Greetings from beautiful, frosty white, Palmer Alaska! Are you all sighing a collective, “We made it!” Yes, we made it passed that wonderfully joyous, much anticipated (since the very first snow of the season), historically celebrated day – December 21st! The shortest day has come and gone, and we made it, we are on the upswing! A hearty pat on the back and congratulations to us all!

![Photo Courtesy of Audra Kiekamp Reger](image)

What are you doing with all the extra daylight now? 😊 Sure, it seems small at first but just knowing that it’s there puts a little skip in your step (unless you are navigating local parking lots where it’s a little slip in your step!) Have you been watching the sun rise and dip along the mountain ridge all day? We have million dollar views and unmatched beauty year around!

Colony Christmas 2013 was a memorable day in Historic Palmer. Great weather, a parade of lights, sleigh rides, delicious foods, bazaars and craft shows, music, cookie contests, nativity scenes, open house at the Colony House Museum, tons of outdoor fun, and the famous fireworks - an exclamation point to the festivities!

The New Year is here and we are looking forward to making it a Historic one! I want to give a shout out to Our Awesome Volunteers - the heart and soul of the Palmer Historical Society! Keep watch this year for talented people using their skills for the good of Palmer and the Palmer Historical Society! “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” -Margaret Mead

As you reflect over the past year, and plan for the next, I trust that Palmer, Alaska holds a special memory for you. Thanking you for the opportunity to serve, **Sheri Hamming**

---

**Our PHS Board and Helpers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheri Hamming</td>
<td>746-1295</td>
<td>President/Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb Lentz Thomas</td>
<td>376-580</td>
<td>V.P./Docents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Campbell</td>
<td>745-4157</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Lombardo</td>
<td>745-3118</td>
<td>Archivist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Strouse</td>
<td>745-3532</td>
<td>Trustee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerry Keeling</td>
<td>745-3703</td>
<td>Trustee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Stuart</td>
<td>745-3462</td>
<td>Trustee/Go-To Dude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Stuart</td>
<td>745-3462</td>
<td>Webmistress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Krupa</td>
<td>745-5770</td>
<td>Program Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Benson</td>
<td>745-4913</td>
<td>Publicist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoAnn Utt</td>
<td>376-4938</td>
<td>Door Prizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June &amp; Clyde Oberg</td>
<td>745-3567</td>
<td>Hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Hecker</td>
<td>746-0545</td>
<td>Newsletter, Membership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Christmas Open House at the Colony House Museum

The Colony House Museum along with the town of Palmer kicked off the holiday season with a festive Colony Christmas weekend December 13-15. The Matanuska wind stopped and fresh snow arrived just in time for the festivities. Our wonderful Colony House was decked out in Christmas splendor.

Our head Christmas elves, Gerry and Sheri decorated every room and the Christmas tree with old-fashioned decorations and ornaments. There was literally no corner left untouched. Thanks to John Stuart for venturing into the woods and getting a delightful real “Alaskan” Christmas tree, and for clearing the path and entry way of new and drifted snow. Our Colony home was indeed a very welcoming and festive scene.

Our Christmas elves outdid themselves making cookies, breads and every kind of Christmas goodies to stock the bake sale table and to share with our visitors. There was plenty of coffee, spiced cider and hot chocolate to warm the holiday spirits. More elves and “Colony kids,” young and old, were there to greet visitors and share stories of our Colony home and the history of Palmer and the Matanuska Valley.

Christmas caroling around the beautiful Colony piano was a favorite part of the day. Did you know the piano was brought to Palmer by a young Matanuska colonist family in 1935? It is now over 100 years old and plays beautifully. Thank you to the piano players and song leaders who lead us in singing all our favorite Christmas carols. It brought back fond memories and created some new. We ended the day with snowflakes falling on our upturned faces, as we watched the fireworks from the front yard of the Colony House. It was a perfect ending to a wonderful day.

A big thank you to all our volunteer Colony Elves and to everyone who stopped by to enjoy the day with us. Also thank you to those who supported the bake sale and/or did some Christmas shopping in our historical books and DVD collection.

November PHS Meeting Features Clayton Family

The PHS November meeting hosted siblings Clayton, Jr. and Maraley Clayton McMichael who shared their family’s connection to Alaska with a power point photo presentation and a table display of family artifacts and mementos.

Al, Jr. told about their father’s early years in Alaska beginning in January 1940, but first explained how an earlier trip Al, Sr. made with his mother in 1935 helped him decide to make Alaska his home.

Al, Jr. read a few excerpts from the diary written by his grandmother on that 1935 trip. In one of the entries, she wrote that 100 colonists from the tent city of Palmer rode the train to Anchorage to join in on the July 4th celebration activities.

Maraley took over the narration when their father met Martine, “the nurse from New York”, telling about their mother’s adventures working as a Methodist Missionary nurse at the tuberculosis sanatorium in Seward beginning in 1951.

The four Clayton children enjoyed growing up in Glennallen, where the family moved in 1963 because Anchorage had become too crowded. There were photos of typical Alaskan activities, as well as travel with the family’s “weasel” and “snowplane”.

PHS members regaled in the sense of humor and sibling banter shared by the brother/sister duo which greatly added to the informative evening. (Tremendous gratitude to Maraley and Al, Jr. for photos and info on their presentation!)

Our guest contributor is Audra Niekamp Reger. Whether she’s decking the town with Elfin window decorations, painting flower and fauna on all imaginable mediums, providing miracles for the cosmetologically challenged (such as I), or snapping photos while running the range with her two best blondes, Phoebe and Greta the Golden Retrievers, Audra is the essence of creativity. Her Page 1 photograph captures fields, fences, and sky bathed in the wondrous glow of sunset on family property overlooking Matanuska Lake. Audra comes blessed with lineage to two Matanuska Valley pioneer families. She is the daughter of Debbie (Grover) and Tim Niekamp, granddaughter of Wesley and Bonnie Grover, great-granddaughter of Clifton and Vera Grover. Audra is married to Scott Reger, son of Linda (Breeden) and Gary Reger, grandson of Don and Jacque Breeden.
January 15, 2014 Membership Meeting: Dan Renshaw of the Gold Cord Mine

Do you know why 1912 was a fundamental year for Alaska the the origins of the Alaska Railroad? Dan Renshaw will share his keen insights on the developments, dramatic events, and friendships forged (and destroyed) which changed our mining and railroading history. Dan is the owner/miner of Gold Cord Mine, located just above Independence Mine. He’s a second generation miner in Hatcher Pass who comes to us with incredible knowledge on mountains, weather, area mines, and Alaskan History.

Dan says he doesn’t usually like to play, “What if…?”, but just for this discussion, he’d like us to think about:
- What IF the presidential election on Tuesday, November 5, 1912 had gone to the incumbent President William Howard Taft instead of Woodrow Wilson?
- Would the Alaska Railroad be the Copper River and Northwestern Railway from Cordova to Fairbanks?
- Would Anchorage exist?
- What if there wasn’t an Anchorage – would there be a Palmer?

You are cordially invited to join the Palmer Historical Society on January 15th at 7 p.m. at the Palmer Library to explore the dramatic events and liaisons which changed the history of Alaska.

Notes and Reminders from our PHS Board:

**From Sheri Hamming, President:** Thank you for becoming a member of the Society, or renewing your dues!

We at the Palmer Historical Society are looking for someone with skill and experience (or willingness to gain some!) as a Grant Writer. If you’d like to benefit the PHS with your skills, please contact Sheri at 746-1295.

“Promote, Preserve, Protect” is our motto. QUITE literally, we are in need of a large, dry, safe storage space for the burgeoning Collections belonging to the Palmer Historical Society. Please contact a PHS Board member with any creative ideas you might have!

**From Joan Campbell, Treasurer:** According to the calendar, winter has just begun. I thought it had been here a couple of times already. As your new PHS Treasurer, I have been familiarizing myself with the Quick Books program used for the accounting responsibilities of my office. Although I used a previous version of this program for another organization, there is still a learning curve to conquer. The Board recognizes the importance of the membership to continue with the preservation and research of our history. One of my most pleasant duties is to thank you for renewing your membership. Dues cover the calendar year from January through December. Fees are: $25 – Individual; $40 – Household; $100 - Patron (Businesses); $500 – Lifetime.

**From Carol Lombardo, Archivist:** Some noteworthy events occurred while the Archivist was on leave. During clean-out and re-organization of the Mid-west Eave two original ridge poles from a Colony tent were discovered. It is believed that further research will confirm these items were part of the museum's original acquisitions from Jim Fox, and have been biding their time peacefully in the attic until spotted by the sharp eyes of John Stuart.

An extensive album of early Alaska snapshots was donated by mail from Roger Harding. The historic photos were taken by his former father-in-law John Long, while traveling through the territory. Long arrived in Alaska in 1928 at the age of eighteen, finally settling in Palmer. He was skilled as a meat cutter and operated the Meat Department of the Colony Commissary. Many of these photos show the Colony in 1935 and include lots of people we would like to identify.

PeterAnn Stenberg has stepped up to help us with archival projects and is tackling the Schaleben collection of materials, organizing and digitizing. Arville Schaleben was a reporter who spent part of the first year of the Colony with the Colonists, living with them and seeing things first-hand. He took photos and sent reports back to his newspaper in Wisconsin, the Milwaukee Journal. Systemizing the collection will make it more usable for viewing and researching, as well as stabilizing and preserving the material.

From time to time we need help with smaller projects as well and are building a list of interested volunteers to be “on call”. If you have a spare hour or two occasionally you can add your name to the list by giving us a call at 982-2824. Needs vary widely and include filing, cleaning, identification, putting items away, inventory, physical labor, indexing. No experience necessary, only willing fingers and a smile! We especially would like to have some strong bodies we could call on sometimes when we need to move large objects. We are looking forward to a great, productive, educational, and fun 2014 at the Colony House Museum.
John August Springer: In October of 1914, an Alaskan pioneer of Swedish descent named John August Springer filed for homestead rights to 320 acres of benchland located on the north bank of a sweeping bend in the Matanuska River, with a commanding view of Pioneer Peak and the Knik River Valley to the south and east, and the Chugach Range behind what would become the location of Palmer to the northeast. Palmer wouldn't be there for another fifteen years, of course, but George Palmer's trading station had been established sometime between 1894 and 1898, near where the present-day bridges cross the Matanuska River just east of town.

According to a post on Facebook from the Palmer Historical Society, “Homesteader John August Springer put his model T Ford up on blocks with only 800 miles on it. He decided that the Valley roads were not good enough to drive on – thus he proceeded to walk everywhere for the remainder of his life.” Springer built a log cabin and a few other buildings, and cleared and proved up on his land, receiving the patent in 1920. Fifteen years later, in 1935, he sold a portion of his homestead to the United States government for $7.50 an acre for the Matanuska Colony Project, which would bring 203 new families from the depression-era Midwest to build their own homes in the Valley. The Colonists who drew tracts in the area which had belonged to John Springer were very fortunate, for it was an excellent location with supreme topsoil. Photo by Erik Hill, Courtesy of Anchorage Daily News

William Ising: One of the tracts of land previously belonging to John Springer was drawn by William Ising, who had joined the Colony Project from Saginaw, Minnesota with his wife, Marie, and their two children. William drew tract number 81, one of the few parcels which was 80 acres instead of the more usual 40-acre size. In 1948 the Isings sold their farm to Clifton and Vera Grover, who had recently arrived in Alaska from Utah. In 1968 their son Wes Grover and his wife, Bonnie, purchased the farm, which was by then a dairy operation.

Two additional Colony barns were added to the property, the Joseph Dragseth barn from tract no. 84 was moved into place adjacent to the Ising barn, creating one large building; and the George Venne barn was moved onto the farm from tract number 82 and was set in a pasture just north of the other two barns. The picturesque RG Farm, located at the end of Grover Lane off the Outer Springer Loop, has been the location for many weddings, television commercials, and other events, and has been featured on the cover of the MTA phone directory.

The area south of Palmer which became known as the Springer System, with its looping roads named Inner Springer and Outer Springer, is the site of some of the richest and most level farmland in the Matanuska Valley. Of the more than 200 farms which became the Matanuska Colony Project, for which the federal government offered financing and support, over one-quarter of them were located in the Springer Loop area. Today the Springer System is a network of picturesque farms which might pass for the Midwest to build their own homes in the Valley. The Colonists who drew tracts in the area which had belonged to John Springer were very fortunate, for it was an excellent location with supreme topsoil. Photo by Erik Hill, Courtesy of Anchorage Daily News

The Lloyd Bell/Doc McKinley barn, Dec. 23, 2013; Mat-Su Landmark Crumbles,

Story by Mike Weland; Photos by Stewart Amgwert. “To people of a certain bent, there’s something almost mystical about a rough-hewn old barn. I don’t know if it’s born of a love of old craftsmanship, an appreciation for timber rough-shaped with old tools; broad axes, adzes, bits and braces and draw knives, and built into a utilitarian structure upon which our forebears depended on even more than the home in which they raised their family.” Please read www.newsmatsu.com/ online for complete article and photos taken of the Doc. McKinley barn over the years.