



March 2022 Newsletter

Kenai Historical Society

P.O. Box 1348  
Kenai, Alaska 99611

Officers:

President—June Harris  
Vice President—Virginia Walters  
Secretary—Sharon Fisher  
Treasurer—Ron Fullinck

Board of Directors:

Jim Glendenning	Joe Harris
Henry Knackstedt	Bill Nelson
Marion Nickelson	Frosty Walters

## Preserving History

When I first met Jetret “Jettie” Ione Petersen, it was because of a small story in the Peninsula Clarion about a book on the history of Kenai that was being written through the Kenai Historical Society. Mrs. Peterson was the contact person for the proposed book. I was new to the area and thought this would be a good way to learn more about my new home. I called, she invited me over, and encourage me to get involved. Soon I was talking to folks about the potential of the book, encouraging people to contribute stories, re-writing some of these stories, typing up recorded stories, and conducting interviews to assist people in telling their stories of experiences in the Central Peninsula area. Since they had all been here far longer than I, it truly was an education in the history of my “new home”. From the phone call I had made to Jettie, until the publication of the book, she encouraged, gently prodded, and kept myself and all the other volunteers moving forward. With the very able contribution of Mary Ford, *Once Upon the Kenai* was published after about two years of work. We got our books, attended a signing party in the gym of the last Territorial School, and took the finished product home to read. That was my first realization and the importance and the scope of our efforts. We’d never have gotten there without the continued energies of Jettie and Mary. Thanks to Jettie, I’m still interested in learning more about Kenai—35 years after I met her.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- PRESERVING HISTORY
- JETRET IONE PETERSEN—  
A Force of Nature
- ANNOUNCEMENTS

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#### KENAI HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Written by Sharon Fisher

If you would like to contribute ideas and information to the newsletter, please contact me at 776-8254. I welcome and would entertain any ideas you may have for articles, and would appreciate being contacted if you see errors in the information contained in the newsletter.

## THE ALASKA LEGISLATURE



*In Memoriam*

### \*JETRET "JETTIE" PETERSEN\*

The Seventeenth Alaska State Legislature joins with the family and friends of Jetret "Jettie" Petersen in honoring her life and accomplishments.

Born March 24, 1895, in Redmond, Washington, Jettie first came to Alaska in 1915. She began her teaching career in Seldovia in 1918 with a class of more than 50 students in the first through ninth grades. She met her future husband, Allan Petersen, while teaching here.

They were married in 1920. Two years later they tried fox farming, first on an island in Kachemak Bay and then in Kasilof where their son, James, was born. The Petersen family returned to Seldovia; where daughter Peggy was born.

The Petersens moved to Unga in 1934, where Jettie continued her teaching career for 13 years. Allen was Deputy US Marshal and in 1946 transferred to Kenai and later served in the First Alaska State Legislature. Mrs. Peterson taught in Kenai until her retirement in 1951.

Jetret was very active in her community, wherever she lived. She helped establish libraries in Seldovia, Unga and Kenai and was active in the start up of Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts. She was one of the organizers and first president of the State Retired Teachers Association. She belonged to the American Association of Retired Persons, Pioneers of Alaska, Veterans Auxiliary, Navy Mothers, Homemakers Club, Federated Women's Club, Eastern Star and the Kenai Chamber of Commerce.

Her endeavors have been recognized with a number of citations from Governor Sheffield, Mayor John Steinbeck, and the Kenai Chamber of Commerce, among others. She also received the "Woman of the Year" award from the Business and Professional Women and is on the list of "Outstanding Civic Leaders of America" and "Who's Who of American Women."

She was also instrumental in the development of "Once Upon The Kenai", a collection of first-person stories published by the Kenai Historical Society. Jettie passed away at the Anchorage Pioneers Home just 10 days before her 97th birthday.

The members of the Seventeenth Alaska Legislature extend their condolences to her daughter and son-in-law, Peggy and Jim Arness; grandsons, Jim Arness and Joe Arness, and their families.

*The document was signed on April 6, 1992 and signed by the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.*

*Mrs. Allan L. Petersen*

UNGA, ALASKA

RECORD OF TEACHING POSITIONS as listed on TEACHERS' RETIREMENT APPLICATION

1917-1918	Tolt Grade School-Carnation West	2nd Grade	9 months
1918-1919	Seldovia Terr.—Seldovia, Aaa	All Grades (Prin)	9
1919-1920	“ “ “	Primary (1-4)	9
1920-1921	“ “ “	Primary (1-4)	9
1921-1922	“ “ “	Primary (1-4)	9
1929-1930	“ “ “	Int (4-6) (Prin)	9
1930-1931	“ “ “	Int (4-6) (Prin)	9
1931-1932	“ “ “	Primary (1-2)	9
1932-1933	“ “ “	Primary (1-2)	9
1935-1936	Unga “ Unga, Alaska	Primary	7
1936-1937	“ “ “	Primary + Music	9
1937-1938	“ “ “	Primary + Music	9
1938-1939	“ “ “	Primary + Music	9
1939-1940	“ “ “	Primary + Music	9
1940-1941	“ “ “	Primary + Music	9
1941-1942	“ “ “	—————	9
1942-1943	“ “ “	Upper Grades (Prin)	9
1943-1944	“ “ “	Upper Grades (Prin)	9
1944-1945	“ “ “	Primary + Music	9
1945-1946	“ “ “	Primary + Music	9
1946-1947	“ “ “	Primary (1,2,3)	9
1947-1848	Kenai	Primary	
1948-1949	“	Primary (1,2) music	9
1949-1950	“	Primary (1,2) music	9
1950-1951	“	Primary (1,2) music	9

Jettie taught in Kenai for 5 years—1947-1951.

Pictured here with the students in 1948. Jettie is at top right; daughter Peggy Arness is shown top left.



Jettie retired from teaching in 1951—shown here with husband Allan Petersen at her retirement party.



After retirement, Jettie continued to work as hard as ever, volunteering in numerous organizations and leading many of them. She received various awards over the years, including the Alaska Governor's Award for Volunteerism.

KENAI HISTORIC SOCIETY

Our Organization

There has been a Historic Society since the days before Kenai becoming a city. The Society was formed a few years before Statehood in 1959, and then went inactive in the early 60's. It restarted in the latter part of the 60's and has met regularly since. The Society had a museum in Fort Kenay for some years, and then continued to meet after that closed. The non-profit Society implemented and operates the Kenai Historic Cabins Park, open for tours in the summer months. We have office space at the Moosemeat John cabin, but are not open to the public in that building. Our member meetings are Sept., Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb., Mar., and April at the Kenai Visitor Center. For Oct. and May, we meet with the Kenai Peninsula Historical Association. Please check the Meetings and Announcements section on this page for date information.

MEETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Kenai Historical Society Monthly Meeting**

**April 4, 2022—1:30 p.m.**

**Kenai Visitor Center**

**Guests Pamela Christenson, Henry Knacksteadt,  
Ryan Tunseth sharing stories of their lives growing  
up in the local area.**

Kenai Historic Society  
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Kenai, AK 99611

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[www.facebook.com/Kenai-Historical-Society](http://www.facebook.com/Kenai-Historical-Society)

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February 2022 Newsletter

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## Preserving History

I've been interested for several years in compiling a timeline for the growth of schools on the Central Kenai Peninsula and am always on the lookout for information lending additional items to that enterprise. A committee was formed in November to visit with Peggy Arness and review and make copies of the very large collection of Kenai history that she and her mother (Jettie Peterson) compiled and saved. I was reviewing some of that collection and came across a handwritten timeline of Kenai history that included some information about the building of schools. Clark Fair is part of that committee and was listening when I talked about my interest. He recently sent me some really interesting information he had ferreted out that adds to and/or corroborates the Society files on the early schools in Kenai. While adding that information from Clark, I realized I had some interesting photos and documentation (using the term loosely) that would be worth putting together for the newsletter. I continue to be grateful to people like Peggy, Jettie, Elsie Seaman, and others who wrote down what they remembered of those earlier days, because now there is no one alive who knew some of that. I really wish others would work on saving the history of some of the entities that were part of the growth of Kenai. It starts with writing down what you know and remember, and then adding information as you find it. Can you help?

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- PRESERVING HISTORY
- THE EARLIEST KENAI SCHOOLS—What We Know About The 1900s's to 1950's
- ANNOUNCEMENTS

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## THE EARLIEST KENAI SCHOOLS

### Russian School

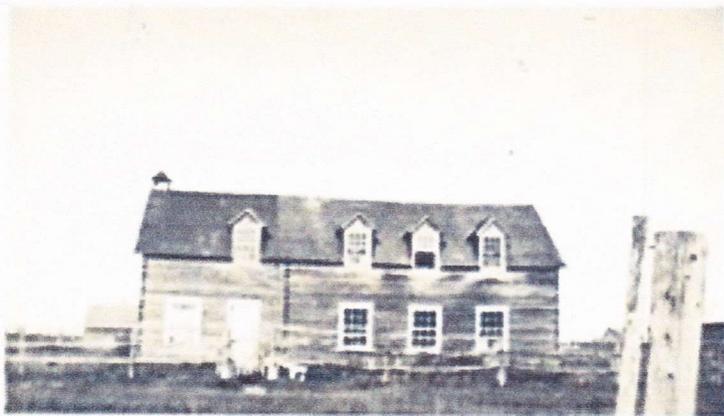
It is not known when the “Russian School” was built, but very likely it was some time prior to 1900. The location was somewhere next to the Parish House, which is located across the street from the Russian Church and next door to the Fort Kenay (built in 1967 in honor of Alaska’s centennial celebration. The following information comes from an newspaper article about the return of the Russian Schoolhouse Bell, written by Mary Ford:

“The bell to the old Kenai Russian schoolhouse has come home. Not home to the hand-hewn square-log school built in the late 1890s—that building is gone. But home to the structure that took its place on the same ground—Fort Kenay”

“Paul Shadura, a resident here since 1907 and son of the Very Rev. Paul Shadura who was priest and teacher...identified the (*long time missing*) bell (*being returned to Kenai*) as one of three which had been used at various times at the school where he attended as a boy. Shadura said the bell had been mounted on the school roof but was later dismantled and stored in the attic.”

“The School was abandoned in the 1920s but Shadura said he used to check on articles in the attic from time to time. He said the bell was still there in 1951 when he checked on it the last time (*he left Kenai for about six years*). Upon his return he found the building severely vandalized and the bell and other items missing.”

“The school was built before 1900 next to the parish house. Workers used no nails and, it is said, utilized some of the logs from the original Russian Orthodox church. By the turn of the century it was the most important of five schools in the extensive Kenai Parish. Eighteen children were attending in 1900. The Priest taught English, Russian and Slavonic (the church language); arithmetic, music and other subjects. The native language was not allowed in the classroom. An American school was built in about 1907 and the Russian School was abandoned... The old school stood vacant until 1960 when it was torn down.”



*Comment from Editor: Note the bell tower on the left side of the roof. I do not know where the bell is now located but several of the desks and bench seats from the Russian School do still exist.*

*This photo was taken by Joe Consiel (“Kenai Joe”) and used by the Cheechako News and eventually donated the Kenai Historical Society.*