

Palmer Historical Society

Promote Preserve Protect

It's time for Palmer History at the ALASKA STATE FAIR!

Palmer Historical Society will be at the Wineck Barn – the perfect spot!

This year we will be sharing the story of the Colonists.

Do you have any Colonist items to display at the Fair?

Do you have a few hours to host in the Barn – to share stories?

Or share a smile? ☺

Email ptownhistory@gmail.com for details and to sign up!

The view is amazing!

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A day in the life of a Docent By Maraley McMichael

My morning shift as docent at the Colony House Museum in June was a unique blend of unusual activity!

When I arrived, Sheri Hamming, Frank and Carol Lombardo, and John Stuart were busy setting up tent coverings in the driveway for the upcoming annual Tent City Market. Since the back door was already unlocked, I went in and did my typical preparations for a new day of visitors.

Soon a young lady named Kharissa came to gather information for a historic walking tour brochure she's producing as a Girl Scout project. Sheri and John came in to exchange ideas and share Palmer history with Kharissa... and of course I listened.

During this time Frontiersman reporter Caitlin Skvorc arrived to finish her interview with our 'Colony Kid' Gerry Keeling. Caitlin and I visited for a few minutes until Gerry arrived and then the two of them disappeared upstairs to find a quiet spot. (Two days later, an excellent article appeared in the Frontiersman titled "Just Make Do – Colonist, docent remembers simple life.")

While this was going on, Barb Thomas arrived to take the place of my co-partner, Lalle Contini, as she was unable to volunteer that morning. When the 'tent builders' left, John came in to visit with Barb and me.

Shortly after John left, Wendy Wesser stopped by to tour the Colony House Museum for her very first time. Wendy is an editor for the Last Frontier Magazine and also a great-granddaughter of Matanuska Valley pioneer Heinie Snider. She's very interested in Palmer and Alaskan history. I asked Barb to give Wendy the "official" Colony House Museum tour, so I could also listen and soak up more details to pass on to future visitors.

In mid tour with Barb and Wendy, another visitor arrived. This time, a young man named Dustin explained that he had recently purchased an original colony house off Palmer Fishhook Road (Camp #7) and wished to visit our museum and take some photos as he is interested in restoring his newly acquired house.

By 1:00 pm when Helen Riley came to relieve Barb and me for the next shift, Caitlin and Gerry were still upstairs and Dustin was wandering around taking photos. As I left to continue my day doing errands in Palmer, thinking about the stimulating and informative morning I'd just experienced put a smile on my face. No 'real tourists' walked through the door during my shift, but we certainly had an interesting and varied mix of people coming and going that morning at the Colony House Museum. What a great day as a docent!

Colony House Museum

Barbara Thomas, Lead Docent

Where has the summer gone! Here we are with just a few short weeks to go in the 2015 season at the Colony House Museum. 2015 has been one of our busiest seasons ever. We began in May with around 500 students at the Colony House for their elementary school field trips, followed by a record month of June.

In June, we were part of the celebration for the 80th anniversary of the Matanuska Colony. A fun and interesting part of the celebration was all the descendants of Colony families who made the Colony House their first stop. They enjoyed finding information, such as where their colony farm was, and pictures and stories about their families. Many were here from "outside" and several were descendants of families who left the Colony in the first few years. Some had only recently learned that their relatives, great grandparents for example, had been part of this historic project.

Now we are in the middle of our tour groups who caravan in motor homes up the Alaska Highway. Many of them are repeat visitors and tell us Palmer and the Colony House Museum is the favorite part of the trip.

The highlight of the season was the tour the Palmer Historical Society hosted for the delegation from Saroma, Japan. We were pleased to be part of the 35th Anniversary celebration of Palmer and Saroma as Sister Cities. They were a delightful and interesting group. We were surprised when they shared that much of the house and its furnishings were familiar to them, especially the kitchen!

So as you can see we host many scheduled tour groups in addition to visitors that find us via word of mouth, a friend or relative, the Milepost, our website or Palmer Visitor's Center. Stop in Tuesday – Saturday 10:00-4:00 to browse at your leisure or for a guided tour. The museum ends our summer hours at the end of August so don't delay – stop by today!



Leslie Fried, curator of the Alaska Jewish Museum in Anchorage, visits with Gerry Keeling during a recent trip to the Colony House Museum. Leslie is researching the Koslosky family and their history in Palmer.

Photo copyright 2015 Lisa J. Seifert

History Nights are coming back!

Mark your calendars!

The 3rd Wednesday of each month
7:00pm @ Palmer Library.

September 16

Author Katie Mangelsdorf, retired teacher, lifelong Alaskan!
As always, History Nights are free & open to the public!

Board of Directors & Team

Joan Campbell	Sharon Benson
Sheri Hamming	Jean Krupa
Gerry Keeling	Clyde & June Oberg
Carol Lombardo	JoAnn Utt
Carol Strouse	
John Stuart	You?
Barbara Thomas	

The Story of Jesse Stubbs

Does anyone remember this elder feller? He and his Husky Quacco just seemed to pop up in Anchorage in the summer of 1953 with the determination to walk from there to Walakpa Bay 13 miles from Point Barrow where Will Rogers and Wiley Post were killed in an air crash in 1935.

Jesse and Quacco and all of their equipment are in the photo which consisted of a tiny tent (behind him), his beautiful Husky and to the right a rickety dog sled with their belongings. Stubbs said he had been a boyhood pal of Rogers back in Claremore, Oklahoma so he decided on a pilgrimage to erect a monument in the honor of the two famous men, which HE DID.

I was doing a Country Western radio show for the Armed Forces Radio Service at Elmendorf, AFB, and working part time at commercial KBYR in Anchorage (then owned by Keith Capper) when I heard of Mr. Stubbs. I was intrigued and quite impressed that an old man and his dog would attempt such a trip and in "summer". It may have been summer but you can see in the photo some spotty snow on the ground.

I took some time off and headed from Elmendorf, AFB to Palmer where I caught up with him. I interviewed Mr. Stubbs but don't know what happened to the interview. It's been more than 60 years. He was sort of pathetic and "scruffy" looking but had determination and enough of a gleam in his eyes that I was sure he would make it.



*Jesse Stubbs traveling to Nome with dog sled,
with Donn Moyer in Palmer Alaska early 1950's
Photo Copyright July 15, 1954*

He and Quacco had planned to walk from Anchorage to Barrow. They did manage to walk as far as Fairbanks, which was no small feat. From here they caught a flight for the remainder of the journey.

The first monument at this site was dedicated in 1938 just three years after the tragic crash. Funding for the project was organized through public subscription and donations from thousands of Americans all across the country.

The Will Rogers-Wiley Post monument was designed in Oklahoma and built on the site with poured concrete using local aggregate. The design is basically two cubes, the smaller one mounted atop the larger. The pink granite memorial marker had been quarried near the Rogers' family homestead at Claremore, Oklahoma. There was an elaborate dedication ceremony which involved a four-way Columbia Broadcasting Co. radio program from Washington D.C. and the statehouses of Oklahoma and Texas and from Barrow and Walakpa, Alaska

The second monument was built 15 years later by Jesse Stubbs. It didn't generate as much publicity and public interest as the first monument but it was a work of love and determination from a small unrecognized man and it stands tall today. The monument is a bit more slender and almost 10 feet taller than the first. The Stubbs memorial was constructed as an obelisk entirely of poured concrete in four rectangular, diminishing blocks. Jesse was not in it for the fame but as a dedication from the heart.

Not much is known of Jesse Stubbs other than he was born on 30 November 1879, probably near Claremore, then Indian Territory but no birth records were kept until 1909. He died 14 March 1960 at the age of 81 after accomplishing the near impossible. Claiming to be a childhood pal of Rogers, the 72-year-old man personally erected the obelisk. It memorializes not only Rogers and Post, but also the Alaskan Veterans of World War II. Both monuments overlook the lagoon crash site near Walakpa Bay.

Jesse Stubbs did stir some interest but it seemed to me there should have been more press on Jesse and his faithful Husky. What a real life adventure story there is!

The tape I made is long gone and so is a bit of my memory of the interview but I feel I had met a very special gentleman and his special dog all those many years ago.

The Rogers-Post Site is located on the north side of Walakpa Bay near the mouth of the Walakpa River about 13 miles southwest of Barrow, Alaska, in the northwest portion of the state. Barrow is accessible by airplane only.

Palmer Historical Society
PO Box 1935
Palmer, AK 99645



As a Blue Star Museum we give free admission to Active Military personnel and up to 5 of their immediate family members. Just bring in your Military ID card and have a blast touring the Colony House Museum!

We thank you for your service and sacrifice!