

Tanana-Yukon Historical Society
Acting President's Report

Submitted by Anne Foster, Acting President
September 17, 2008

The Society has seen a number of changes over the past year. Reports from our committees, officers, and others will follow, but I would like to focus upon some of the “people” changes. Last spring, Board President Renee Blahuta was forced to take a leave of absence to spend more time with family. As vice president, I became the acting president until such time as we are able to gather nominations and hold an election.

Other changes on the Board include the resignations of the Catherine Williams (who moved out of state) and Janet Matheson (who wishes to focus more on historic preservation activities). As a result, we have a number of open Board seats.

Part of my goal as acting President is to make the work of the Society run more smoothly, without overburdening one or two members. As part of this plan, we have hired a (very) part-time coordinator, Jenny Barrett, to help us get organized. You have already seen the benefits of having some paid staff with the production of a long-overdue newsletter. Jenny will help us reconnect with our members through a variety of communications as well as assist officers and committees with the day to day activities of running an organization.

A second aspect of my plan is to create several standing committees. This will help spread the work of the Society, allow members to participate in areas where their interests lie, and develop new leaders for possible future Board membership. If we all pitch in a bit, the work should not be onerous—and may even be quite enjoyable!

So, with several open Board seats as well as new committees forming, I hope you will consider helping out a bit. We need everyone's assistance to ensure the Society is able to continue to pursue all of the exciting history projects we envision. This is an especially critical time in Fairbanks as we see changes to our economic and demographic outlook and significant threats to our historic built environment and sense of community. Please consider volunteering a small amount of your time to help out!

Tanana-Yukon Historical Society
Wickersham House Committee Report
Submitted by Anne Foster, Chair
September 17, 2008

The Society has received three grants to benefit the Wickersham House and its interpretation of Judge Wickersham, early Fairbanks, and Alaska's legal history. Each of these grants follows upon the successful completion of the Interpretive Plan reported and reviewed at the previous annual meeting in January 2007. Following are descriptions and updates on each of the grants:

\$2,000 from the Museum Grant-in-Aid program of the Alaska State Museum to construct and install doorway barriers with interpretive signage in the bedroom and kitchen. We ran into some troubles with contractors last winter and have received an extension until June 2009. Hopefully, construction can occur in the early winter with the installation and signage being completed in the spring.

\$3000 from the Museum Assessment Program of the American Association of Museums to conduct an assessment of our public dimension (outreach, marketing, etc.). We do a self-assessment and then the funds are used to pay a stipend and travel for a consultant. We completed some of the major components of the self-assessment, including a partnership with Anne's Library 101 classes to conduct some of the legwork research, but still had some outstanding sections due to the short season we are open. We have received an extension through November 2008 for the self-assessment portion and look to have the consultant next summer.

\$20,000 from the Alaska Humanities Forum's Statehood Grants to design and construct a small traveling exhibit on Wickersham and first bill for Statehood. Our plan calls for us to subcontract the curation of the exhibit to Dr. Terrence Cole's Office of Public History. After a season at Wickersham House, the exhibit will travel to Eagle and Juneau—and elsewhere, if desired. We're just setting up this grant now.

We continue to take a leadership role in organizing the annual Museum Day. Under the able guidance of Board Treasure Elizabeth Cook and Society member Ron Inouye, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of Museum Day with a record-number of participating venues. We now hope to expand this relationship beyond the one event and create an interest group of museums and cultural organizations to work toward other shared goals.

The 2008 operation season for Wickersham House has just ended and we are currently working on a report to compile visitor, staff, and financial statistics. Overall, this seemed to be a successful season for the house, with visitation in the Park slightly above average and operations in the house going very smoothly under the management of Museum Manager Lisa Harbo.

Tanana Yukon Historical Society
2007 Annual Meeting Report
Submitted by Rosalie L'Ecuyer, Board Member and Organizer
January 17, 2007

Present: 13 members, including six board members: John and Elizabeth Cook; Kathleen (Mike) Dalton; Anne Foster; Matthew Reckard; Terrence Cole; Pat Holloway; J. Rogan; M. Leahy; Donna Krier; Karen Farrell; Ron Inouye, facilitator; Rosalie L'Ecuyer

Reports Given: Elizabeth Cook-Museum Day, Wickersham's Birthday, Teaching American History Project, U.S. Army Contracts, Newsletter; Anne Foster-Wickersham House Committee; Terrence Cole-Old Yukon Re- publication; Pat Holloway-Membership; Mike Dalton and Donna Krier- Representation of TYHS on Pioneer Park board; Catherine Williams- submitted report on Web Site; Renee Blahuta-submitted President's Report (unfortunately, it arrived too late to be read and much of the information had already been covered in the oral reports).

There were many questions about the reports and several expressions of a desire to form a coalition with local groups interested in fostering local history. Mike Dalton paid a very nice tribute to Jane Williams.

Recommendations included:

Re-enable Life Membership

Cooperative use of office space to get around rent payments
Dog Mushing Museum/DT Museum-cooperative planning, shared space

Museum coalition within Pioneer Park

Borough Assembly orientation to facilities and museums

Relation to Historic Preservation Commission

- Invitation to joint meeting
- Collaboration of space
- Historic Aspect of Pioneer Park

Program in a one-half hour meeting immediately before a lecture; focus on one topic for that meeting.

Tanana-Yukon Historical Society
Contracts Report

Submitted by Elizabeth Cook, Treasurer
September 17, 2008

Over the course of the past twenty months, contracts with the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the FNSB School District, the Tanana Chiefs' Conference, and the US Army Garrison-Alaska have continued bring the Society opportunities to share our knowledge with the larger community thru exchanges of information and advice to outside groups, direct participation in research and application of Federal standards, and management of 'inter-cultural' meetings.

As part of a contract between the Fairbanks North Star Borough and DesignAlaska, the Society has aided in the discovery process, seeking to identify culturally significant historic properties located within the Borough. Working closely with former TYHS Board Member Janet Matheson (and current DesignAlaska project leader), TYHS designed a public survey to elicit nominations of historic properties, mounted the survey on a newly developed web site, and sent e-notices to over 800 individuals and groups seeking their input to the process. Results have been submitted to the Borough's Historical Commission.

This is the final year of the current grant to the Borough School District for the Teaching American History project. TYHS wrote the original grant application, and became a contractor to provide services to District teachers and students. A more complete narrative of our activities will be published in a forthcoming Society newsletter.

Site preparation for the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors' Center (MTCVC), just west of the south end of the Wendell Street Bridge resulted in the demolition or removal of all the existing structures, save one. The Society contracted with the Center project to provide mitigation and rehabilitation expertise, such that the surviving 'Gould Cabin' will become an example of early Fairbanks' living style. A more complete description of the Society's involvement was provided in the July 2008 TYHS newsletter.

The multi-year Memorandum of Agreement, negotiated with the US Army Garrison-Alaska in 2002, has continued to provide the Society with a variety of contract projects and – more recently – some very substantial net profit.

- In 2007 and 2008, the primary jobs are continuing to manage the Army's government-to-government meetings with Native Alaskan tribes whose traditional lands have been and continue to be impacted by military operations. Most of the meetings are small (10 to 20 participants), and take place in the Upper Tanana and Cook Inlet regions. In early 2007, the Society hosted a 3-day meeting in Fairbanks, designed to expose the two cultures – military and Alaskan Native – to each other. The meeting involved about eighty participants and speakers. The Society's job is to secure meeting facilities, provide catering, and reimburse Tribal representatives per diem and transportation costs.
- In the fall of 2007, TYHS accepted three contracts to perform inventories and condition assessment of buildings on Forts Wainwright and Richardson. And, last month, the Society negotiated yet another, similar, contract for more Ft Wainwright buildings. All of these building-related contracts have been sub-contracted out.
- Also in the fall of 2007, the Society entered a contract to collaborate with the Native Village of Eklutna and the US Army in the identification of potential Traditional Cultural Properties (aka, sacred sites) located on Eklutna traditional lands now controlled by the Army. This is a follow-up to an earlier contract between the Tribe and the Army, which failed to accomplish its objectives. With the expertise of Society member John Cook (retired Federal archeologist and cultural resources specialist) we hope to achieve the goals set forth in the original contract.
- And, in the fall of 2008, the Society accepted a contract to research the history of military medicine in Alaska and then construct interpretive panels to be used in the education of troops and other users of the Army's medical facilities.

Tanana-Yukon Historical Society

Past President's Report

Submitted by Renee Blahuta

Sometimes family must come first and as much as I love the Society I found that I could not keep up the daily duties required of a volunteer president and juggle my duties as my husband's caretaker, homemaker and Miniature horse stud owner. I asked Anne Foster to act as president until the next election and she graciously accepted. The almost immediate result of this decision was the hiring of an assistant. It was a well overdue decision, but for a Society that has traditionally depended on volunteers truly revolutionary.

Thus relieved of the daily responsibilities I was able to concentrate on the rehabilitation and interpretation of the little cabin sitting next to the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center. Lots of research went into the stabilization and interpretation of the cabin. With most of the restoration work complete we are now concentrating on the interior of the cabin. Dr. Sam McConkey recently decided to put on permanent loan a cooking stove once owned by Peggy and Heine Carstens. This was truly marvelous news. The Carstens, as many of you may know, helped shape the history of interior Alaska. What a truly great surprise to get such a great offer. As with other offers I had to find out if the stove was right for the cabin. So I played "History Detective" and to my delight found that the stove was manufactured by an Austrian immigrant who made his way to Nome and, after losing his shirt in mining ventures, invented a efficient cooking stove using willows as fuel. As we acquire more items for the cabin many other mysteries await to be solved.

Some time ago we featured three endangered structures in our newsletter. I am attaching a letter to this report giving a glimpse into the history of the structures. The buildings are now gone and more detective work is needed to document these important landmarks in Fairbanks' history.

We supported the preservation of the little hairdresser shop which sat next to the Mt. McKinley Bank and while we were unsuccessful in preserving it in place, board member Karen Farrell funded the move to a new location out of her own pocket. The building sits now between 5th and 6th Avenue and is in need of repair and restoration work. The building has a rich history, it once sat near its present location before being moved by Robert and Jessie Bloom to Third Avenue. Now well into her 90's Jessie and her son Morris would like to see the house preserved as we all do.

I also remain involved in trying to preserve some of our military heritage. As you all know Dermot Cole as well as many other people in this community wanted to see the old Bassett Army Hospital preserved but to no avail. It's now gone but at least there will be an exhibit interpreting its history for both the military and civilian communities.