

THE ALASKA ASSOCIATION

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NOVEMBER 1989

VOL. 8, ISSUE 3

JERRY STRANG; LIVING WITH HISTORY

By Kathe Dooley

He came to Alaska with a hunting party in 1974, looking for a moose. "We never did get that moose," Jerry Strang said recently, "but I fell in love with Alaska."

So the successful businessman from Watkins Glen, New York, went home, settled his affairs and moved to Alaska where he proceeded to look for property. Soon Jerry and his brother, John, joined forces and bought the old Gakona Lodge property.

Located at the junction of the old Valdez-Eagle and winter Fairbanks Trails, the site has been a popular rest stop for travelers since the first, single-story log roadhouse was built in 1902. By the time the Strangs acquired the property, it had 12 buildings including a lodge, barn, store and carriage house.

"In a way, it's funny," said Jerry, "I never really had a thing about old buildings."

The old carriage house was a blackened shell, the inside gutted in a disastrous 1942 fire. The store, originally a military barracks, was in disrepair. The lodge needed a new roof.

So the Strangs set to work. Soon Jerry's future bride, Barbara, joined them. "It took about 10,000 pounds of sand to clean the carriage house," said Jerry.

Today, the restored carriage house is a restaurant complete with candles and red linen tablecloths, where lobster and 20 ounce steaks are standard fare. The walls and windows are filled with memorabilia.

It's a gathering place for local folks. Many of them have donated items for display here. The most recent acquisition is an old Winchester rifle which Jerry plans to hang over the main entrance to the restaurant.

An oak bar graces the renovated barracks next door. "If you run your hands along the side," said Jerry, "you can feel the blade marks. It was handbuilt in Europe during the late 1800s and shipped to Dawson during the gold rush."

When a new addition is finished, the Gakona River will flow approximately 30 feet from the huge glass windows. Although the river has jumped its banks at least three times, Jerry isn't worried.

In fact, one time when the water was only ten feet from the front door, he loaded a truck with liquor from the bar. John asked him what he was doing. "I told him," said Jerry as he laughed, "if the buildings went, we could still have one hell of a party."

John left Alaska to care for their ailing parents, so Jerry and Barbara run the business with help from family members and hired hands. During the height of the summer season they have a staff of nine working on staggered shifts. Even Meghan, their three-year-old daughter, has been known to ask guests, "Can I help you?"

"She's not afraid of people," say Barbara, "because she's always been around a lot of them."

Right now, the Strangs are content to have Meghan attend preschool in a little two-room building across the road. "But



Jerry Strang outside the Gakona general store.

when she's ready for high school," says Jerry, "I'd like to get her in a larger school."

So he's ambivalent about keeping the lodge. While he wouldn't refuse a good offer, Jerry feels strongly about preserving the buildings which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"I'd like to see the place totally restored," he said, "and made into a museum. This is one of the nicest old roadhouses in Alaska. It's too late to save a lot of the others."

AAHP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1989

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The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation (AAHP) was founded in 1981 as a statewide, non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Alaska's architectural, archaeological, historical and cultural resources.

FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STERNWHEELER NENANA PRESERVATION CEREMONY

By Bill Coghill

The "Proud Queen of the River", symbol of a past era and a great chapter in Alaska's history, cried out on Sunday, August 6, 1989, in Alaskaland at Fairbanks. The occasion was a four-hour public ceremony marking the second year of a five-year Sternwheeler Nenana restoration effort. The event was put on by the Pioneers of Alaska and Tanana-Yukon Historical Society saluting the Fairbanks Historical Preservation Foundation. Special honor was paid to the former crew members that served on the S.S. Nenana during the years 1933 to 1955 when she plied the waters of the Tanana and Yukon Rivers from Nenana to Marshall.

It was a moving personal experience for me. I watched the S.S. Nenana being built at my hometown of Nenana and in 1933, at the age of ten, I was on the maiden voyage of the ship. In 1940, my first job was on the S.S. Yukon which was primarily a tourist sternwheeler travelling between Nenana and Dawson City, Canada.

The center of action on August 6th was on the newly restored front deck (bow) of the vessel. A new song "Queen of the River" was sung several times during the afternoon between sharing of stories by former crew members. Even I had my chance, and I emphasized the historic preservation importance of this stately white queen and monarch of the Yukon to our Alaska heritage.

Jack Williams, who is spearheading the restoration, activated the steam whistle, providing a thrilling sound of the past seeking to recall bygone days. I believe the real highlight was the mingling with the people who cut the wood to fuel the

steam boiler, greased the machinery, worked in the galley, took river soundings, steered the vessel, tooted the whistle, and handled the freight and passengers.

The sternwheeler Nenana restoration is largely a Fairbanks community effort. The Fairbanks Historical Preservation Foun-

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Jack Williams, Fairbanks Historical Preservation Foundation leader and Bill Coghill, Statewide AAHP Coordinator, stand alongside the S.S. Nenana on August 6, 1989 at Fairbanks.

1989 Accomplishment; 1990 Objectives

By Janet McCabe, AAHP Chair

In retrospect 1989 has been a landmark year for our eight-year-old statewide organization. Last fall we were able to hire Kathe Peratovich-Dooley as AAHP Administrator. Though Kathe works part-time, her efforts in our office in Anchorage's Old City Hall have enabled much more accomplishment than was possible when we were an all-volunteer organization.

Combined with good staff, we have stronger financial resources than ever before, and are starting to look at the possibilities of making small matching grants for preservation projects. As the basis for all this improvement, a big thanks goes to Jerry Strang, board member and owner of the historic Gakona Lodge. Jerry sells pull-tabs on our behalf and gives AAHP a hundred percent of the proceeds.

This past year the State Legislature appropriated \$40,900 to AAHP through the State Office of History and Archaeology for the work of the Icon Preservation Task Force. Organized and administered by Steve Peterson, AAHP/task force personnel worked with National Park Service staff to study and document the Russian Church at Unalaska and establish priorities for the restoration of the building and its historic icons and religious artifacts. This summer's accomplishments are a major step towards preservation of this important National Historic Landmark.

AAHP was an active lobbyist this year, supporting statewide preservation in a number of areas. We worked with many others to support funding for the State Office of History and Archaeology. AAHP spokespeople also helped gain the passage of a law which strengthens historic conservation easements in Alaska and a resolution in support of the preservation of the historic Kennecott Mine.

Next year's legislative support will be focused on a tourism bill which includes an initial amount for a state historic preservation grant program. On the national front, Statewide Coordinator Bill Coghill ably represented AAHP in support of federal appropriations for historic preservation and for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Other successes of the past year include a national award to the Potter Section House for an outstanding preservation project and several innovative projects to commemorate Preservation Week in May. Through the work of Kathe Dooley and Donna Lane, Anchorage school children prepared a delightful display of historic Alaska houses.

In conjunction with a workshop on maritime preservation, Kate Lidfors and Greg Curney coordinated the publication of a special single-topic newsletter displaying the many facets of the issue of shipwreck preservation. Greg Curney, Newsletter Coordinator, has added new polish to the quarterly AAHP newsletter.

New directions for 1990 will be discussed at the AAHP annual meeting on December 3rd. We will propose a program to formally endorse individual preservation projects from all parts of the state and give these projects active support by lobbying, recognition and, where feasible, financial aid. We have recently established an awards program which will be implemented during the coming year, and our newsletter will continue to share information of statewide interest to preservationists. As a lobbyist, AAHP plans to work vigorously to rally statewide support for preservation projects. To help accomplish this, Membership Chair Russ Sackett is seeking new members throughout Alaska. If you haven't already, please lend us a hand by joining AAHP.

Sternwheeler ceremony continued from page 2

dition has raised over \$300,000 to date. This fall, the Fairbanks telephone directory will have a picture of the S.S. Nenana on its front cover. Inside there will be an appeal for financial contributions. One can even sponsor a stateroom. We taped short TV spots for use this winter for fund raising.

The steamboat Nenana is one of the last, some say one of only two, wooden-hull paddlewheel steamers left in the world. It was granted national landmark status in May, the 54th such designation of a vessel.

AAHP plauds the noteworthy preservation efforts of this proud veteran, the S.S. Nenana which once reigned as "Queen of the River" with a heritage matching that of Vitus Bering and Captain Cook. She cries out of the yesteryear days to thousands of visitors at Alaskaland in Fairbanks.

AAHP TESTIFIES ON TOURISM

AAHP Board members, Gail Hollinger and Bill Coghill, testified in September before the State Legislature's Special Committee on Tourism. The Anchorage hearing was attended by about 50 persons.

Gail Hollinger told the committee that tourists want to experience Alaska's heritage by visiting historic sites. She stated that by pursuing our unique Alaskan identity, we can further attract visitors. This approach will allow us to be future leaders in tourism.

Bill Coghill testified on the importance of historic preservation to tourism in Alaska. He cited the Potter Section House restoration which this past summer was visited by an average of 500 tourists a day. Coghill had just returned from a two week visit to Colorado, where he observed the big attraction of historic structures and interpretation to tourists in that state.

The Special Committee on Tourism also conducted hearings in Juneau, Valdez and Fairbanks during the month of September.

NEW AAHP BOARD MEMBERS

Replacing AAHP Board members that have moved or resigned are Gillian (Jill) Smythe of Wasilla, Phyllice Bradner of Juneau, and Michael Jungreis of Anchorage.

Jill is the senior planner for the Mat-Su Borough. She has a background in geography and history and has been a resident of Alaska since 1965.

Phyllice works as a private commercial designer and has been involved in design of the Governor's Mansion and the State Capital Building. She has resided in Alaska for 23 years.

Michael is an attorney with the firm of Taylor and Jungreis. He has lived in Alaska for ten years and has a real interest in archaeology and history.

AAHP welcomes these new members. The board is now at its full strength of 24 members.

Statewide Highlights

Kenai Peninsula

The Kenai Peninsula Historical Association (KPHA) passed a resolution supporting a historical assessment of an old Finnish log building on the Kasilof River at their October 7th meeting held at the Scout Lake Inn in Sterling. AAHP board member Mona Painter is KPHA secretary/treasurer.

Fairbanks

The future of the Lacey Street theatre in Fairbanks was the topic of a panel discussion sponsored by the Tanana-Yukon Historical Society October 17th in the Noel Wien Library. Panelist and AAHP board member, Russ Sackett has researched and prepared a National Register nomination for the theatre.

ANNUAL MEETING 1989

The annual meeting of the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation will be held in the first-floor public conference room of the Loussac Library in Anchorage at 2:30 p.m. December 3rd. The meeting will run until approximately 5 p.m.

A summary of the year's activities will be presented by Janet McCabe, Chairperson. Executive Director, Donna Lane, will discuss future directions of the association. Recent appointees to the board of directors will be introduced and the election of new directors will be held.

The program that follows the "business" portion of the meeting will include speakers on education and tourism and presentations from the Icon Presentation Task Force and the Fairbanks Main Street Program.

Refreshments and live music will also be a part of the program. Please join us and help make this annual meeting a successful celebration.

NOTICE

The newsletter mailing list may undergo a dramatic reduction of names in the near future. The list will be made to more closely reflect membership. Current membership is a mere 87 while we mail newsletters to more than 1,000. If you wish to continue receiving this newsletter, please join us by sending in the attached membership form.

Dues paid anytime within the rest of 1989 will count for all of 1990.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership runs from January 1 through December 31. Dues are payable by December 31 of preceeding year.

- | | | | |
|--|----------|---|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | \$ 10.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend | \$ 100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$ 15.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor | \$ 250.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$ 25.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Donor | \$ 500.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit | \$ 25.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | \$1000.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contributor | \$ 50.00 | | |

Donations to AAHP are tax deductible, as allowable under IRS regulations.

\$ _____ IS ENCLOSED. Also, I would be glad to participate in AAHP activities in the following areas:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Legislation |
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