

Palmer Historical Society

PRESERVING OUR PAST, SHARING OUR STORIES & MAKING HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS
Official Publication of the Palmer Historical Society—Volume XXIV No.3 – March 2009 Edition

President's View from Farm Loop

The days are definitely getting longer and the Fur Rendezvous races are over and the Iditarod race will no doubt have a winner by the time you read this newsletter. As a child growing up in the 1950's I have fond memories of the Fur Rendezvous races huddled around the radio and later the television tracking the progress of the race. Everyone that I knew cheered for the Native mushers knowing that winning the race injected much needed money into the winner's village. I guess the classic races were between George Attla the "Huslia Hustler" and Doctor Roland Lombard from Massachusetts.

There is the usual swirl of activity going on this time of year that some occasionally refer to as Spring fever. The City of Palmer is still actively trying to acquire the Matanuska Maid Cooperative property from the State of Alaska and decisions are still pending on the design of the Evergreen-Dogwood Avenue couplet and the question of what to do about railroad tracks in town. As I

mentioned in the last newsletter, this just might be the year that redevelopment of the historic Co-op property begins.

We have had some great programs so far this year and there are more to come, starting with Sue Merritt, March 18th at the Palmer library at 7:30PM. Sue will talk about her experiences as a school teacher in the Colony, please join us if you can.

I also want to alert you that we are tentatively planning our annual fundraising dinner raffle at the Colony House Museum for mid-May. As always, two lucky people will win a fine catered dinner for themselves and a guest at the Colony House Museum, and maybe even some entertainment rooted in the Valley's Colony era.

Finally, my sincere apologies for the late delivery of the February Newsletter. Mailing problems were compounded by the President's Day holiday and several days in limbo in Anchorage.

Chuck Logsdon, President

45th Anniversary of the Great Alaska Earthquake

With the 45th anniversary of the Good Friday Quake coming up on March 27th, I thought it would be interesting to see what our local newspaper, The Frontiersman, had to say at the time.

According to the Frontiersman, the most often repeated words in the community were "We were lucky". Once the mess in the stores and houses was cleaned up and the electricity restored, less than 24 hours after the shaking stopped, the main concern was what the community could do to help those who were severely affected in other communities. "Friday evening a report that blood was needed for the injured of the Anchorage area brought donors flocking to the Valley Presbyterian Hospital". Food was on the minds of many, given the disruption

caused by the quake: "Requests for milk and other food stuffs for Anchorage and Glennallen (for Valdez refugees) were filled. A local group of citizens sent donations of potatoes, milk, bread, typhoid vaccine and clothing to Glennallen".

The paper reported that Matanuska Maid announced a price reduction for milk of 5 cents per gallon and 2 cents per quart. It was also reported in the paper that the State Civil Defense organization sent a C-46 to Palmer airport to pick up a load of dairy feed for Homer. "The Mat Valley Welfare and Disaster Council represented by Ed Smith, William Bouwens, and Minnie Clark arranged for cash donation cans to be placed in local stores and bars".

(continued on page three Great Alaska Earthquake)



Your PHS Newsletter

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

March 18th, 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!

Teaching in Early Palmer with Sue Merritt

After teaching for three years in Los Angeles, Sue Merritt wanted some excitement. With a great sense of humor and a teaching contract for three Alaskan village schools, she hitched north by train and boat. After a few adventures, she arrived at the first village, Palmer, in the summer 1944.

Sue stepped off the train, absolutely broke, didn't know a soul in town, and school wouldn't start until fall. Not a bit scary, but where can you stay and how do you eat before the first paycheck?

A single schoolteacher might stay at the dorm or the chicken coops if you had money, maybe the depot, or board with the "big hairy guy". Waiting tables revealed the high school hooligans before they knew their next teacher – and some became lifelong friends.

Join us and some of her students for our March 18th meeting as Sue entertains us with often hilarious tales of teaching in the great land.



visit our website at www.palmerhistoricalsociety.org

Mat-Su Borough as a National Heritage by Seagar-Boss

At our last meeting, February 18th, Fran Seagar-Boss talked about her efforts to establish a National Heritage Area designation for the Mat-Su Borough. Fran stressed that this is not about land use regulation but to help acquire funding for projects aimed at promoting the Borough's unique historical and cultural heritage. The following is taken from Fran's talk:

What is a National Heritage Area?

An NHA is an assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition. An act of Congress designates an NHA. Currently there are 40 NHAs, located primarily in the eastern U.S. such as the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor through Massachusetts and Rhode Island and the Erie Canalway in New York. There are only two current NHAs west of the Mississippi.

Another proposed Alaskan NHA is for the Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm corridor. NHAs are defined and held together by the inter-relationships of natural and cultural resources, that characterizes a cohesive and unique landscape. An NHA is not a land grab; land ownership and control is unchanged by the designation. NHAs are not national parks.

Management of an NHA is carried out by a locally determined entity, usually made up of citizens, government officials, and representatives from private and non-profit organizations. This entity formulates management goals, identifies community-initiated programs for funds, allocates those funds, and monitors progress toward established goals.

GET INVOLVED!

By identifying important historic themes and resources and by sharing your ideas for projects that conserve, promote, and re-generate the Valley's heritage, you can play a key role in bringing NHA designation to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Contact: Fran Seagar-Boss,
MSB Cultural Resources Specialist
Ph: (907) 745-9859; (907) 745-9655
Fran.Seagar-Boss@matsugov.us

The Oldest House, Oldest Business...the research continues!

More on the Clark house....

I reported last meeting that the Clark house has not always been at its current location. Maralyn Hartley noted that when the Hartley brothers bought the site, the house was south of where they built the shop in 1946, which was then moved about 100 ft to its present location. It seems all the old houses were moved. Felton's store was built in 1917, moved to its present location at least by 1935, and is now vacant but in pretty good shape.

Mary Jane (Clark) Phelps sent us a delightful letter telling us how her father built the house, her first home, out of boxcar lumber in '32. There are two small books in the library, under glass, by Mary Jane and her mother Jennie Clark. The stories and photos are delightful – must reads for historians. *My Alaskan Memories* tells the Frank Clark family history, including life in the Palmer house and their homestead on Lazy Mountain.

A Man and His Mountain is about Harry Morehouse, a trapper, prospector, and contemporary of Bugge, Sullivan, and other pre-colony Palmer bachelors. I asked if anyone knew Con, who had a store next to Felton's – John Seemann mentioned this book, which tells of Con's demise and the stash of cash. More on this next meeting!

Research continued on the oldest Palmer business, where else but the Palmer Bar. Reese Kinney polled the patrons and called several old-timers. By consensus, candidates must have a business license and still be under the same name or ownership, which excluded govern-

ment, churches, and certain professions.

Many buildings dating from '35-36 have held the same type of business, but different names and owners, including the Hyland Hotel and Felton House. Toast's Service was built in the '40s?

The Palmer Bar is believed to have started in '52-53(?) in the basement of Bert's Drug after it was rebuilt. Other original bars on the block have since left town.

The Valley Hotel was built in circa 1952, and has kept the same name with different owners.

Palmer Machinery was originally opened in '50 and Monte is the third generation Goodrich to run it.

Pippel Insurance was started in 1945 but has since moved out of town. Combs Insurance was started in 1967.

Matanuska Electric Association was incorporated in 1941, the oldest REA cooperative in the state. Matanuska Telephone was formed in 1953.

Kopperud Transportation was started in 1940 by Herb and Claire, at what was then the end of Alaska St. The operations, now run by Karl, have long outgrown the downtown city lot and moved just outside the city limits. The business address and owners have not changed, Claire still lives in the downtown house, and all important decisions are still made there by the family.

Meanwhile, the cows on the Snodgrass farm are patiently contemplating over 80 years in the business, looking over the walls of the homestead calf shed at the new town below.

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

Great Alaska Earthquake and another Palmer Youth Earthquake Memory

(continued from page one)

The Frontiersman also reported the narrow escape of a woman and her baby who “fled to safety moments before an avalanche destroyed their Goat Creek home during Good Friday



quake”. I vividly recall seeing the remnants of that avalanche in the river containing debris from the house on the first trip our family took into Anchorage a month after the quake.

My reaction to the newspaper accounts was twofold. First, that this cataclysmic natural disaster brought the community together to help others, and second, that the local community, as the agricultural heartland of South-central Alaska, was capable of providing food to other Alaskan communities in need.

Chuck Logsdon

Both advertisements were in the April 2, 1964 edition of The Frontiersman

Hibernation is Over at the Museum

Ms. Keeling has tours coming through this month, and soon snow will be replaced with grass and “chores”. Next month we’ll cover many of the volunteer opportunities for you to support the PHS – both indoor and outdoors!

Another '64 Earthquake Memory from a Palmer Youngster

Well, here is my story that I like to tell everyone about my experience during the *quake*. Pretty exciting times and something I will NEVER forget!

My family lived in Palmer and I was a teenager, a sophomore in high school at that time. My dad wanted me to paint the ceiling of the basement utility room after school Good Friday afternoon. Now this room was a fall-out shelter constructed during those days when the Cold War was a big threat. My Dad built this thing with tons of rebar, block walls and a solid concrete roof which also served as the floor of the single car garage above.

So, I’m painting away with brush and roller, when “The Big One” hits and, yeah, we’ve all had our share of small earthquakes, so no big deal, nothing to worry about...it would stop soon enough. Well, it doesn’t stop...just keeps on getting bigger and louder, rockin’ and a’ rollin’ and I’m thinkin’ it’s time to get the hell out of this fallout shelter or I’m gonna be crushed by all the concrete and rebar!

I stumble up the stairs to the garage, paint bucket dumpin’ paint on me, why I didn’t just drop the can, I don’t know...didn’t want to make a mess and get yelled at by my Dad, right? Get to the top of the stairs by bouncing between the walls and takin’ big steps. As I lunge past the door into the garage, I see my Mom’s 1962 Chevy BelAir pitching around on it’s springs, one side hitting the garage wall where it had been parked too close, lumber fallin’ off from a shelf hanger onto the roof of the car, crash, bang! This is gettin’ scary! And this quake ain’t stoppin, either!!!

Down the hallway, bouncing between the walls, yelling for the rest of the family...hell, they’re already outside, I hear a loud crash in the kitchen, lunge past and see all the dishes on the floor, broken, more falling out of the kitchen cabinets, furniture sliding around. Out the front door, fall down the steps onto the snowy lawn where the rest of the family is: Mom, Dad, my two brothers and sister, clutching the ground, because you could not stand up—it was impossible to get to your feet! We’re all there grabbing dirt and snow, being thrown around, waiting for this thing to end, but it just kept going on and on and on!

I remember looking at the trees while all this was happening and it is one of the scariest things I have ever seen and gave me great respect for the forces of nature! In Palmer there are lots of cottonwood trees where we lived and they are big trees, hollow inside usually, but 24” to 30” in diameter. Honest ta’ God, those trees were rocking side to side, their branches touching the ground as they pitched back and forth, their tops almost touching the ground—I am not bullshittin’ you!!!

We were waiting for the earth to swallow us up, all of us, and it just kept going on and on, we’re all yelling for it to stop, then suddenly, it

stopped! We all just stayed where we were for a bit, waiting for it to start again, I guess, not sure what would happen next. So quiet! Slowly we all got on our feet, walked back into the house, stopped at the kitchen to see that pile of dishes sitting in the middle of the floor. We’re all shaking, cold, scared about what has just happened.

On top of that stack of broken dishes was an unbroken bottle of white wine, one of those big gallon jugs that Mom and Dad kept for holiday feasts—probably for Easter Sunday dinner coming up! Well, Dad reaches down, picks up that jug and cracks her open and passes it around telling all of us to “have a snort”. And we all did—hell, we needed it! We just rode out the biggest earthquake in North America!

The next few weeks we kept warm by stoking the fireplace 24 hours-a-day, eating meals fixed over the fire, listening to the radio, jumping up and heading to the door when the aftershocks happened. I remember cutting lots of wood. Mom and Dad went to the store and got water and groceries to keep us stocked up. Yeah, the Chevy was ok. No school for a while. What a time that was!

*William Paul Demming
Eldest Child of Richard and Annie Demming
Bailey Hill, Palmer, Alaska*

Heritage Recipe of the Month

Helen Munoz, our very own local “Leprechaun” — one of the race of elves who are cobblers and have hidden treasure”!

Her heritage recipe “treasure” comes from her Aunt Maggie who was from County Galway, Ireland.

This bread goes nicely with Corn Beef and Cabbage or serve with a hot cup of tea and orange marmalade.

Irish Soda Bread

- 4 Cups Flour
 - 1/4 Cup Sugar
 - 1 Tsp. Baking Powder
 - 1 Tsp. Salt
 - 1 Tsp. Baking Soda
 - 1/3 Cup Margarine or Butter
 - 1 & 1/2 Cup Buttermilk or Sour Milk
(You can add raisins if you want)
- Mix above ingredients together.



Put on floured board and make an 8” circle approximately 1/2” to 3/4” high. Put a cross on top (for Irish Catholics!) Bake at 350 degrees for approx. 30 minutes. Check to see if done. Top should be firm. Take out of oven and wrap in a wrung-out damp tea towel, which keeps the bread fresh.

Helen Munoz moved from New York State in 1972 to Alaska and has operated “A-Lazy Aces” Bed and Breakfast since 1995. She often gives her favorite recipes to her guests and will share her sourdough starter (which originated in 1979) with you! Call her at 745-6340. Helen always has a “twinkle” in her eye!

Palmer "History" Question of the Month

No questions was submitted to the Palmer Historical Society Board of Directors this month! 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!

Website of the Month

Heard of YouTube? Check out "modern" technology meets the Colonists: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IX12QFQ0Lvk>

Mark Your Calendars

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

November 19th - PHS Meeting • Dr. Don Dinkel

December 13th - PHS Open House • Colony House Museum

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

February 18th - Fran Seager-Boss - National Heritage Area

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 and the Chickaloon Branch

-Matanuska North and the role it played in rail routes in Alaska"

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

Questions from our Friends
We got a from Mr. Richard Hess this month, and will share it with you in our next edition! Your newsletter needs *you too* – send your article, recipe, and photos for upcoming editions and be a part of PHS History!

Address Service Requested

Palmer, AK 99645-1935

PO Box 1935

Palmer Historical Society

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 232
PALMER, AK 99645