

Schedule of Sessions
(rev. 8/13/11)

**Alaska Historical Society
2011 Annual Conference
Valdez, Alaska**

Valdez History

Thursday, September 22, 10:15-11:30 a.m.

Virginia Lacy, “Prince William Sound”

Join Virginia Lacy to hear a personal history of the Valdez-Cordova area. She will discuss fox farming in the 1920s and 30s, the Coast & Geodetic Survey’s mapping of the coastline, copper mining, herring fisheries, subsistence seafood harvest, local gardening, and many other topics of local interest.

Other speakers TBD.

Early Pioneers

Thursday, September 22, 10:15-11:30 a.m.

Michael Carey , “Tom Marquam and His Creative Camera”

In late 1912, two Fairbanks sourdoughs got into a dispute about the behavior of one of the men's dogs. The dispute escalated into fistcuffs and ended when one of the men shot and killed the other. Enter attorney Tom Marquam for defendant William Landon. Marquam was an experienced, combative advocate. He was also creative, especially as a photographer. To prove his client's innocence, Marquam gathered several actors, undoubtedly total amateurs, to re-enact the shooting and photographed their re-enactment. The photographs were entered into evidence in Judge Frederic Fuller's court. Photographs, including re-enactment photographs, had a surprisingly long history in the courtroom by 1912. Michael Carey will review that history and will explain what happened to all the major players in the case.

Michelle Dent, “Alaskan Women’s Work at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition”

In 1908 Mary E. Hart traveled by steamship throughout Southeast and Southcentral Alaska recruiting groups of local women to participate in the work of building a massive exhibit for the Alaska Building during the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (in Seattle). At each stop, Hart mobilized womenfolk, local educators, and youth to participate in the world’s fair. Hart was an Alaska pioneer and former prospector, and an ambitious career woman who resided in Nome, Valdez, and Cordova throughout the early 1900s. She was convinced that the household work of native and non-native women was necessary to the development of a thriving Alaska infrastructure, to official territory status, and to eventual statehood. Hart’s assignment was to organize a network of women’s auxiliaries throughout Southeast and Southcentral Alaska. Hart mobilized over 18 auxiliaries, each contributing its own local display to what became an award-winning exhibit. Through a discussion of Hart’s work, this project examines the relationship

between women's opportunities for social and professional mobility as they traveled along the waterways connecting California, the Pacific Northwest, and the Far North.

John Fournelle, "Early History of Rogers Park, an Anchorage suburb"

Robert J. Rogers (1920-1990) homesteaded land a couple miles south of Anchorage. It was platted in 1941 as Rogers Subdivision. Legend was that he grew potatoes. Following the end of WWII, there was pent up demand for housing in Alaska both for residents (stuck in substandard dwellings) and newcomers. "Lack of housing limits troops sent to Alaska" (Chicago newspaper 3/6/51) There is a good record in National Archive II (Maryland) documents in RG207, documenting many of these issues, esp. relations between the Federal Housing Authority and Alaska Housing Authority. In 1950, the Home Builders company received an FHA loan of \$72K for building 6 houses in Rogers Park; my father bought one, 2503 Galewood, where our family lived from 1950-59. Also, a Sacramento builder formed "Alaska Associates, Inc" and received a 2 year load of \$340K in October 1951 to build 25 houses in Rogers Park. The NARA files records much controversy over finances and workmanship for this later project.

Immediately south of Rogers Park existed the small homestead of Joseph D. Traversie, a native American from S. Dakota (who married an Eskimo woman); circumstantial evidence suggests it may have preceded Rogers in the area. I myself had forgotten this area, until the summer of 2009 when I interviewed an older Roger Park resident who mentioned "small Afro-American enclave which was urban renewed away in the 1960s". An aerial photo from 1947 shows that this area had in fact more structures than Rogers homestead had. It apparently developed into a predominately (but not totally) minority community and was recorded in local records as "Traversie"; around 1956, Club Mambo became one feature of this community. In the early 1960s "Urban Renewal" became a phenomenon across the US, Alaska not excepted. The NARA HUD records the "Northern Lights Urban Renewal Project", and aerial photos show that the community was "urban renewed" away by 1965. Today upon the footprint of Joe Traversie's homestead sits Rogers Park Elementary School; when I inquired at the school in 2010, no one had any idea of the story behind this location.

Ted Stevens Papers at UAF

Thursday, September 22, 2:00-3:15 p.m.

Mary Anne Hamblen

Mary Anne Hamblen, Ted Stevens Project Archivist at the UAF Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, will lead a panel discussion on the Stevens Papers. Hamblen will discuss the role of political archives in society, documentation of the political process, and the issues, challenges, and politics surrounding the processing and outreach of a large collection of papers with numerous restrictions. A second speaker (TBD) will outline the evolution of Alaska's fisheries and coastal and marine management from no regulation through the complex policies and laws existing today. Stevens' role in crafting fishery and marine legislation will analyzed and discussed. A third speaker (TBD) will examine the politics of fisheries and ocean policy, the impact of regulation on Alaska, and the issues and perspectives involved. Time will be allowed for questions and discussion.

Faith and Conflict in Southeast Alaska

Thursday, September 22, 2:00-3:15 p.m.

Mary Ehrlander, “Edward and Jennie Olson Rasmuson: Swedish Covenant Missionaries in Yakutat”

Pioneer Alaskans Edward A. and Jennie Olson Rasmuson spent their first ten and fourteen years, respectively, in Alaska with the Swedish Covenant Mission in Yakutat, after having immigrated to America from Sweden at the turn of the twentieth century. The two were married in 1905 and from then until 1914 they worked tirelessly not only to spread the Word among the Tlingit who lived there, but to improve their living conditions, to offer western education, to provide medical care, and to protect them from the negative influences of western culture. Among their greatest challenges were communicable diseases that ravaged the village, the children's and their parents' disinterest in school, and the Natives' taste for alcohol, which wreaked havoc in the village, despite the missionaries' earnest efforts to keep whiskey peddlers at bay and to keep the Tlingit from distilling “hootch.” During their last four years in Yakutat, E.A. Rasmuson would serve as U.S. Commissioner, which meant he was a justice of the peace, probate judge, notary public and recorder. The story of the Rasmusons' years in Yakutat illustrates much about life on the Alaskan frontier: the impacts of missionaries and Natives on one another, responses of Alaska Native peoples to other western influences, the myriad roles that settlers played in small communities on the Alaska frontier and the personal growth that often resulted there from. E.A. Rasmuson earned a law degree and went on to save the infant National Bank of Alaska from ruin and built it into the state's largest bank. Reflecting back on the years in Yakutat, Rasmuson wrote that he and his wife considered them the happiest and most rewarding years of their lives.

Zach Jones, “By the Blood of Our Shaman: The U.S. Army’s 1869 Attack of the Wrangell Tlingit Village in Southeast Alaska”

The December 1869 U.S. Army bombardment of the Wrangell Tlingit Indian village is a little known and understudied topic of Alaskan history. In 2010 I presented a paper at the AHS conference on the Kake War of February 1869, and this paper builds on my research surrounding U.S. military relations with the Tlingit Indians between 1867 and 1885. In regards to the Bombardment of Wrangell in 1869, although it was discussed in the U.S. Senate’s 41st Congress and 2nd Session in 1869 and received coverage in national newspapers that same year, it is now a largely forgotten event. No scholar has examined it specifically, though many scholars have provided one to two page interpretations of the bombardment in some studies and general surveys. My paper presents newly uncovered sources generated by both soldiers and the Tlingit on the history of this event, which functions to bring balance to the conflict’s narrative and helps us better understand what actually happened. By placing this military conflict within the context of national U.S. military altercations with Native American Indians we see this event’s importance and unique nature. The Bombardment of Wrangell resonates through Alaskan history with a complex, important, and partially dark past.

Terrence Cole, “A Modest Price to Pay for World Peace and White Supremacy”

Even many of his friends and colleagues must have thought he was a kook, but Robert Stein believed he was a reasonable man. Perhaps his Prussian heritage might have had something to do with it; born in Silesia in 1857, he immigrated to the United States only a few years after Bismarck’s unification of Germany in 1871. As a looked with pride on the growth of German

power from his new American homeland, he was convinced the German model could be emulated in other parts of the globe, and dreamed of a more orderly and disciplined world, organized along logical principles. For instance he wanted to rename Hawaii as “Ooctonesia” to indicate there were seven other islands besides the Big Island itself. But the greatest cause Stein took on was his campaign to rectify what he thought was the greatest geographical mistake in history, the Southeastern Alaska panhandle. Beginning in 1910, Stein started a campaign for the United States to give the panhandle to the country to whom it should logically belong, Canada. Such an action would not only make the map conform to geographic reality, it would also be the first building block in an alliance to save the world from chaos and the destruction of the white race. Stein feared the growing tension after 1904 between his native Germany and the British Empire could lead to a new era of barbarian conquest, the rise of the Yellow hordes of which the Kaiser had warned. To forestall this tragic mistake and promote the common racial and cultural heritage of a unified Anglo-German-American world empire, which would ensure the supremacy of the white race, Southeastern Alaska would have to be eliminated. Though he never asked anyone in Alaska about his plan, he was sure no one would mind paying such a modest price to save civilization.

Machines On the Move

Thursday, September 22, 3:30-5:00 p.m.

Chris Allan, “The Curious History of the Snow-Machine in Alaska”

In the early 1960s many Alaskans fell in love with mass-produced snowmobiles, but the history of snow-machine design stretches back to the late 1800s. The Klondike Gold Rush inspired a burst of invention as Lower 48 dreamers and returning Sourdoughs hatched improbable schemes to reach the gold fields over snow and ice. In the decades that followed, gold miners, steamboat mechanics, automobile enthusiasts, and even a champion dog musher all dreamed of cracking what one inventor called the Basic Laws of Over-the-Snow Transport by cobbling together machines designed to power their way through a snow-filled landscape. These innovators used the materials at hand and equipped their strange, new contraptions with airplane, car, and motorcycle engines. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs in Seattle, Detroit, and elsewhere sent their novelty machines to be tested under Alaskan conditions. Although most of their prototypes ended up on the scrap heap, these snow-machine pioneers made contributions to a technology that would eventually revolutionize both work and play in the North and force many a proud sled dog into retirement. Mr. Allan will present photographs and early film of some of Alaska’s earliest snow-machines and will describe the quest to conquer the last terrestrial transportation frontier: snow.

Katie Ringsmuth, “Sea, Mountains, Sky: The Flyers of the Copper Basin”

Harold Gillam, Bob Reeve, “Kirk” Kirkpatrick and Merle “Mudhole” Smith are among the famous Alaska flyers who established aviation in the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountain region. Starting from coastal airfields such as Valdez and Cordova, and following the glaciers and rivers inland to isolated airstrips, these flyers flew over some of the highest and most rugged terrain in Alaska. Whether they were supplying miners, flying in the mail, assisting aerial photographers, promoting early tourism, transporting big game hunters, or, like “Mudhole” Smith and merging his business to become one of the most successful airlines in the nation, these flyers transformed the Copper Basin region after 1929. After Kennecott closed the Copper River &

Northwestern Railway in 1938, they literally kept it alive. Although the flyers were representative of a cutting edge, 20th century industry, the isolated communities they served were determined to remain the “Last Frontier.” Bush pilots connected such communities to the larger economic system, but they allowed residents of the Copper Basin to maintain an “off-the-beaten-track” lifestyle—a quality for which they are identified to this day. Interestingly, instead of remembering these pilots as advocates of modern world, history remembers them as rugged as the terrain they flew and as independent as the “tough old Alaskans” they served.

Victoria Smith, “The Satko Ark and the Covenant: A Voyage of Biblical Proportions”

The Great Depression dealt a devastating blow to the American people. While some took this as a sign from God, Paul Satko saw it as an opportunity. Satko and his family had lost everything; the 24 acre farm, gas station and their parking lot. In the face of this defeat Satko turned to his attention to, of all places, Alaska. It was at this time that the federal government was transplanting roughly 200 colonists to the Matanuska Valley area, where each family was given a plot of 40 acres. Once Satko caught wind of this he began building a boat to transport his family in—first as a shelter from their home in Richmond, Virginia to Tacoma, Washington and then as vessel to reach the Alaskan coast. The *Ark of Juneau*, as it was later christened, created quite the spectacle as it crossed through the states and, with some added strife, made its 41 day voyage to Alaska’s southeastern shores. Although one day shy of being a biblical journey, their survival was nothing short of a miracle. The tenacity with which this family sought out a new beginning is a prime example of the pioneering spirit Alaska was founded on, and the adventure itself is by far one of the strangest spectacles to occur in Alaskan waters.

Fishing and Resource Harvest In Northern Waters

Thursday, September 22, 3:30-5:00 p.m.

Anjuli Grantham, “Beach Seining at Karluk: Fishing Gear and the Creation of the Karluk Reservation”

The Alutiiqs of Karluk, Alaska were granted a reservation in 1943 that included the waters surrounding one of the most prolific salmon rivers in Alaska. This paper will argue that conflicts over fishing gear, specifically the beach seine and purse seine, were the primary reason for the creation of the reservation. Cannerymen improved the beaches of Karluk to make them more amenable to beach seining operations and in doing so created racially and technologically exclusive fishing areas. Karluk beach seiners, employees of the Alaska Packers Association, struggled to make a living due to the segregated fishing beaches, increased competition from purse seiners, and fishing regulations that limited the efficacy of their seines. This case study demonstrates the centrality of fishing gear to the history of commercial salmon fishing.

Shana Loshbaugh, “The Kenai River – A Love (?) Story”

In the 1970s, the Kenai River transformed from a rustic waterway to Alaska's top destination for sport salmon fishing. Soon the state began passing out brochures warning people not to “love the river to death.” This story describes how people's relationship to the river has evolved over time. Before the Euro-American invasion, Natives and salmon co-evolved in the post glacial landscape. That balanced subsistence system gave way in the 1880s to an era of exploitation by outside processors. After statehood, the runs recovered to sustain commercial fishing as a pillar of the local economy. But the oil boom diminished the fishery's role in the community at the

same time an influx of newcomers arrived to visit or settle. Sportfishing increased and created its own economy via fishing guides and other visitor services. By the mid 1980s, erosion, trespassing and trash reached crisis levels. The generation since has seen the evolution of a broad-based stewardship ethic and elaborate public and private efforts to restore and preserve salmon habitat. We will focus on the transition from unregulated river use to community resource management and discuss the implications for sustaining the Kenai's wild salmon runs.

Jenya Anichenko, “The Fleet of the Russian-American Company”

From the first fur-hunting expeditions in the middle of the eighteenth century until the sale of Alaska in 1867, the success and the very existence of Russian-America colonization depended on the colonial fleet. Many flaws in the functioning of Russian America were attributed to the poor state of its maritime affairs. The image of the ever-drunk Russian sailor venturing out to sea aboard an anachronistic vessel was frequent in the accounts of nineteenth century travelers. This perception is, however, far from an in-depth analysis of the company’s maritime activities. In fact, in the vast body of work devoted to the history of Russian America there is no comprehensive study of the formation and function of the colonial fleet. This paper is an attempt to fill the gap by collating and analyzing the abundant, but scattered information regarding the company’s fleet.

Follow-up Q&A with Douglas Brinkley

Friday, September 23, 10:15-11:45 a.m.

Join Douglas Brinkley for an extended conversation immediately following his keynote address. Terrence Cole and Ross Coen will speak briefly on *The Quiet World*, Brinkley’s new book about the history of conservation in Alaska. Attendees will have an opportunity to ask questions of the author.

Maritime Historiography

Friday, September 23, 10:15-11:45 a.m.

Janine D. Dorsey, “Navigability and Subsistence: Documenting Historical Travel, Trade, and Commerce on Alaska’s Waters”

Historical use of Alaska’s rivers, lakes, and streams for travel, trade, and commerce is a key criterion in determining whether those water bodies are navigable for title purposes. Historians at the Office of History and Archaeology (OHA) compile information on boat use by explorers, traders, miners, government personnel, and recreational users, and especially by Alaska Native people in their seasonal round of subsistence activities. Native people engaged in fishing, hunting, trapping, and berry picking have accounted for a large proportion of boat use on many of Alaska’s water bodies. OHA historians research specific subsistence activities and types of boats used, and they also consider the international scope of the fur trade and the many aspects of subsistence as an economic system.

Rolfe G. Buzzell, “Researching and Writing History in Alaska’s Turbulent Waters”

Researching and writing histories of water bodies are key components of an exacting process for determining navigability of inland water bodies and adjudicating title to submerged lands in Alaska. At the Office of History and Archaeology, historians are tasked with writing comprehensive and impartial histories of waterways that managers in federal and state agencies use to resolve conflicts over title to submerged lands and help manage public lands. These histories are used by federal and state agencies that often disagree on the criteria underlying navigability, and by other interested parties and the public.

Rachel Seale, “Down By the River: A short history documenting the use of Alaska’s rivers”

This presentation will illustrate how early Alaskans used the river system by using historical materials from the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections (APR). Following this brief glimpse of how Alaskans used their local rivers, I will demonstrate how I located the materials for this presentation. Many researchers are familiar with the Alaska Digital Archives, but some are not familiar with the image gallery hosted by APR’s Digital Photographic Services. As a result, there are many overlooked photograph collections and albums in the image gallery that are not currently available in the Alaska Digital Archives. I will also demonstrate searches via Star Archives, the Alaska Polar and Periodical Index, and Goldmine in order to find oral histories and historical films.

Digitizing the Minutes of the Constitutional Convention

Friday, September 23, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Terrence Cole and Leighton Quarles

Abstract pending.

Ships of Alaska I

Friday, September 23, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Bruce Merrell, “Wally’s Wicky: The Jones Act, Wally Hickel, and the Stop-gap Ferry Wickersham”

In the mid-1960s, the new state-owned ferry system was so popular that many travelers found themselves stranded during the height of the busy summer season. A new ferry was on order but wouldn't be ready for years, so Governor Walter Hickel arranged for the purchase of a luxurious, almost-new ferry that was built in Norway. But there was a problem: the 1920 Jones Act prohibits carrying goods and passengers in foreign-built vessels between U.S. ports. Illustrated presentation by a former crew member will include details about the acquisition, operation, and disposition of the Panamanian-flagged M/V Wickersham, as well as attempts by Alaska's congressional delegation to get a waiver to the Jones Act, and personal memories of working aboard the "Wicky."

Ross Coen, “Breaking Ice for Arctic Oil: The Historic Voyage of the SS Manhattan Through the Northwest Passage”

Upon discovery of the Prudhoe Bay oil field in 1968, the oil industry explored several different transportation methods for shipping the crude to market. Humble Oil (now Exxon)

commissioned the SS *Manhattan*, an icebreaking tanker and the largest merchant ship in the U.S. fleet, to traverse the Northwest Passage in order to test the logistic and economic feasibility of an all-marine transportation system. Proposed as an alternative to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the *Manhattan* made two voyages to the North American Arctic and collected volumes of scientific data on ice conditions and the behavior of ships in ice. Although the *Manhattan* successfully transited the Northwest Passage—in the process closing a 500-year chapter of Arctic exploration by becoming the first commercial vessel to do so—the expedition demonstrated the impracticality of moving crude oil by icebreaking ships. Humble Oil cancelled the project in 1970. Today the *Manhattan* provides an important historical reference point for marine traffic and resource development in the Arctic.

Ryan Jones, “The Russian-Finnish Whaling Company and the History of Alaskan Waters”

Though the Russian-Finnish Whaling Company (RFWC, 1850 – 1860) is little known to historians of Alaska, it played an important role in the history of Alaskan waters. The RFWC represented the Russian American Company’s (RAC) most ambitious attempt to establish a commercial whaling industry in Alaskan waters, at nearly the same time American whalers were entering the region. The RFWC also represented a major change in RAC policy towards the development of its Alaska colony, attempting, after many decades of reliance on indigenous whalers and their technology, to introduce European methods of catching the mammals. The company failed, just as all other Russian attempts to establish a whaling industry in Alaska did. However, the RFWC left an important legacy for the history of Alaska, helping to usher in a new era of intensive whaling in Alaskan waters and contributing to the growing Finnish influence during the last decades of the Russian colony’s existence. In addition, several of the Finnish employees’ journals and letters, available in the Finnish archives, give a unique, non-Russian perspective on social and environmental conditions in Alaska during the 1850s.

“Alaska’s Real Women!” Writers Workshop

Saturday, September 24, 9:45-11:45 a.m.

Michelle Dent

Join New York University Professor Michelle Dent for a 90-minute writing workshop where you can try out some of your new ideas about this year’s conference theme *Northern Waters*. Writers of all levels are encouraged to attend. Through a series of guided prompts, workshop participants will be encouraged to write about topics related to this year’s conference theme. They will also have the opportunity to explore new approaches to longstanding research topics, and/or they may even find themselves delving into family history and memoir. Want to experience the surprising new insights that will occur to you by participating in this impromptu writers group? The workshop will be an excellent opportunity to play around with prose, to experiment with evidence and ideas, and to risk sharing new writing with new and familiar peers and colleagues. Historians, storytellers and artists from a wide range of traditions, including oral history, poetry, textile arts, and the visual arts, are welcome. Museum professionals with an interest hosting similar workshops at their home institutions are also encouraged to attend.

Ships of Alaska II

Saturday, September 24, 9:45-11:45 a.m.

Daniel Monteith, “The Enduring Tlingit and Haida Canoes”

The Tlingit and Haida Canoe of Southeast Alaska were made out of a variety of woods and were built in a variety of styles. The style of each type of canoe was well suited to the types of seas and the purpose of the vessel. The tools that used were basic but the craftsmanship and efficiency of the builders was remarkable. In recent years there has been a revival in the making of these dug out hand-made canoes for ceremonies and the promotion of physical fitness. These issues will be examined in the essay.

Rebecca Poulson, “Sitka Boatbuilding”

The story of boat building in Sitka informs the picture of Sitka’s society and ethnic diversity; the fishing industry; and the role of Sitka’s Native people in the region’s economy in the first half of the 20th century. Boatbuilding in Sitka was mainly by Alaska Native fishermen. Builders made boats for themselves and others, not just to save money but because they wanted to – for the challenge and pride in craftsmanship. Few had any formal training, and their work and ingenuity is impressive. A handful of European immigrants also built and repaired boats, often for fishermen of their own ethnic group. Prominent boat builders in Sitka included Peter Simpson, a founder of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, and Andrew Hope, a Territorial then State legislator and leader in the fight for land claims. In addition, the color - bootlegging, tragedy and good times, characters and incidents - adds to our picture of pre-1960 Sitka.

J. Penelope Goforth, “History by Sea: the Ships that Made Alaska”

Before vehicles drove the ALCAN, before airplanes landed at the Ted Stevens International Airport, and before communications went wireless on the Internet, only the ships that sailed the seas connected Alaskans with the Outside. Alaska’s history resides in the stories of the vessels that moved people and goods from the rain forested Southeast through the North Pacific tidelands and into the Bering and Beaufort Seas. Cultural exchanges, commercial activities, political events, modern infra-structure building—from laying cable to mapping the undersea continental shelf—depended on fleets of staunch freighters and liners that brought the settlers, entrepreneurs, judges, and scientists to Alaska. They sailed the dreaded waters of the North Pacific extending the frontiers of geographic knowledge and empire; arriving to extract the riches: salmon, furs, gold, copper, and timber. They departed laden with cargo bound for world markets. In their wake arose the foundations of society and economy that is the modern state of Alaska. Histories of Alaska abound from the personal memoir and biographies of the great filling the Alaskan shelves with the ‘what’ of Alaska: gold rushes, Native moieties, railroads, mega-industries like mining and fishing, the Russians, statehood, etc. The chronicles of these vessels—whose voyages of discovery, transport and labors recast cultures and fortunes—portray the ‘how’ of Alaska.

This presentation is an overview of selected ships of the line in this varied historical fleet of vessels beginning with the organic bidarka and canoe from the seafaring Unangan peoples of the Aleutian Islands and the Tlingit of Southeast. The voyages of exploration by European-built caravels and colliers and Russian shitiks give way to the harvest activities of the barkentines, schooners, and Downeasters followed by the windjammers, tugs, power scows, and dories of the salmon pack. Signaling a new era, military ships of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, Navy, and Coast & Geodetic Survey explorations narrate the ‘Americanization’ of the territory. From

clinker-built to the modular steel-hulled Liberties the maritime saga concludes with a trumper that spilled the beans and the tanker that hit a reef. They all changed Alaska forever.

Richard Fineberg, “The Birth of Greenpeace: A Forty-Year Retrospective”

In 1971, Vancouver, B.C. residents dispatched a dozen men across the North Pacific on an old, wooden fishing vessel to protest the largest U.S. nuclear test in U.S. history at Alaska’s Amchitka Island. The boat never got there. Nevertheless, the media techniques employed on that failed, strife-filled voyage set the mold for direct environmental action and launched what became, over the next decade, the world’s largest environmental organization: Greenpeace. Eleven of the twelve original crew members lived in British Columbia. Although I take no credit for inception of the maiden voyage or the remarkable subsequent exploits that built Greenpeace, I witnessed history first-hand as an Alaskan and the lone U.S. resident on the first protest. Writing about Greenpeace became a cottage industry, but key questions have yet to be fully answered: How has this organization maintained relevance in a rapidly changing world, despite widely-reported internal controversies? What lessons can be learned from the unique Greenpeace interface with media? Did members of the maiden voyage realize they were making history? Reviewing literature from a first-hand perspective, I tackle these questions.