

A look back in time at Wrangell Museum

Story and Photos
By HARRY GAMBLE
Log Staff Writer

A one-legged fisherman totem pole, a 1902 Kodak camera, an old wolf hide, a 13-star American flag and a series of photos of a 1906 Wrangell fire are just a few of the items that take the modern-day sight-seer back for a glimpse of history at Wrangell Museum.

Housed in what was once the town's only school building, the museum ranks as one of Alaska's best for variety of contents.

Lempi Fykerude directs the museum's operation, and, she says, "We take everything and we get everything."

One day, Mrs. Fykerude, who recently turned 75, found an old ring-shaped life preserver on the doorstep of her home. It was abandoned somewhat like an unwanted child. The life preserver is so ragged that the lettering printed on it, and describing the boat to which it once belonged, is weathered beyond recognition.

But, no matter, the preserver still found a final home in the Wrangell Museum.

Another donation is a picture of President Harding, taken when he visited Wrangell in 1923. The original hand bell that once signaled the town's children to the classroom rests in the museum also. And there are a lot of old pictures of Indian leaders in the Wrangell area.

Historical society runs museum

The museum is run and maintained by public donations and the Wrangell Historical Society. The city government pays for light and heat used in the building.

Ken Gilbertson is the society's president, and Irene Ingle, the town's librarian, is vice-president.

Contents of the museum include an old stereoscope, old pictures of Wrangell in its infancy, stone implements manufactured by Indians and totem poles that once stood near Chief Kadashan's house near Wrangell before the 1930s and now rest against a wall of the museum. Kadashan was a Tlingit chief of the area.

Propped against another wall is the one-legged fisherman totem pole that once protected the grave of another Indian, and close by is a 13-star American flag that an aged visitor from the lower 48 obtained from her grandmother and donated to the museum.

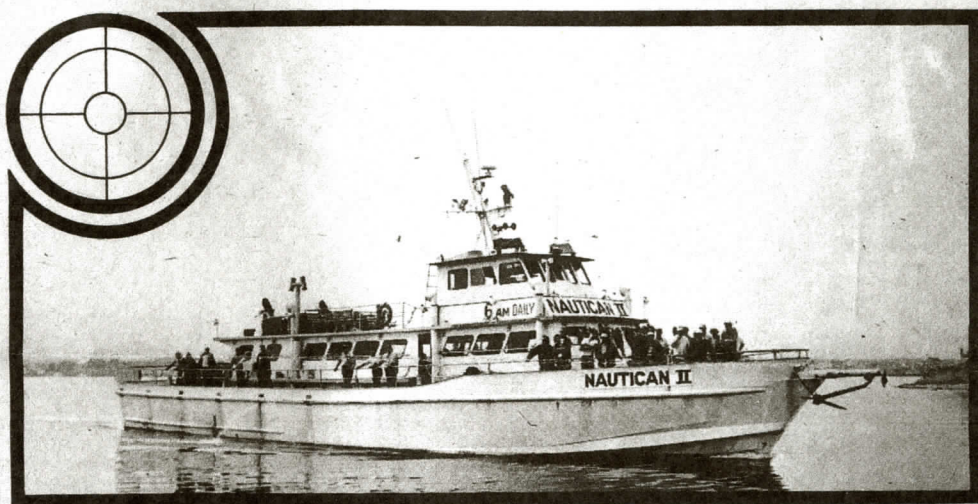
Many museum pieces reflect Wrangell history. Against the far wall in the main room hangs a huge picture of the three-story Wrangell Hotel that was leveled by fire in 1952. On display is a series of photos of the Wrangell sawmill fire as it burned in 1918 during World War I.

Then, there is an old Spanish pack saddle, antique weapons of various sorts, tools that the cheechakos brought with them to the gold mines and a well-preserved Russian sword.

Cont. on next page



Built during the early part of the century, the Wrangell Museum was once the town's only school house.



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Captain Lou O'Donnell, owner of the Nautican II of Point Judith, Rhode Island, says: "I've been 26 years in this business and know what's good and what isn't. We've found Bonzer radar can do the job of other radars costing four times as much and some things that no other radar can do. □ We're working in congested waters where there's danger of collision with small boats, skiffs and the like, which pass close to your bow. Other radars would lose these small boats close in but Bonzer doesn't. It's ideal as a collision avoidance radar. It's great for navigation too. □ My ship, Nautican II, is a 106-ft. charter fishing boat capable of carrying 120 passengers. Expenses are high and any day we don't go out because of weather poses the loss of significant income. The fish like to bite in dirty weather so we like to make the trips. And on some days our earlier-purchased more expensive radar has failed us. Not Bonzer. On these days our Bonzer has meant the difference between going out on profitable trips or staying in tied to the dock. With Bonzer we fish every day, rain or shine. □ And installation on the Bonzer was so simple I did it myself from instructions sent with the equipment. That was about a year ago now. It took me half an hour to rig it up and it's been working perfectly ever since."



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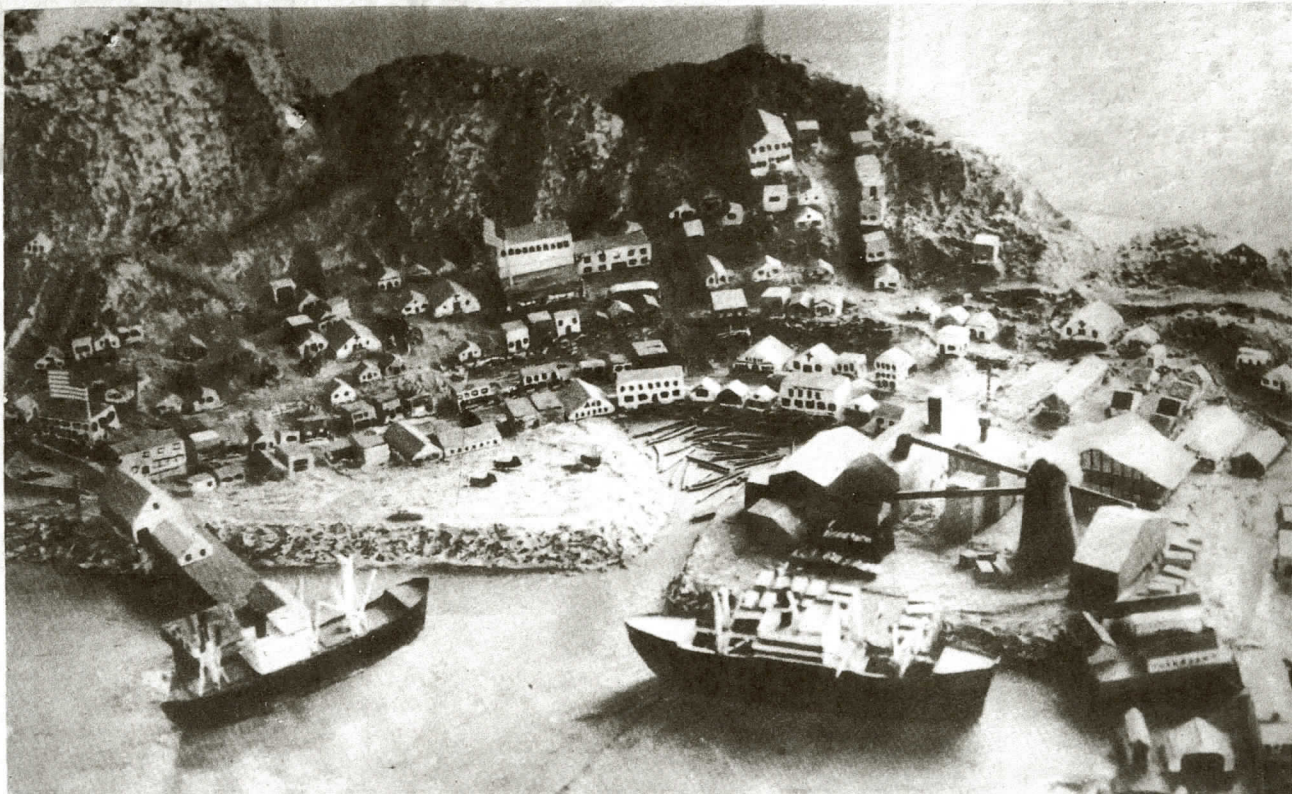
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A scale reproduction of Wrangell was sent to Fairbanks for the Alaska Centennial celebration for exhibit in 1967. Now the piece of art is housed in the Wrangell Museum.



Most of those who visit the museum come during the summer. Many are from tour boats that scoot through the Inside Passage, grabbing peek-a-boo winks of Alaskan life.

Lempi Fykerude directs the museum's operation, and she says, "We take everything and we get everything." Mrs. Fykerude recently turned 75 years old.

Wrangell Museum. . .

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Museum opens seven years ago

The museum first opened in 1967 as Wrangell's Alaska centennial project. It has been a success ever since, Mrs. Fykerude reports.

Over 5,000 people toured the museum last year and that is an amount about double Wrangell's population.

Most of the museum's crowd is attracted during the summer from the many tour boats that scoot through the Inside Passage, grabbing peek-a-boo glimpses of Alaskan life.

According to the guest register, they come from all over, Japan, Australia, Iceland and, of course, the Lower 48.

Other items include a flawless, red shirt worn by Wrangell firemen in the days when the fire truck was a horse-drawn cart, a yellowed, undated catalog from the Schwabacher Hardware Co., and seats made of rope and wood that were used by pioneer commercial fishermen.

And on the wall is an enormous wooden propeller left by one of four airplanes that stopped in Wrangell on Aug. 14, 1920, on a famous New York to Nome flight.

Then, there is a Russian cloth that once draped an altar in old Fort Wrangell when the Russians controlled the city.

On display is a pack sack used by the driver of a dog sled team, old Eskimo dolls and bottles of every shape, from Mason jars to medicine bottles to opium bottles from the East.

In a small room to one side, stand old printing presses, a linotype machine and typewriters that newsmen once used to publish the Wrangell Sentinel.

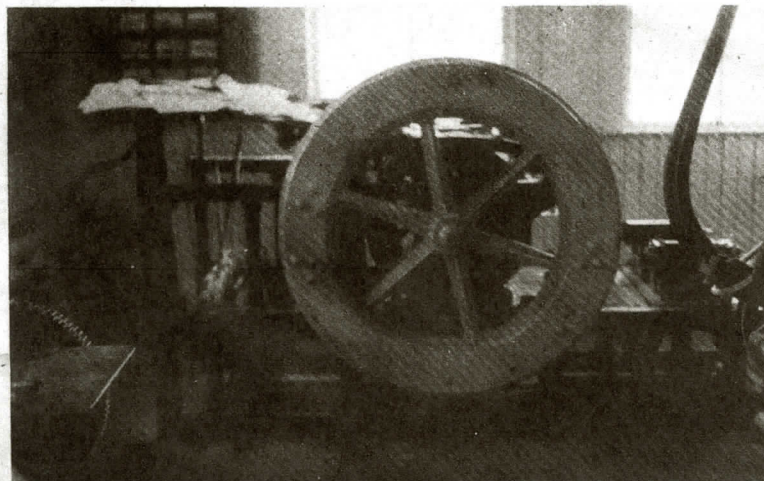
Then, there is an antique movie projector and a rock collection with a wide assortment, from huge garnets obtained on the Stikine River several miles from Wrangell, galena from Kansas to copper nuggets dug up in Alaska.

Museum opens for ships

The museum is staffed by a half-dozen hostesses who tell visitors much about the displays. Hours are Monday, 7-9 p.m., and Tuesday through Saturday, 2-4 p.m. And the museum opens whenever tour ship passengers are in town and for most Alaska Marine Highway ferries.

One display a visitor almost always sees at the museum and photographs before leaving is a scale model of the city of Wrangell.

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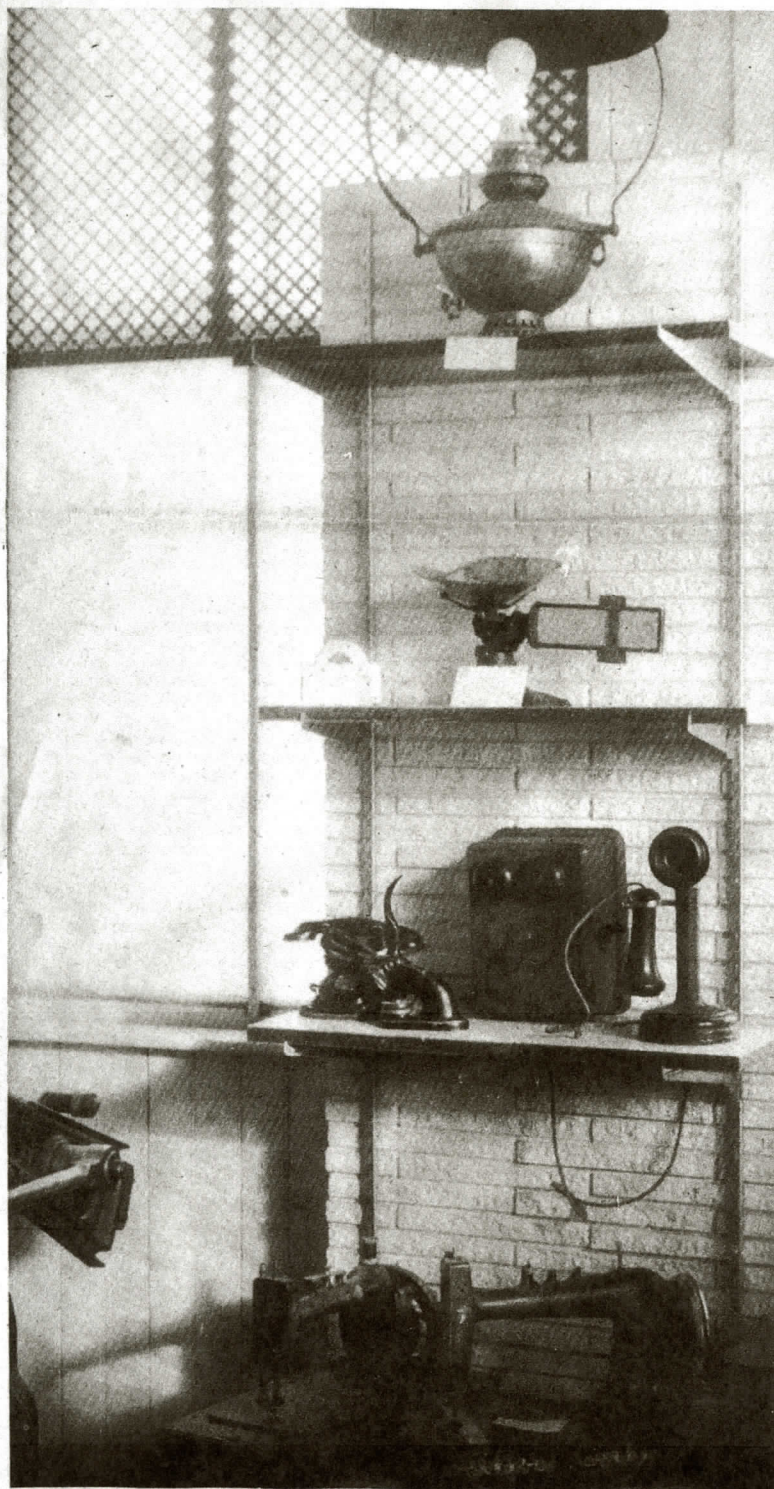


In one corner of the museum stands this old Campbell press, built in 1866. It was used by the Alaska Miner, a now defunct Ketchikan paper, and later sold to the Wrangell Sentinel in 1914.

It was run by a pelton water wheel until 1931 when its owner installed an electric motor. The press was retired in 1965 after 99 years of use.



Visitors browse at the Wrangell Museum. About 5,000 toured the museum in 1973.



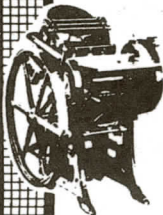
Artifacts of many varieties can be seen at the

Wrangell Museum, which about 5,000 visitors attended in 1973.

The museum opens whenever tour ship passengers are in town and for most Alaska Marine Highway ferries.

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