

Palmer Historical Society

PRESERVING OUR PAST, SHARING OUR STORIES & MAKING HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS
Official Publication of the Palmer Historical Society—Volume XXIV No.2 – February 2009 Edition

President's View from Farm Loop

Oh boy, 2009 rushed in with a tropical storm that melted snow and flooded basements. I took a look at the yard and wondered if it was time to break out the lawnmower. I even heard that some folks took the opportunity to plant tulips.

Well, winter is hardly over but as we head into February the sunlight hours are lengthening and we have some more great programs coming up. The January program on the 50th anniversary was a lot of fun as we had the excuse to roll out some really cool memorabilia from 1958 and 1959, watch some video clips put together by KTUU on the statehood celebration and listen to a number of interesting anecdotes that those in attendance shared with the group.

As you may know, the City of Palmer is currently attempting to acquire the Matanuska Maid property in hopes of continuing to develop the historic district in Palmer as a Community Center with a Conference Center, Theater, and Museum. The restoration and conversion of this historic property from an abandoned industrial area into a community asset has been a goal of the Palmer Historical Society for a long time. The project is in the early planning stages but with the closing of Matanuska Maid and ongoing discussion with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and the other property owners, there appears to be a great opportunity to see something good happen.

Chuck Logsdon, President

Your PHS Newsletter

Our apologies to Louise Bidondo, who whose last name was misspelled in our January edition. We appreciate that you called in to identify a photo and regret the spelling error of your last name. All members are again encouraged, in this new year, to contribute "at least one" item—send a Tribute Recipe, photos of life in the Palmer area "back in the day", or a story or anecdote about your family's life in Palmer. We welcome your submissions to newsletter@palmerhistoricalsociety.org or to our mailbox: Palmer Historical Society, Post Office Box 1935, Palmer, AK 99645!

Mark Your Calendars

February 18, 2009

Palmer Public Library Mtg Room

Gather at 7:00PM • Call to Order at 7:30PM

As always, the public is cordially invited to attend, and refreshments, served by our Hospitality Committee, will be available during our evening. Come Join Us!

Borough Seeks to be National Heritage Area - Mark your calendars for Feb 18th's PHS Meeting!

Fran Seager-Boss will be making a presentation on her effort on behalf of the Matanuska Susitna Borough to obtain recognition of the Borough as a National Heritage Area (NHA). A NHA encompasses and combines the natural, cultural and historic features of a region. The region may be defined by historical, political, or geological/geographical boundaries. Often a NHA crosses current political lines such as when a river corridor runs through more than one State. The Black Stone River on the East

Coast recognizes the importance the river played in the early history of the country where the river supported the numerous mills that drove the economy of many communities. A NHA may identify a natural region such as the Great Basin in Nevada and Utah. It may define a cultural activity such as "Smoke Stacks and Silos" in Iowa that celebrates Iowa's farming history or in the case of the Kenai Peninsula that celebrates its early transportation corridor from Hope to Seward.

Fran, as most of you know, is an

archeologist who has been very active in recording and documenting historic structures, sites, and trails for the Borough. She has a BS and MS in anthropology with an emphasis in archaeology and geology. She has worked at the MSB for approximately 20 years as a Cultural Resource Specialist assisting local historical societies and communities in preserving and championing their respective histories. This program should make for an interesting discussion session so please put this on your calendar.

Palmer Historical Website - Karen Stuart, Webmaster

As a fellow member, I value the time that Palmer Historical Society "volunteers" give to our Society.

This ranges from those who have stepped forward to serve on the Board of Directors, serve the needs of the Colony Museum—docents, yard and repairs, holiday singers and bakers, annual raffle "staff" for the dinners, program speakers and those who seek out presenters, and more! The Palmer Historical Society could not do it without them!

This month, I would like to highlight Karen Stuart and her efforts

on the website! She puts in hours to maintain the links, update information provided by the Board, and keep it as a resource for both the Palmer Historical Society membership and those working on their family or area history.

Have you visited us at www.palmerhistoricalsociety.org? What is your favorite part of the site to visit? Do you have it serving as your homepage? What would you like to see added?

Answer these questions and win a prize! Send your replies to newsletter@palmerhistoricalsociety.org, or you may

mail them to PHS Newsletter Editor, PO Box 1935, Palmer, AK 99645.

Cheryl Lynn, Newsletter Team

Questions from our Friends

We got a nice letter the other day from Mary Barry. She notes that she is "working on a new book about the 1964 Alaska Earthquake! If any of the members would like to tell me of their experiences, they could use our address (323 West Harvard Ave. Anchorage, AK 99501) or call our number 907-272-0668. I'm nearly finished, but welcome more personal memoirs."

visit our website at www.palmerhistoricalsociety.org

CHATTER FROM THE COLONY HOUSE MUSEUM

The Colony House Museum remains tucked in and resolute to the changeable challenges of our Valley's winter...including two steady weeks of unrelenting bitter freeze followed by an incredible downpour which created a street lake in the nearby intersection. But with "February" now on the calendar, it's not too early to begin planning for our Museum summer.

Springtime will bring the annual CHM "dinner raffle" (date as yet unset), a visit from the Borough Historical Preservation Commission, and tours with some of our Valley school children, who are a delight to visit with as they glimpse first hand the historical difference in lifestyle from "then" to "now". Next year, in 2010, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Colony will be celebrated, making a spotlight year for our community.

Perhaps you have considered offering your "helping hands" to this PHS Museum effort. We invite you to take the plunge this year! For those of you who are already "on board", THANK YOU A THOUSAND-FOLD! Spending a bit of time toward the Museum effort offers a worthy and enjoyable opportunity to save and to share our local history and to protect the spirit of the Great Depression-post World War II generation. It allows us to offer a friendly welcome to visitors while sharing our town's historical birth and evolution, all surrounded in 1930's -1940's atmosphere. It has been touching to witness the endearing and heartfelt memories that visitors share as they visit the Colony House Museum.

Besides being a docent, other CHM needs are typical of any house or home. The windows need washing, the garden needs planting, the furniture needs dusting, the lawn needs watering...! In a way, it's rather like a family operation at work, with different helpers popping in during any day to check in, touch base, or carry on with some duty. If you can see yourself as helping to take on any one of these efforts, you will be totally appreciated! (Give Gerry a call at 745-3703.)

In retrospect, though times are tough now and the Great Depression comes to mind, there is much that is different. You can glimpse some of that difference if you read "The Worst Hard Time" by Timothy Egan or, on a more person level, "Johnny Cash, the Autobiography" with Patrick Carr. (Johnny Cash's home town of Dyess Arkansas was one of FDR's 100 "New Deal" communities, as was Palmer, Alaska.)

The Oldest Building in Palmer

Last meeting, while showing a 1959 aerial photo of north Palmer, I pointed to the Benders of Hair shop, behind what is known as the Clark house on Arctic, and claimed it was the oldest building in Palmer. I was wrong, no news there, but there's more...

I was first asked this question in the mid 1970's, so I sat down next to Rollie Snodgrass at the Valley Hotel and tried to get smarter over coffee and breakfast. I'm a slow study and should have taken notes. He first remarked that all the pre-railroad structures had disappeared from within the city limits. We talked of moved structures, since the Loken-Snodgrass log house had just been moved out of town. Duration in current location became the prime criteria.

Then Rollie suggested "that place with the beauty shop next to Hartley Motors" as the most likely, as it was built mostly from a turn of the century boxcar in the '20s and had never been moved. I thought he referred to the shop. Frank Clark worked for MD Snodgrass and got a cow in payment, but it was Mrs. Snodgrass' favorite, so he took land instead and built the house.

Last week I looked closely at aerial photos; in 1939 there was no shop next to the house. Dee Woods, curator at the Alpine Historical Park who knows old boxcars, lived there from 1959-64 and

assured me the 3 bay shop contained no old boxcar lumber, nor did the visible basement of the house, known then as Seth Cook's. Remodeling in the '80s reportedly uncovered railroad lumber.

Felton's little post office and store that greeted the colonists is usually referred to as the oldest, but it was supposedly moved to its current location just before the colonists arrived. Photo 1(UAA-HMC-0413) shows the store in early 1935 in its current location, apparently recently moved. The photo was taken by Almer J. Peterson, an ARRC carpenter.

But, as Jim Fox noted, it originally was the Palmer section house just across the tracks. Photo 2 (UAF-1996-0190-8) shows Palmer Station in 1917, looking north. White's store and PO is on the left, the old depot by the tracks, and the section house on the right.

So, the old section house was obviously built before the Clark house, but apparently moved later. The dates need further research.

But, now that the Snodgrass farm is inside the city, we should look at the calf shed. It supposedly was a pre-railroad homestead house moved to the farm and used continuously by the cows. But that story will wait 'til after Jack confirms some details.

Ralph Hulbert

Come Join Us and Become a Member of the Palmer Historical Society!

Mail in your payment with the following information today:

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Membership Levels of the Palmer Historical Society:

- Regular – \$10yr Contributing – \$25yr
 Sustaining – \$100/yr Lifetime \$500

Board of Directors Serving PHS in 2009

President – Chuck Logsdon.....745-2327
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Co-Secretary – Sharon Benson745-4913
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Program Chairman – Ralph Hulbert745-4586
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Photo 1 shows the store in early 1935 in its current location, apparently recently moved. The photo was taken by Almer J. Peterson, an ARRC carpenter. (UAA-HMC-0413)

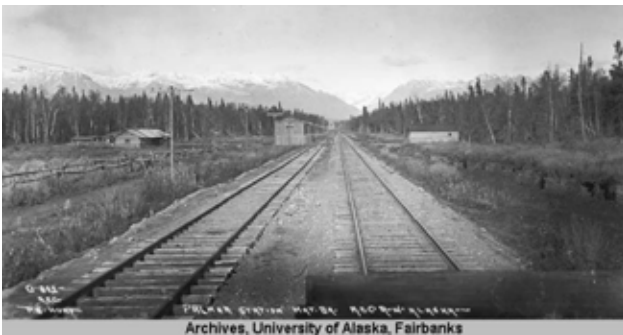


Photo 2 shows Palmer Station in 1917, looking north. (UAF-1996-0190-8)

Party Time Oreos

This is my favorite "recipe" to bring to school for the kids' holiday parties, especially for Valentine's Day.

- 1 pkg. Oreo cookies
- 1 tube "squeeze" icing
- 1 package large Valentine candy hearts or any holiday type candy



Place Oreos on a silver tray which has been lined with paper doilies (to dress it up for the occasion) Put a small amount of the icing on the Oreo and place the candy on it. (The icing serves as a cement for the candy and the cookie) The kids love it and the cookies look so pretty!

By Sharon Benson

Made for lots of school parties with love! Big and little kids love them. Happy Valentines Day!

Open Mike Night in January Yields Treasures and Stories

A nice crowd showed up to remember the 50th anniversary of statehood. A couple of video clips put together by KTUU Channel 2 for their series on the 50th were shown and got folks in the mood.

We learned from *Clyde Oberg* and *Tiny DePriest* that Statehood was important in getting Alaskan dairy farmers the ability to sell milk to the military.

LeRoi Heaven graduated from Palmer High School in 1959 and doesn't remember much of a party in Palmer, but like many, remembers there was a big bonfire in Anchorage. There were other bonfires.

Cliff Salisbury recalls that he and some other GI's with an Alaska connection got together with a bunch of Alaska kids who were attending Western Washington State College in Bellingham and had a bonfire on campus.

Carol Christianson was working at an ACW site up in Hughes Alaska and they had a bonfire not only in June but tried for one in January too. Finally, it turns out that *Betty Mathews* arrived in Alaska January 3, 1959.

Mementos of the Statehood push were also on display including the Referendum for Statehood signed by voters in the Palmer Precinct. It was really neat to see the signatures of all of the local residents who signed the referendum and look for familiar names. *Helen Hulbert* pointed out that one of the original prospector homesteaders in the area, A.A. "Tex" Cobb signed the document.



The Referendum for Statehood signed by voters in the Palmer Precinct hangs in our very own Palmer Library



Board members Sharon Benson and Gerry Keeling show their pride in the 49 star flag.

Palmer "History" Question of the Month

Research work continues on Engine #5, and our next question is from Tony Pippel, who asks – “What do you think is the oldest business still in existence in Palmer?” Please send an e-mail

to info@palmerhistoricalsociety.org or write up your thoughts and mail them to Palmer Historical Society, PO Box 1935, Palmer, AK 99645!

Mark Your Calendars

October 15th - PHS Meeting • Annual Meeting & Dan Renshaw

November 19th - PHS Meeting • Dr. Don Pinkel

December 13th - PHS Open House • Colony House Museum

January 21st - Open Mike Night - Memories of Alaska Statehood

February 18th - PHS Meeting • Fran Seager-Boss

"The Matanuska-Susitna Nation Heritage Area Study"

March 18th - PHS Meeting • Sue Merritt

"Recollections of a Colony School Teacher"

April 15th - PHS Meeting • Delena Johnson

"Renovating and Restoring the Colony Rec Center"

May 20th - PHS Meeting • Pat Durand

"History of Palmer's Locomotive #5"

All PHS Meetings are at the Palmer Library

Gather at 7:00PM - Call to Order at 7:30PM

As always, the public is cordially invited to attend!

Palmer Historic District – Matanuska Colony – 1939



Courtesy Aero-Metric Aerial Photos 1939

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