



2017 Historic Preservation Award to Bob and Bill De Armond



Robert "Bob" De Armond
(1911-2010)

Robert Neil "Bob" DeArmond and his son William Davidson "Bill" De Armond followed the same professional path as media men and historians. Although the eras of existence somewhat dictated their modes of expression, Bob a newspaper man and Bill a radio man, they each used their medium of choice and writings to become great contributors to the researching, recording, and sharing of Alaska's history.

Robert Neil DeArmond was born in Sitka in 1911 and died there in 2010. The son of Robert W. DeArmond who had arrived Sitka from Kansas in 1903 as the horticulturalist to assist Dr. Charles Christian Georgeson in establishing the first U.S. Agricultural Station in Sitka. The mission was to determine if Alaska's agriculture and horticulture could be developed, thus aiding the permanent development of mining, fisheries, and lumbering. He married Elizabeth Davidson DeArmond who had come to Sitka in

1907 to teach in the public school. They married in 1909 and a street in Sitka is named for them. He was the grandson of Robert William DeArmond, a college student who came to Alaska in 1898.

Robert attended school in Sitka and at Tacoma, Washington, where he graduated from Stadium High School in 1930, just after the Wall Street crash that marked the beginning of the Great Depression. He worked in a salmon cannery that summer, then got his first newspaper job as a reporter for Strollers Weekly in Juneau. The paper was sold the following spring and the new owner became his own reporter. Jobs were scarce and, in the summer of 1931, DeArmond made a rowboat trip from Sitka to Tacoma. This resulted, years later, the book, *A Voyage in a Dory.*" He also wrote or compiled several other books.

From Tacoma he went on to Eugene, Oregon, and the University of Oregon. After one year of college he returned to Sitka and for the next 12 years worked in the fishing industry at Sitka and the new settlement of Pelican. In 1935 at Sitka he married Dale Burleson, whom he had first met at Stadium High School. A son, William, was born to them in 1938, and a daughter, Jane, in 1940. In the fall of 1938 DeArmond was a member of the first crew that went from Sitka to Lisianski Inlet, Chichagof Island, to build a cold storage plant and found the town of Pelican. There DeArmond was storekeeper, bookkeeper and postmaster.

The DeArmond's and their two children remained at Pelican until the end of 1944. Anxious to get back into newspaper work, DeArmond moved his family to Ketchikan and he became a reporter on the Alaska Fishing News, which soon became the Ketchikan Daily News. From 1946 until 1953 he covered the biennial sessions of the Alaska Territorial Legislature for the Daily News, the Juneau Empire and several other papers. That took him to Juneau for two months

every other year, first from Ketchikan and after 1949 from Sitka where he had become a partner in the Sitka Printing Company. At two different times, while living in Sitka, DeArmond was elected to the City Council. He became a member of the Ketchikan Igloo of the Pioneers of Alaska and in 1957 became Grand President of the organization. In April 1953 DeArmond became administrative assistant and press secretary to B. Frank Heintzleman, the former Regional Forester who had been appointed Governor of Alaska by President Dwight Eisenhower and who, with most of his staff, were employees of the U.S. Department of the Interior. While they lived in Juneau, Dale DeArmond worked for several state agencies including a new Department of Library Service. She then became librarian at the Juneau Memorial Library and held that position for 29 years. She also became known as a printmaker, particularly wood cuts and wood engravings.



William "Bill" De Armond
(1938-2015)

Between 1957 and 1973 DeArmond worked part time as a researcher at the Alaska Historical Library in Juneau. In 1958 with Robert A. Henning he founded Alaska Northwest Publishing Co. and purchased The Alaska Sportsman (now Alaska Magazine) which he edited for some years. He also edited Alaska Journal, published by same firm. He also served on the board of directors of the Alaska Historical Society and as a member of the Alaska Historical Commission.

The DeArmond's moved from Juneau back to Sitka and into the Pioneers' Home there in 1991 where he continued as a writer for The Sitka Sentinel, the Alaskan Southeaster, The Sea Chest and other publications. He consulted and advised widely, including providing advice to our Digital Bob project. Dale died on November 21, 2006 at the age of 92 and their daughter Jane died on December 17, 2006. Bob passed away on November 26, 2010.

Upon Bob's death his son Bill culled his father's historical works and appropriately distributed them to the Alaska State Library and Historical Collections and the Sitka Historical Museum collections for future reference. The Juneau collections include: *Juno's Days of Yore*; *News of the Gold Camps*; statehood-related writings, articles, clippings, reports and bills; obituaries from late 1800's gathered from Alaskan sources; articles on steamers, fishing vessels, and other marine information from Ketchikan's Daily Alaska Fishing News; and significant dates in Alaskan aviation, dates of shipwrecks; the manuscript of DeArmond's dory trip from Sitka to Tacoma and numerous De Armond columns and articles published in local newspapers; correspondence, articles and photographs on the topic of the Willow Creek Mining District, sent from Al W. Reeder of Palmer, Alaska, to Bob DeArmond when he was editor of the Alaska Sportsman; donated by late historian Patricia Roppell, Bob's and Pat's notes on people, places, and events in Alaska history. Pat described them as "partially originals and a lot of Xeroxes. . . If there are penciled cards, then they are my notes and I filed them with Bob's." and Bob's boat notes on the commercial boats that went up the Stikine River."

The Sitka Collection includes his research notes and draft articles for the Daily Sitka Sentinel. William Davidson "Bill" De Armond entered this world in Sitka, on April 27, 1938 and as noted above, spent his early years in Pelican where his father was part of a group sent to establish a fish plant, cold storage and eventually salmon cannery. Bill spent his grade school years in Sitka and Ketchikan, then moved to Juneau in 1953 when his father was appointed Special Assistant to Governor. Bill graduated in 1956 from Juneau High School and from Stanford University in 1960, majoring in English and Mandarin.

After graduation, Bill returned to Juneau, working first for the Bureau of Public Roads then for KJNO radio. Facing the draft, in August 1961 he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was assigned to Armed Forces Network (AFN) in Frankfurt, Germany, where he was a radio announcer and journalist until discharged (in 1964) when he promptly became a civilian with similar responsibilities for AFN – at much better pay! Mike Blackwell of Juneau relates that he was listening to AFN while serving at the U.S. Navy Base in Iceland (winter of 1962-1963) when he recognized that distinctive voice...it's from KJNO! From 1966 to 1968 Bill returned to Juneau and working for KJNO as an editor and announcer again.

He accepted a similar position with Radio Free Europe in Munich, Germany, where he remained until 1984.

He thoroughly enjoyed living in Germany – even though Munich was nowhere near salt water – and became immersed in the local culture and language.

Bill was profiled in an article in the Anchorage Times, Jan. 7, 1982, that focused on his work broadcasting uncensored news reports into embattled Poland; he stressed that RFN meticulously verifies their news tips and avoids inflammatory news segments (i.e., no “fake news!”).

Returning to the United States in 1984, he lived in Portland, Ore., with a brief sojourn in Taos, New Mexico, studying with his uncle Dan Burlison, a noted silversmith.

He intended to study art and printing techniques but stopped when it was obvious that his skin and lungs were too sensitive to the processing chemicals.

Bill moved back to Sitka in 1995 where he joined his parents, who had moved to the Sitka Pioneers Home in 1991, and his sister Jane, who also lived in the city. There he hosted and reported for KCAW Raven Radio for several years, was editor-in-chief for Alaskan Southeaster Magazine, and from 2002 through 2009 he was a seasonal ranger for the National Park Service. One of his contributions for the service was writing an opus, “Interpretation at the Russian Bishop’s House; An Idiosyncratic Enchiridion for the Uninitiated, Perplexed, Uncertain, and Overwhelmed.” Beginning in 2007, he was an online editor for Public News Service.

On behalf of the City and Borough of Sitka, Bill served on the Sitka Historic On behalf of the City and Borough of Sitka, Bill served on the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission. His contributions include writing the historic context for the Sitka Preservation Plan, devising the Sitka Street Naming Policy and assisting in historic preservation granting opportunities. His amazing memory and local historical knowledge proved to be an invaluable resource for the Commission.

After two years of commuting (mostly by ferry) between Juneau and Sitka and renewing their acquaintance from Juneau High School, Bill and Malin Babcock married on Valentine’s Day, 2012, followed by Bill’s move to Juneau.

Bill continued his online editor position with Public News Service until mid-2013. He continued his interest in historical Alaska through the Juneau Douglas City Museum and the Gastineau Channel Historical Society. He donated many items to the JDCM and assisted with written materials for several of their special exhibits. Specifically, he initiated and facilitated the purchase, at auction, of Sydney Laurence’s “Early Morning, Juneau, Alaska.” The Gastineau Channel Historical Society’s Gastineau Heritage News profited by his many lead articles on Nevada Creek Mine, written with Anne Pollnow, and the series on “Some Place Names Around Juneau,” an updated and revision of Robert DeArmond’s original publication; and various

smaller items. Bill revised and updated R. N. DeArmond's Southeast Alaska "Names on the Charts" and how they got there" that was published by GCHS, 2015.

A humble but consummate and erudite writer/editor/journalist, Bill was forever droll and had a way with a turn of a phrase! Bill passed away 28 June 2017, in Virginia Mason Critical Care Unit, Seattle, Wash. He was 79.