



Palmer Historical Society

Preserving Our Past * Sharing Our Stories * Making History for Future Generations

Volume XXX No.5 May 2014 Newsletter

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Happy May! Palmer is greening up quicker than ever! Our record-breaking temps are such a gift - seems unreal doesn't it? Every day we have measurable growth in our rhubarb, roses, chives and fireweed. The same May Day tree and lilacs that, last year, leafed out so very late, and the forsythia that never bloomed at all, are already showing off! The honey bees are busily buzzing as they carry in pollen of all colors. Just never mind (if you can) the ginormous mosquitoes! This spring has brought us surprisingly pleasant weather - and has also fetched an abundance of terrifically generous donations. We have been so blessed with historic additions to our collections and for our Tent City Market! Outshining the donations though, are connections made with the bighearted owners of these treasures.

I delighted in memories as two sweet brothers, 'Colony Kids', relived their stories, as a 1949 high school picture prompts memories of old friends and teachers, in a childhood toy model airplane and WWII military pins, in an old but treasured Seattle luggage tag, a golden metal decoder from a cereal box offer, and a book from the Palmer Territorial School that we unearthed under layers of old newspapers from a dusty, vintage Sears-Roebuck cardboard box. These artifacts are priceless and such a privilege to receive. Palmer's story lives on in treasures you folks are willing to entrust us. We will continue chronicling our past with your support and donations.

The sound of a robin chirping draws me back out to the green, the new growth must be awww'd over and visually measured daily. It's springtime in Palmer, breathe it in... and enjoy! Celebrate Spring today!

Sheri Hamming, PHS President

Please mark your calendars!

Celebrate Colony Days in Palmer June 6-8. Colony Days festivities include *free admittance* at the **Colony House Museum on Saturday June 7, from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.** Peruse the **Tent City Market, Friday and Saturday, June 6th and 7th**, held on the lawn of the Colony House Museum. Join us for bygone pleasures, but be careful, you might just take home a bit of history!

"The Presence of Agriculture Today and in the Future" Wednesday, May 21st, at 7 p.m. at the **Palmer Public Library.** Our final spring program features a panel of local agricultural icons. All four serve on the Board of Directors of the Mat-Su Farm Bureau.

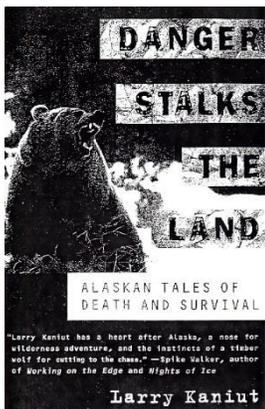
- **Arthur Keyes:** Glacier Valley Farm (Inner Springer); Alaska Land Trust; Arthur sells at the South Anchorage Farmers Market, Anchorage Farmers Market, Spenard Farmers Market, and local supermarkets
- **Bruce Bush:** Bushes Bunches (Lazy Mountain); Bruce sells at the Alaska State Fair, at his roadside stand on the Old Glenn Highway, and wholesales zucchini and other crops
- **Ted Pyrah:** Pyrah's Pioneer Peak (U-Pick) Farm (Bodenburg Loop); (He's got the right idea - people come to him!) Ted also markets to wholesale distributors and sells seed potatoes.
- **Carol Oberg-Kenley:** Kenley's Alaskan Vegetables and Flowers, Carol also sells at the South Anchorage Farmers Market and from her Palmer-Fishhook farm.

We foresee a fun and busy 2014 season at the Colony House Museum. Dawn McNeese Campbell gave the museum a thorough and polished cleaning. Repairs necessitated by the long winter and relentless Matanuska winds were dispatched by John Stuart and his helpers. Books and DVDs have been restocked and we are ready for shoppers. Clyde and June Oberg will soon plant our vegetable garden.

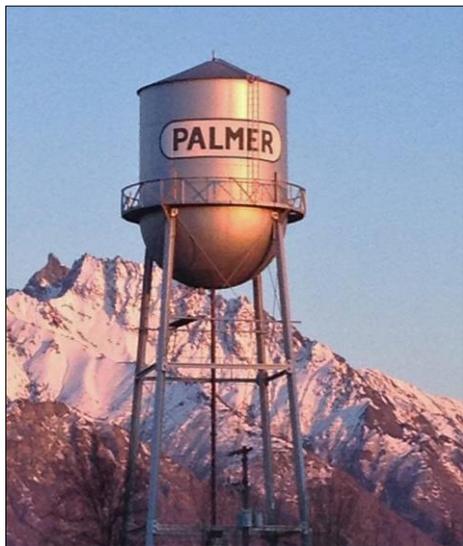
Our faithful docents gathered to socialize and organize. Stories were shared on how best to guide and educate our visitors. Icelandic Airlines is planning flights through Anchorage this summer, so we're hoping for visitors from Iceland (and beyond.) The 2014 season started early with our first elementary school kids tour on April 24. The school field trips continue almost every day until the school year finishes on May 21. We enjoy sharing with the little ones how 'Colony Kids' lived in the early years without electricity, telephones, electronics and - especially - indoor plumbing. Tourists begin arriving in droves in June, making May an excellent time for locals to reacquaint themselves with the CHM.

Our wonderfully enthusiastic group of docents are ready to meet and greet, and to share the history of Palmer and the story of the Matanuska Colony. We can always use more docents, especially as back-up for our docents who all have busy lives and need a break from time to time. You need not be a 'Colony Kid' or even an historian. If you considered joining us, but missed the docent gathering it's not too late. We can pair you with our docents so you can see what it is all about.

Barb Lentz-Thomas, V.P., CHM Docent Facilitator



Do you recall the tale of a GI who foolishly ventured out on the Cook Inlet mudflats where he became trapped in the indomitable forces of mud and tide, eventually perishing despite daring attempts at a rescue? Unfortunately, there are more stories of this ilk in Alaskan history than we'd like to admit. One such story made it into Larry Kaniut's book, *Danger Stalks the Land*. What makes it worthy of note – beyond its cautionary aspects – is the rescuers. Palmerites Merle "Doc" Puddicombe, and his teenage sons, Larry, Lynn and Joe played heroic key roles in attempting to save the GI's life. The event happened in September of 1961. In 1988, Kaniut interviewed Lynn Puddicombe for this story. The author generously granted permission to share the story with us, saying it really belongs to Lynn. St. Martin's Press gave permission to share it in electronic form. You'll find its link on the "E-Newsletter PLUS Email" that carries this newsletter to our e-readers. For our print readers, I suggest either asking for the book at the Library (Larry Kaniut's books are widely found) or Fireside Books. Or, if you have a friend or family member who does email, have them request the link from: blhecker@mtaonline.net From *DANGER STALKS THE LAND: ALASKAN TALES OF DEATH AND SURVIVAL* © 1999 by Larry Kaniut. Reprinted by permission of St. Martin's Press. All rights reserved.



The Palmer Water Tower



Water Tower art by a Sherrod Elementary 4th grader

A reminder from Joan Campbell: Thank you for your renewals and new memberships! PHS appreciates your support and interest! Our e-PLUS Newsletter is free for the asking. You may request a subscription at pls@mtaonline.net or at blhecker@mtaonline.net. Members may receive a print copy (b/w) or the e-PLUS version, or both. Dues may be paid by check through the mail at "PHS, Attn: Joan Campbell, PO Box 1935, Palmer, AK 99645. You may pay by check, credit card, or cash at our monthly programs.

Membership Dues: Individual: \$25.00 Household: \$40.00 Patron (business): \$100.00 Lifetime: \$500.00



Palmer's Oldest Structure Built *in situ* by the Original Homesteader

History enthusiasts like markers, remnants of earlier events and inhabitants. Few relics of early white settlers remain within Palmer's city limits; but Ralph Hulbert thinks he's found, at least thus far, the earliest cabin, built *in situ* by an original settler. Some older structures have moved around, and the city has moved a bit to encompass this cabin, and will continue marching – history never stops.

Boots crunching on the final spring snowfall, Ralph and our host, Dan Lucas, led us to the unassuming cabin. We marveled at the sod roof with its stubborn mini-evergreen forest. A few of us slight enough to stoop and crawl through the doorway frozen ajar, saw relics of another time – a small wood stove, an old wood table, a rusted flat spring... The cabin sits on a sloped site which has helped keep it dry, and retard the rot. It still sits on its original site, just out of sight of the Glenn Highway as the city of Palmer continues to grow around it. Dan is the son of Margaret and Leo Lucas who have farmed this homestead since 1939. It is assumed, from stories passed down and relics, that the little cabin was used as storage for the early settler's fox farm. Here is the story in Dan's words:

"Oliver Jones, an ARR conductor and brakeman, owned the property and was (I think) the original locator of the 160 acre homestead. According to my parents, he had various people stay on the property over the years tending the foxes while he worked on the railroad. I'm not sure exactly when the cabin was built, but certainly well before my parents moved there in 1939. If it was indeed used in conjunction with the fox farm activities, I would guess it was built in the 1920's. The heyday of fox farming, I believe, came to an end near the crash of 1929, with changing economics and fashion making it unprofitable. The repeal of prohibition in 1933 might have been its final death knell, as many of these farms had a lucrative side business of moonshining. In any event, my mom said the pens didn't appear to have been used in some time when they moved onto the place - although she said there were still some long-dead fox corpses in some of the boxes!

"The cabin itself is constructed of saddle-notched spruce logs, with a thick layer of dirt over a continuous spruce pole ceiling. A waterproof layer of birch bark, laid shingle -style between the poles and the dirt, has kept the roof surprisingly well preserved - although the southwest corner of the structure is beginning to collapse. It appears that some of the logs were fire-charred before construction (as they alternate with logs that show no signs of fire), and they may have all been dead standing trees before being used to build the cabin. The logs were set right on the dirt, and as such have been slowly rotting ever since construction, resulting in a door that is now quite low."



Since the cabin was not a residence, where did Margaret and Leo live when they moved to the property in 1939? Again, Dan:

"My folks were renting a cabin from John Bugge in '38, who told them Jones might want to sell. He had recently hauled a house, part of "New Chickaloon", to the site. Built in 1920 on top of the bluff overlooking the river and the mining infrastructure as a bachelor residence, it was moved to this property sometime between 1927 and 1933. It had been disassembled (roof removed, cut into quarters, loaded onto the last train leaving town) so as to fit through the Howe Through Truss bridges in use at the time. It was then rebuilt about 100 feet from where the cabin sits today.

"When my parents moved in, the house was livable, but had only tarpaper for a roof, so my dad put a metal roof on as rent. There were at least three different hand dug wells on the property, one due west of the cabin, one due east, and one to the south. As far as I know, only the one to the east produced water in any quantity. After the earthquake in 1964, that well went dry, and even though Archie Moffitt drilled at that site, no water was ever found there again. Ironically a new, very productive well was witched and drilled right out the back door of the Chickaloon house! Had it been there originally, hauling water to the house would have been much easier!

"The 'Chickaloon house' can be viewed today at the Sutton Historical Park. You can still see the saw marks from the 'surgery' through the siding."

“Abraham Lincoln, Martians and the Alaska State Fair”

Talis Colberg, April 2014

With professorial aplomb, our April featured speaker, **Talis Colberg**, persuaded us that Abraham Lincoln very likely had an interest in Martians, or at the very least, facilitated UAF's present role in (land, sea and) space research. Lincoln's timely patronage of agriculture understandably extended to the Alaska State Fair as we know it today.

Colberg's engaging logic went something like this: In **1862, President Abraham Lincoln** signed into law the **Morrill Land-Grant Acts** allowing for the creation of land-grant colleges in each state. (Had we lived in Alaska at the time, we wouldn't have been too impressed as our commander-in-chief would have been Alexander II of Russia.) Present and future US states were promised funding and land to create "people's universities" bringing agricultural research and education to the people. The enactment of the **Hatch Act of 1887** followed with additional federal grant funds for each state to establish an agricultural experiment station in association with the land-grant college.

Sandwiched between the Morrill Act and the Hatch Act, **Alaska was purchased by the United States from the Russian Empire in 1867.**

Charles Christian (C.C.) Georgeson, of Kansas, came north in 1898 as special agent in charge of establishing Alaska's U.S. Agricultural Stations. Unlike other states where experiment stations extended naturally from the university system, Alaska's agricultural stations were formed *prior to* the University of Alaska. Among the agriculturalists Georgeson recruited to administer experimental stations in Alaska was his former student, M.D. Snodgrass, who would, among other sites, establish the Matanuska Experimental Station in 1915. (Georgeson would recruit sufficient of his Kansan colleagues that they were accused of being the "Kansas Mafia.") While C.C. Georgeson would earn UAF's honor as Alaska's "true father of agriculture", it was M.D. Snodgrass whose name is renowned in the Matanuska Valley.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks, flagship campus of the University of Alaska system, was founded in 1917 as a land-grant college under the auspices of the Morrill Act, two years after the establishment of the Matanuska experiment station (located invaluable near the railroad depot at the original Matanuska settlement.) Experiment stations in Sitka, Kodiak, Kenai, Copper Center, Rampart and Fairbanks had already been founded – only two of which, Fairbanks and Matanuska, remain. In 1966, UAF received a grant in the development of coastal marine research, making it also a 'sea-grant college'. The Alaska Space Grant Program was established at UAF in 1991. Moreover, the UA system became part of the 2012 **Mars Curiosity Project**. Accordingly, UAF is one of a handful of institutions in the country which can claim the trifecta of being a Land, Sea and Space Grant Institution.

This buckles the buckle, bringing round Colberg's reasoning: **Abraham Lincoln's** signing of the **Morrill Act** led to the establishment of the **UA land-grant college system** which preceded **UAF's** predominance in studies of **land, sea and space** (and all the drones who fly therein), **including Mars, and beyond**. Unquestionably, Lincoln's focus on agronomy provided catalyst to the **agricultural showcase of Alaska's State Fairs, of which Palmer's is the largest**. Honest Abe was truly the incarnation of futuristic intuition benefitting Alaska.

Talis pointed to the turn of the 20th century as the era when expositions (international events) and fairs (localized) garnered tremendous public attention. Immense, ornate, and now electrified, expositions were originally established to display agricultural and technological expertise. Shepherded by the land-grant colleges and agricultural stations, agriculture in Alaska gained traction. In a day before television and public media, these extravaganzas created an international stage for celebrities and politicians. Early on, Alaskans had the same desire to showcase their products, produce and people. Fairs were created across the state, from Nome to Haines. Colberg emphasized that it was the very early Valley settlers who planned and promoted the first Palmer Fair. The Grange was founded. The first Grange included many early settlers – King, Lamp, Snodgrass, Thuma, Wimmer, Swanson, Cornelius, DeArman/Estelle, etc. - who came before, yet welcomed the 1935 colonists. Welcomed them not only to the Valley, but to the first Palmer Fair. As M.D. Snodgrass entreated, "The bigger the crowd, the more the fun!"



Photo Courtesy of Jean Krupa

Until next time... While spring cleaning keep PHS in mind ~ we ♥ donations!

May 21, 7 p.m. ~ Our final monthly program of the season! Join us for a panel discussion with our local Alaska Grown farmers. As always- sweets and treats!

June 6-8, 2014 ~ **Colony Days** in Palmer and **Tent City Market**, Friday and Saturday, June 6th and 7th, at the Colony House Museum

June 7, 2014 ~ **Annual Open House @ Colony House Museum, 10am-4pm**

June TBA ~ **Palmer Museum and Visitors Center, PHS** and the **Colony Inn Café** will host an **intriguing, enlightening event**. Stay tuned for details!

July 2014 TBA ~ **PHS Picnic**; sunshine has been ordered.

August 2014 ~ **Alaska State Fair**. PHS in the Wineck Barn – come see us!

Your PHS Board and Support Team

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