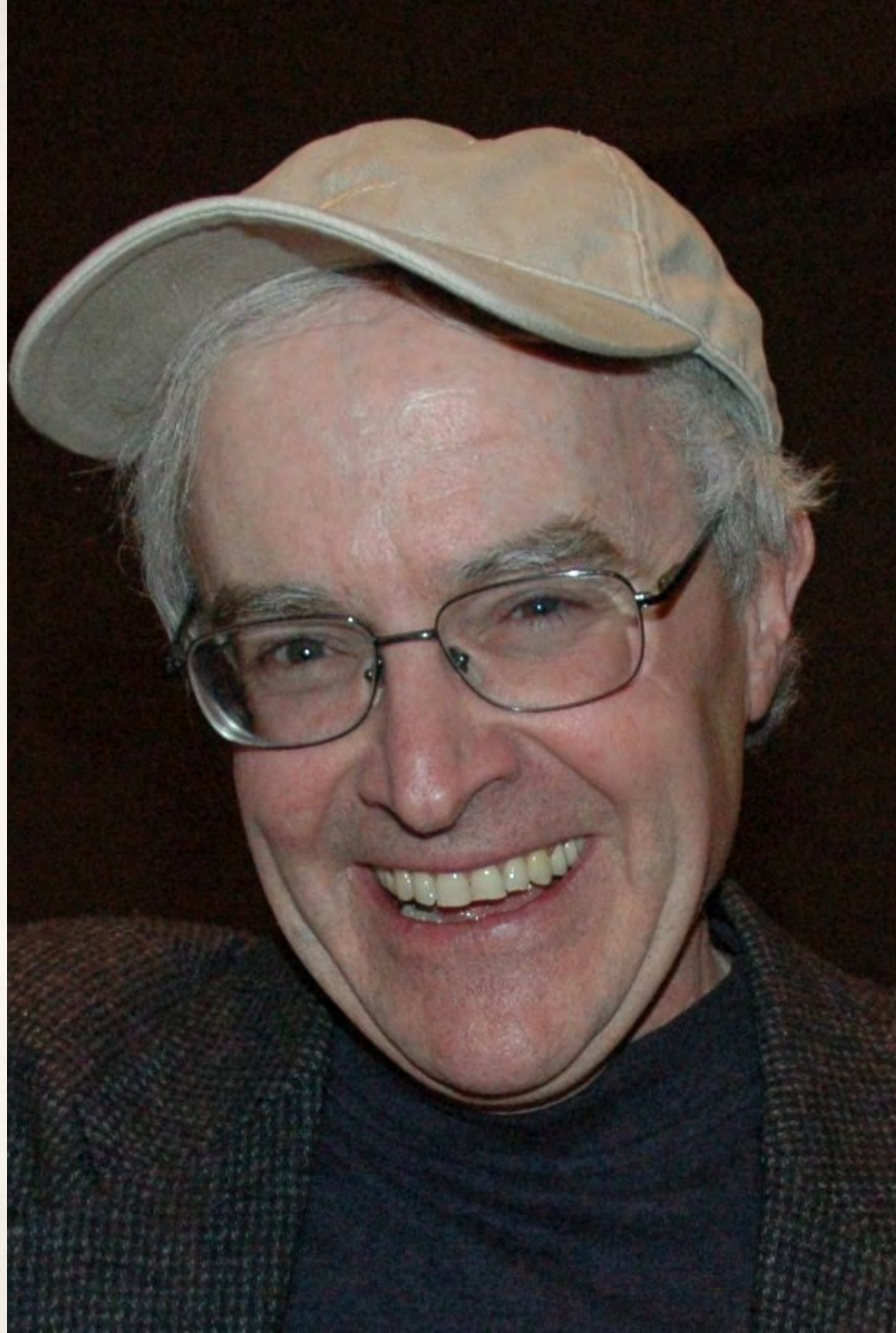
1953-2020

Raconteur and University of Alaska Fairbanks history professor Terrence M. Cole analyzed, documented, and most significantly shared his infectious passion for Alaska and polar history. A steadfast supporter of the Alaska Historical Society, he served as editorial advisor to *Alaska History* and contributed numerous articles and book reviews.

A believer in a broad liberal arts education, Terrence urged students to question their assumptions, think critically, and develop analytical writing skills. He urged his students to attend and present papers at the annual AHS conferences. He mentored hundreds of students through more than history classes as a thoughtful and kind individual.

Beyond the classroom, Terrence published in academic journals, served as consultant for PBS and History Channel documentaries, edited the University of Alaska Press's Classic reprint series, began and co-directed the National History Day program for area public schools.

Upon retirement in 2018, he continued to be active in public service, research and writing. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2017.



“Mike” Gravel

1930-2021

Born into a Massachusetts family of French-Canadian immigrants, Maurice Mike Gravel came to Alaska in 1956. With a career in Anchorage real estate, he was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1962, serving as House speaker in 1965-1966.

Mike served two-terms (1969-1981) as Alaska Senator during the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline legislation period and post-ANCSA creation of the Alaska Native Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

Better known outside Alaska for his 1971 reading to a Congressional subcommittee the court-suppressed Vietnam war *Pentagon Papers*, he unsuccessfully sought the 1972 Democratic vice-presidency and the 2008 and 2019 US Presidency.

He died in Seaside, California, from multiple myeloma.



John Havelock

1932-2021

Born in Toronto, John Havelock moved to the US at age 14. He served in the US Army and obtained a Harvard University law degree in 1959 then came to Juneau to work at the Alaska Department of Law. Next in Anchorage he was a founding partner of Ely, Guess, Rudd & Havelock law firm.

Gov. Bill Egan named him attorney general in 1970, guiding the development of state's positions on the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the first North Slope oil tax system, the state's first limited-entry fishing program, and subsequently the state's constitutional amendment on privacy.

In subsequent years he continued his private law practice and ran unsuccessfully for several elected state and federal offices. He served as founding director of the University of Alaska Anchorage's Criminal Justice Center and UAA legal studies program. He was lead lawyer and director of the state commission investigating the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill.

John retired from the law firm Havelock and Duffy in 2019. As a maker of Alaska history, his papers are deposited in the University of Alaska Anchorage Consortium Library.



Katie Hurley

1921-2021

Juneau-born, Olga Katherine Torkelsen Alexander Hurley, Katie devoted her life to public service. She was the Secretary to Alaska Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening, Chief Clerk of the Alaska Constitutional Convention, and State Senate secretary for five terms. She was elected to the State House of Representatives from Wasilla.

Katie served as president of the State Board of Education, and executive director of the Alaska Women's Commission. She won the Democratic Lt. Governor primary nomination in 1978, the first woman ever to win a statewide election, joining the unsuccessful ticket with Chancy Croft.

She also served as executive for the Alaska Commission on the Status of Women, State Board of Education, the Alaska Commission for Human Rights, and served on the Alaska Judicial Council. She was inducted into the 2009 Alaska Women's Hall of Fame. She strongly advocated teaching Alaska history in schools.

Katie married Joe Alexander in 1944 and had two children, David and Susan. She remarried in 1960 to [Jim Hurley](#), a delegate to the Alaska Constitutional Convention and a member of the first state legislature. They had a daughter, Mary, and later divorced.

Katie was St. David's Episcopal Church (Wasilla) organist for decades. She died at age 99.



“Jay” Kerttula

1928-2020

Jalmar “Jay” Kerttula was the farmer who long represented Palmer in the state legislature and uniquely in positions as Senate president and House speaker. Popular and personable, he was re-elected and served intermittently for 30 years from 1961-1994.

Part of the original Matanuska Valley Colony families, Jay and wife Joyce formed a team at home and in their Juneau legislative office where he focused on legislation while she directed the office.

Jay worked to ensure Alaska received its share of oil revenues through the Alaska Permanent Fund. He pursued the purchase of the Independence Mine for a state historical park, and advocated on issues of education and health care, the Pioneer Homes, the Alaska Marine Highway, purchase of the Alaska Railroad, anti-trust legislation, and the work of the state’s cultural agencies.



Albert Kookesh

1948-2021

Angoon commercial fisherman, businessman, attorney, and basketball player/fan, Albert Kookesh operated the Kootznahoo Inlet Lodge and the Angoon Market Center. He worked in the administrations of Governors Tony Knowles and Bill Walker, and served in the Alaska House of Representatives (1997-2005) and the Alaska Senate (2005-2013).

Albert served in various positions with Kootznoowoo Inc., the Sealaska Corp., and the Alaska Federation of Natives. He was active in the Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Tlingit and Haida Central Council. Through the Sealaska Heritage Institute Board, he expanded the scholarship program and revitalized the Alaska Native language and culture programs and helped launch the Juneau biennial “Celebration” of traditional regalia, song, dance, art, food and language. Statewide, he was an early trustee of the First Alaskans Institute.



“Bob” Mitchell

1931-2021

Robert “Bob” Anthony Mitchell’s second career brought him to Alaska as a historic preservation architect. Completing his initial career in the U.S. Navy, he next successfully earned a University of Pennsylvania architecture degree.

Bob worked with firms in Connecticut, Philadelphia, Montana, North Dakota, and Alaska. Here he was architectural historian for Office of History and Archaeology. The Independence Mine and Rika’s Roadhouse rehabilitations were among his major projects.

Bob was active with Yale Alumni committees, the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation (now Preservation Alaska), Friends of Nike Site Summit, the Alaska Chamber Singers, Anchorage Waterways Council, Friends of Anchorage Refuge, and Opportunities for Lifelong Education.



Ken Nail, Jr.

1950-2021

Originating from Tupelo, Mississippi, Ken was the 6th Alaska State Archivist and served for 5 years. He initiated efforts to begin electronic records Archives (ASERA—Alaska State Electronic Records Archives).

Ken worked with the Carrie M. McLain Museum and the City of Nome to digitize state records there and allow the originals to stay in Nome with provision for their care.

His long archivist career included the Kennedy Space Center, Montgomery County Alabama, Alaska State Archives, then completing his career as archivist and librarian at the University Medical Center Library in Jackson, Mississippi.



Lyle D. Perrigo

1930-2020

With a specialty in corrosion science, Lyle worked for General Electric at the Hanford Project in Washington State. His new employer Battelle Northwest assigned him to open an Alaska Field office. Later he became the Assoc. Director of the University of Alaska Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center followed by directing the Alaska Office of the Arctic Research Commission.

Lyle coordinated programs and meetings in Greenland, Iceland, Northeast Russia, Northern Canada, and Northern Scandinavia while continuing his professional corrosion interests.

Lyle organized the lecture series accompanying the Smithsonian “Shackleton” Anchorage Museum exhibit and assisted in the Museum’s exhibit “Science Under Sail: Russia’s Great Voyages to America 1728-1867”.

Dedicated to public service, he also served on the boards of the Cook Inlet Historical Society, and the Alaska Genealogical Society. Lyle and wife Dalene Perrigo’s papers are deposited in the University of Alaska Consortium Library.



John Sackett

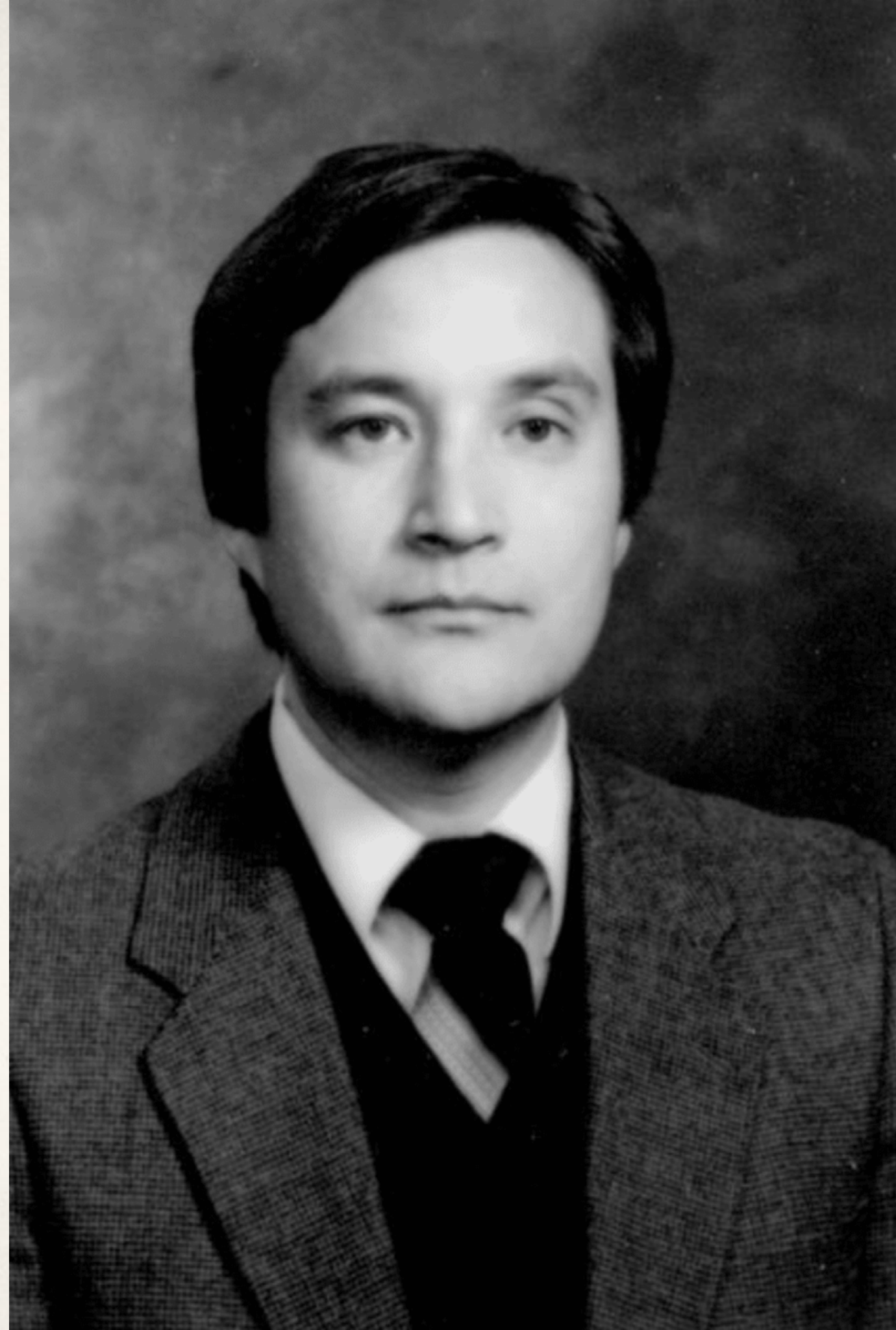
1944-2021

Born in a hunting camp on the Huslia River in the Interior, John was raised in the now relocated town of Cutoff currently known as Huslia. As a child he became aware of the lack of medical care, transportation, and public services in rural communities.

At age 21 he began his political career in 1966 in the House of Representatives, the youngest person ever elected to the Legislature. He served 3 years in the House representing Interior and Southwest Alaska, then 13 years in the Senate. As a member and chair of the Senate Finance Committee he negotiated to appropriate increased funding for rural priorities.

John participated in the establishment of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, helped establish Doyon Ltd, serving as its first President. He previously served as president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference which provided social services to Interior communities. In 1975 John introduced the Legislative Joint Resolution recommending the U.S. Board of Geographic Names change the Mount McKinley name to Denali.

As Senate Finance Chair, Sackett listened to his former teacher Pat Oakes when she called, and supported funding for museums. After being appealed to by Pat Oakes, Jane Williams and others, he helped secure state funding for the Central Museum building.



Glen Simpson

1941-2020

Metalsmith artist Glen C. Simpson was born in Atlin, British Columbia to Canadian and Tahltan-Kaska Indian parents. Deeply aware of these shared roots, he mentored many students reinterpreting traditional and contemporary art themes and techniques.

He earned his metalsmithing degree from the Rochester Institute of Technology and joined the University of Alaska Fairbanks Art Department. Glen was particularly knowledgeable about tools made and used by the indigenous people of Interior and Southeast Alaska and Canada.

His work combined metal, wood, bone, etc. in distinctive functional and visual designs; they appear in the Smithsonian Museum and other public, corporate, and private collections. He particularly enjoyed working and teaching in the UAF Native Art studio.

He had exhibitions at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, the Alaska State Museum, and the University of Alaska Museum of the North and served as consultant to numerous museums.



“Pat” Pletnikoff

1948-2021

Patrick “Pat” Swetzof Pletnikoff grew up on St. George Island in the Pribilofs. He attended Central Middle School in Anchorage before transferring to the Sheldon Jackson School in Sitka where he was an avid basketball player.

As an intern for the Aleut Community of St. Paul, Pat developed a self-government transition plan for the community from the Federal Government. He was later appointed director of the Aleut League (later the Aleutian-Pribilof Islands Association) in Anchorage to successfully seek redress for the US Government’s World War II relocation of Unangan from the Pribilof and Aleutian Islands to camps in Southeast Alaska. Restitution included restoration of Russian Orthodox churches.

Pat returned to St. George Island, serving as mayor. Remembering the thriving populations of birds and fur seal of his childhood, he initiated efforts to rejuvenate those dwindling numbers through the establishment of a National Marine Sanctuary.



Millie Renkert

1922-2021

Millie Waldie Renkert transferred her 1945 FBI position in Washington, D.C. to Anchorage. Coming to Alaska was an adventure: a trans-Canada train, the SS Alaska to Seward, then the Alaska Railroad to Anchorage. Here she met and married Bob Renkert, settling into the small intimate community of Anchorage and raising a family.

Quickly Millie became involved with community groups and organizations: the First Presbyterian Church, PEO Sisterhood (women's philanthropic education charity), Anchorage Symphony, Pioneers of Alaska, Anchorage Ski Club, and Nordic Ski Club and was a charter member of the Cook Inlet Historical Society. She and Bob were strong supporters of Sheldon Jackson College and Alaska Pacific University and historic preservation advocates.

With her long community presence and social contacts, Millie assisted in compiling 2 volumes of *Fond Memories of Anchorage Pioneers: Personal Histories*. The Alaska Historical Society recognized the work with an award.



Frank Soos

1950-2021

University of Alaska Fairbanks English professor (1986-2004) and Alaska Writer Laureate (2014-2016), Frank Soos guided many students through basic classes, mentoring some of the state's best writers. He authored numerous books of essays, short stories, and poems. He and English Dept. colleague Peggy Shumaker established the annual "Dead Writers" series when words came to life through recitation, costuming, and fun.

Tall and lanky with a soft, melodious southern twang, he was as comfortable out-of-doors on ski and bicycle trails as in the classroom. His life ended in a tragic cycling accident.

Married to artist Margo Klass, the two collaborated on unique hand constructed books and boxes of verse and prose. In retirement he continued sharing his literature expertise by regularly teaching non-credit courses for older adults through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

Frank will be remembered for his 2015 Alaska Historical Society keynote address in Cordova.



Cynthia Toohey

1934-2021

Transplanted New Yorker Cynthia Toohey lived a varied and full Alaskan life: Reeve Aleutian Airlines stewardess, emergency room nurse, Alyeska Ski Patrol room aide, Tec-Medic on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and small business owner.

Married to Barney Toohey, the two sought adventure, living and working in Seldovia, Kodiak, Trappers Creek, Anchorage, then settling in Girdwood to restore and successfully operate the historic Crow Creek Mine as a small business.

In addition to raising a family and operating the business, Cynthia was passionate about public service: serving on local government boards, volunteering, and while in the State House of Representatives (1993-1996) was particularly supportive of the Gold Rush Centennial commemorations.

Her dynamic personality and unusual Crow Creek Mine business impressed visitors and reached a national audience on *Good Morning America*.



Dixie Waddell

1937-2020

Long time Eagle River Elementary School teacher, community leader and volunteer, Dixie Lee Waddell was active and proactive for Chugiak. Upon retiring from teaching, she and husband Bill evolved the Rural Discount Center to bring food, clothing, and furniture to the area.

Dedicated to improving recreational opportunities she supported the Chugiak Dog Mushers Inc. and long served on the board, as well as on the boards of the Alaska Sled Dog Racing Assn. and the Chugiak/Eagle River Parks and Recreation Board.

The Waddell's ran numerous small businesses to serve the community, and hired and trained many young people. They purchased and restored the Spring Creek Lodge, contacted the original homesteaders-owners and successfully listed the property in the National Register of Historic Places.

Dixie was a member of the Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society, the Chugiak Area Business Assn., and organized numerous community events.



Fred Williams

1930-2021

Fish and Game biologist Fred Williams of Copper Center drew upon his extensive knowledge of wildlife and human subsistence, geography, geology, to share with others.

Long associated with the George L. Ashby Memorial Museum at Copper Center, Fred worked on the rivers, glaciers and landscapes traversed by indigenous residents and then by the 1898 gold seekers in the massive region. As a search and rescuer, his geographic knowledge was valuable.

Fred's love of area history was represented in his extensive personal book collection. Fascination with the 1898 gold rush traffic between Valdez and Klutina Lake resulted in multiple research trips on that glacier route. He was a stalwart and generous supporter of the Alaska Historical Society.

He served on the Copper Valley Electric board of directors for 49 years. Ironically his wife Hallie of 68 years died on January 26 and Fred on January 31.

