

PALMER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESERVING OUR PAST, SHARING OUR STORIES & MAKING HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS
Official Publication of the Palmer Historical Society - Volume XXV No.7 - July 2010 Edition

PRESIDENT'S VIEW FROM FARM LOOP

Summer started with a flurry of activity for Palmer area history fans and volunteers. Along with the appearance of new green leaves, came end-of-the-school-year visits to the Colony House Museum by school classes from the Valley as well as Anchorage. Later in May, we had the raffle dinner (one of PHS's main fundraising events) at the Colony House Museum, then there were preparations for the CHM Open House during Colony Days (in June) as well as helping the Colony kids with their work organizing the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the New Deal colonists.

Now it's midsummer and visitors to Colony House Museum come from many places and really appreciate the look into local history. As usual, though, we're looking for volunteers. If you have even a couple hours to spare, consider helping at the museum—greeting visitors, telling (and listening to) stories. Keeping local history alive takes effort from all of us.

Mary Ann Anderson has provided a list of people who have contributed to the celebration of Palmer area historic

events. Our appreciation and thanks to Michelle Adeszko of Bushes Bunches who, for many years, has planted flowers in the milk can at the Colony House Museum; the Colony kids and grandkids who donated money to help Mike Sweeney and Dale Anderson install masonry for the 75th Colony commemorative monument; everyone who donated cookies for the Colony Kids Mug-Up; and especially to Marcie Bentti, Diana Long, Helen Munoz, and all the helpers whose hard work made the Seventy-fifth Colony Anniversary Celebration such a huge success.

The last big PHS event for the summer is the Annual Picnic which will be Sunday August 1st from noon to 4:00 in Palmer at the pavilion across from the Palmer Museum and Visitor Center. Besides visiting and eating (bring a side dish, dessert, or soft drinks, if you can), it's a perfect picnic venue for visiting historic Palmer, the Museum and "Agricultural Showcase" gardens.

Chuck Logsdon,
PHS President

PHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Ralph Hulbert - 745-4586

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Gerry Keeling

Webmistress - 745-3462

Karen Stuart

PHS MEETING INFORMATION

The Palmer Historical Society meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month (Sep-Nov and Jan-May) at the Palmer Public Library. We gather at 7P, and the program starts at 730P.

Refreshments are served during the break. Come Join Us!

YOUR PHS SOCIETY

Yes, you have a Board of fellow PHS Members serving the membership. Yet if you were to help select our speakers for the upcoming Fall and Spring meetings—who would you want them to seek out? The Board would like *your input* for our meetings' guest speakers. Please contact Jean or Ralph, our Program Committee, and let them know your ideas!

Our *season of service* is year around—groundskeepers, docents, meetings and community activities. Take time to renew your Palmer Historical Society membership *today* with our Treasurer Dave Mathews so you'll be ready for our fall meetings and adventures!

MONUMENT UNVEILING COMMEMORATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE NEW DEAL COLONISTS



Congratulations to the Colony Kids for a wonderful 75th anniversary community celebration!

visit our website at www.palmerhistoricalsociety.org

MATANUSKA VALLEY ROOT CELLAR

A Newfound Interest in Root Cellars?

I got a call from someone in Anchorage the other day who wanted to know about root cellars in the Valley. Needless to say, many people around here remember the root cellar as cool storage when refrigerators could not be used (i.e., no electricity). History shows that, whether

called root cellars or cache pits, underground storage was a common way of keeping food cool and safe. Even this summer Katie Eberhart reports, after volunteering at a remote research camp in the Yukon Flats Wildlife Refuge, that 55 gallon steel drums were used for cool

underground storage of fruit and vegetables, milk products and canned goods as well as protection from bears. This subterranean storage was so successful that the crew ate canned goods that had been in the underground barrels for one (or more) winters.

Do you have a root cellar story?

Following are a few recollections from some PHS members.

Ralph Hulbert—Many root cellars remain. Every homestead had one, especially the potato farmers. Most obvious is a root cellar along Fishhook Road, by the Fishhook Golf Course. There was another community root cellar dating from pre-Colony somewhere along Matanuska-Wasilla Rd. Perhaps, the biggest was at the north side of the Co-op warehouse basement which is now a road.

Jean Krupa—Shortly after the Barrys bought the Bogard homestead they began farming. When they needed more storage they built a root cellar below the hill at the site of the original lodge. I have a couple pictures of the roof structure when it was under construction and another of the tin roof after completion. I can remember entering the root cellar like a garage and going into the side of the hill. They stored tons of potatoes and other root crops harvested on the farm.

Sharon Benson—When I worked for the MSB, there was a subdivision called Ancient Tree off Seward Meridian where Chief Wasilla "summered". The Archeological Dept. did a dig and found a hole lined in birch bark [a cache pit] on the property—I suppose this was the first of the root cellars and was used to keep items cold!

Jim Fox—The Dena'ina used forms of food burial that may qualify as root cellars, though not as we think it. The homesteaders had them. Fanny Werner had a fantastic one (homesteaded 1916) under her house which even Rollie Snodgrass envied - shelves and shelves of glistening jars filled with meats, soups, vegetables, fruits, jams, even cooked lettuce, canned butter and canned milk - all by her. I saw it in its final years and was duly impressed. Rollie, near the end of his life, built one, but was rather shy at showing it since it never came up to Fanny's standards. I saw it and I think he was too hard on himself. It was simple, but effective. Most colonists had root cellars - and have stories of animals getting in sometimes and ruining the food - my grandparents' cow got in their root cellar, knocked the door shut on herself and ate her way through all the cabbage. Imagine the scene when they discovered her in there the next day!



Anyone recognize this Valley root cellar? Have a story of your own to add? Contact a Board Member and let them know!

MEMORIES FROM THE COLONY HOUSE MUSEUM — CONTRIBUTED BY GERRY KEELING

It was a festive May 23 Sunday evening when our dinner raffle winners and their guests gathered at the Museum to enjoy the fine dinner prepared especially for them by Chef Pete Scott of the Inn Café. This year's lucky winners were Lucille Wimmer of Anchorage and Mary Ann Harmon of Palmer, who with their guests added to a most enjoyable evening for all. Coincidentally, both first and second alternate tickets belonged to loyal dinner supporter Jane Aklestad. Nostalgic table centerpieces created by Palmer's Flowers by Louise, programs edited by the ARRC, PHS Board members and supporters in "bib and tucker mode" together created a Sunday evening's walk down memory lane. Hearty thanks to each of you who participated in the raffle...and if you have the opportunity, do tip your hat to Chef Pete and to Carla at Flowers by Louise, who so kindly add to the

community specialness of the occasion.

Colony Days celebration weekend saw the Museum again a beehive of activity when our doors were opened wide for OPEN HOUSE on Saturday June 12! With the Colonist's seventy-fifth anniversary observance underway and the weatherman on good behavior, it was a first-class day for the many visitors (including numerous Colonist family members) who came by to say "hello". The kitchen was filled with the grandest collection of goodies from you awesome baking elves, and the Matanuska Maid milk punch was downed to the last drop. Fanfare for Vosie Heaton, Martha Guinotte, Carol Strouse, Gena and Jack Straayer, June and Clyde Oberg, Patrick and Nancy Durand, Gloria Okeason, Jean Krupa, June Tull, Roy Hoskins, Marilyn Hartley and Brenda Valley, and the Colony Kids "Mug-Up" crew via Elinor Goodrich. A first-class team!

THE STORY OF JOHN BUGGE REVISITED

What do we know about John Bugge, one of our most famous town founders whose homestead is now the site of a number of homes and businesses in Palmer including the 1st National Bank-Alaska, Carrs-Safeway, Fred Meyer, the Post Office and a cluster of apartment buildings? We were recently contacted by John Bugge's great-niece Pam Grender who is writing a book about her family and searching for information about her great-uncle John. The local historians we contacted responded with a few facts and some classic stories, such as this tale excerpted from an email Jim Fox sent to Ms. Grender:

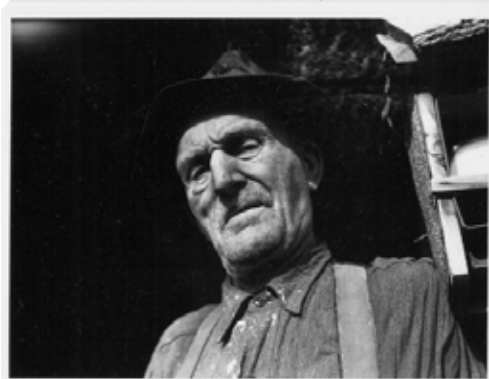
"...There are still people in Palmer who knew John well...Archie Leckwold recently told me that his father, Martin, and John, fellow Minnesotans, came up together in 1913 to the Valley. They came into Knik...drawn by the lure of gold in the Nelchina country NNE of what would become Palmer. On the way up to the Nelchina through the Matanuska Valley they noticed how good the land in

that area looked. When the gold didn't pan out for the two men, they returned in early 1914 to the valley and staked out homesteads. John stayed on his homestead until nearly his last days, dying in the Palmer hospital in 1956.

Now, on to John's history as I've heard it and recorded it. John did come to Alaska from Washington where he was in retail as you mention. He went to Ketchikan to mine in or just prior to 1910. While there, he was working at a saw mill where most of the fingers of his left hand were cut off leaving the index finger and thumb. This amputation was the reason he always gave for never marrying—what woman would

want a deformed man, he said. From everyone who knew him I've concluded he was not the marrying kind—the accident was a good excuse. He did create a special leather wrap/sling/holder/strap which he could wrap around his right arm and hand over the finger stumps which allowed him to grip and swing an axe or use other implements with the best of them. He cleared a good 80 acres that way, much of that land still cleared and covered in businesses, homes, and a highway today."

Photo: Machetanz Collection—Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Machetanz Collection; Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



ON THE TRAIL TO A PIE — A BEAR, A WOODPILE, AND BLUEBERRIES

We are headed for August and I thought that something to do with blueberries might be a good idea. I immediately thought of Kantishna pioneer miner and hostess Fanny Quigley's recipe for her famous blueberry pie, as published by Jane Haigh in her book *Searching for Fanny Quigley* and excerpted below.

Chuck Logsdon

A Pioneer Recipe

First, pick five gallons of blueberries as they ripen on the back of your mining claim.

Then, in early fall shoot a good fat bear. Haul it a quarter at a time to your cabin.

With sufficient snow use the dog team to haul 10 or 15 cords of wood for the woodstove for the winter.

Using a large kettle and the wood you've hauled, render the bear fat into lard.

Then mush your dogs 125 miles to Nenana for 100 pounds of flour and 50

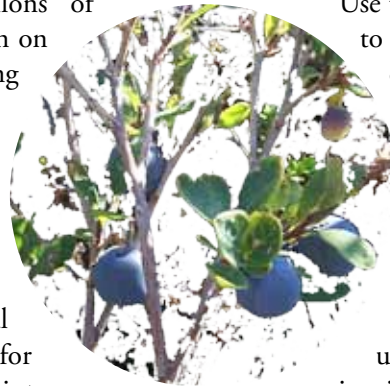
pounds of sugar.

Use the bear fat lard and flour to bake a dozen flaky pie crusts in the oven of the wood cookstove. Keep the stove well stoked to maintain a high temperature.

Mix the blueberries with some sugar, and add enough flour to bind up the juices. Put the filling into the crusts and bake.

Don't let the stove get too hot, or the pies will burn.

Cool the pies, then store them frozen in the permafrost mining tunnel behind the cabin.



Come Join Us & Become an Active Member

Mail in your payment, with the following information today:

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Membership levels of the Palmer Historical Society:

Regular

\$10 per year

Contributing

\$25 per year

Sustaining

\$100 per year

Lifetime - \$500

PALMER HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL PICNIC



The annual Potluck Picnic is scheduled for Sunday, August 1st, at the Pavilion in downtown Palmer, which is on the east side of the railroad tracks just across South Valley Way from the Palmer Museum and Visitors Center.

Arrive any time after noon and stay as long as you wish. There are three picnic tables in the pavilion and a couple more at the Visitors center. You might want to bring a lawn chair and hope for a nice day.

PHS provides burgers, hot dogs, buns and condiments, and some paper products. Bring a side dish, soft drinks, or a dessert. We will also be touring the Palmer historic district, beginning with a stop at the Museum and Visitor Center and, of course, the "Agricultural Showcase" gardens just acrossed the road.

The Colony House Museum reminds that our Summer hours continue until August 31st! Visitors from faraway places such as Italy, Canada, Finland, Great Britain, Germany, and Australia have already stopped in to see us!

PHS September Meeting

Noon to Four

Downtown Palmer Pavillion

Sunday, August 1st

PHS Annual Picnic

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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PALMER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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