

Alaska Historical Society



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Alaska Historic Canneries Initiative Launched at Cordova Conference

Recognizing the role of the seafood industry in Alaska's history, the Alaska Historical Society announced the Alaska Historic Canneries Initiative to document, preserve, and celebrate the history of Alaska's commercial fish processing plants. The announcement was made at the Society's recent annual conference in the historic fishing community of Cordova.

"Hundreds of canneries and fish processing plants dotted Alaska's coast, serving as economic engines and social hubs for communities around our state," said Anjuli Grantham of Kodiak, chair of the initiative. "Today our commercial fishing industry continues to thrive, but changes in the industry mean that many of these historic places are at risk of disappearing before their stories are recorded. The seafood industry is critical to the livelihoods of many Alaskans and it is central to the state's identity. It is important to document and preserve these places, and record the stories of the fishermen and processors who define coastal Alaska."

The initiative began as a grassroots effort among historians, with a panel focused on Alaska fisheries at last year's AHS conference. In formalizing the initiative, the AHS's goal is to establish an ongoing program of research into fisheries history, including a grant program to assist students and others research local salmon canneries, herring reduction plants, floating processors, cold storage facilities, cod salteries, and other commercial seafood processing plants.

"This initiative relies on the knowledge and passion of local individuals to be successful," Grantham said. "It can be as simple as donating photos of Alaska canneries to a local historical society or organizing a storytelling event among fishermen and cannery workers. Ultimately, we hope to develop a preservation plan for a cannery. Regardless of the size of the project, all these fit within the initiative's goal to document these places that matter to so many Alaskans."

Alaska Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott recognized the importance of preserving this heritage. He was born and raised in Yakutat where he fished and worked in the local cannery. "Yakutat's history with seafood is typical of an industry and resource that serves to define Alaska today," Mallott said. "It is a history, a present and a future that must be preserved, understood and made available to our children so they understand the balance between the

use of Alaska's rich ocean resources and the care that must be taken to assure their continual existence."

AHS thanks the partners and sponsors who have already demonstrated their commitment to the Alaska Historic Canneries Initiative: the Alaska Historical Commission, the Alaska Sea Grant program, and the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute. The initiative is seeking additional project sponsors and donors to expand the program. For more information about marketing benefits for business sponsors, see <http://alaskahistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/sponsorship-benefits.pdf>.

More information about the Alaska Historic Canneries Initiative is available at: <http://alaskahistoricalsociety.org/about-ahs/alaska-historic-canneries-initiative/>, which includes a link to the Initiative's recently released *Alaska Fisheries: A Guide to History Resources*, an annotated bibliography compiled by Bob King of over 500 books, articles, and other publications on the history of Alaska's fisheries.