



A Slice of Early Seward

How Archeology Provides a Glimpse
into Daily Life in this Frontier Town





Seward's early settlers enjoy an outing at Spring Park in Seward, 1907. Photo by W.A. McPherson: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 2020.1.45.



Block 10, circa 1915. Photo by F.W. Sheelor: Seward Community Library Association, cropped from 1915 panorama.



A Slice of Early Seward

How Archeology Provides a Glimpse into Daily Life in this Frontier Town

Primary author: Dan Trepal

Text editors: Jeremy Karchut
Sharon Kim
Shannon Kovac

Design and layout: Amy Ireland

The material is based upon work conducted by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Interior.



Acknowledgements

The National Park Service would like to thank all who made possible the production of this booklet. Special thanks go out to the Seward Community Library Association and Resurrection Bay Historical Society, who graciously permitted the use of their historic photographs to illustrate much of this work.



A selection of medicine and food bottles recovered from the privies. NPS Photo.

Table of Contents

Introduction: The Block 10 Privy Project	8
Prologue: Resurrection Bay Before Seward	12
The Birth of a Modern Alaskan Town, 1903-1915	16
Archeology and the Block 10 Privies	28
The National Historic Preservation Act	38
Visualizing Seward's History through Material Culture	42
Conclusion	50
Bibliography	52





T.W. Hawkins, at far left, and Mr. and Mrs. Anton Eide, at far right, prepare for a little gardening, circa 1910. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 2010.1.7.



The Hotel McNeiley on 4th Avenue was one of the first buildings in Seward. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Hale Collection.



People, cargo, horses and wagons filled Seward's 4th Avenue dock when ships were in port, April 13, 1906. Photo by Case and Evans: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Hale Collection.

*Introduction:
The Block 10
Privy Project*



*Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Winter
Collection, crop of original.*



Introduction: The Block 10 Privy Project



View of Seward in 1905. Photo by Evans and Anderson: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Hale Collection.

In 1905, Seward was a town rapidly progressing forward. Having been founded just two years earlier, the town had carved out an urban landscape in the Alaskan wilderness. A long wooden pier jutted out into Resurrection Bay to receive steamships arriving with passengers, goods and materials for the new railroad that had begun to snake northwards towards the Tanana River, over 400 miles away. The pier landed new arrivals on Fourth Avenue, Seward's commercial center, where many comforts of the day could be found and

where little houses had begun to spring up along the adjacent avenues and roads in the town site. The town buzzed with expansion and expectation of a bigger, brighter future.

Amidst this hubbub, some of the more ordinary aspects of daily life likely passed largely unnoticed. Residents of early Seward did not have indoor plumbing for years, and almost every property was equipped with an outhouse or privy. Early Seward residents used outhouses not only as receptacles for human

waste, but also as trash dumps. In those early days, there were no designated landfills or trash services. Garbage was often deposited in Resurrection Bay and the glacial creek that ran along Jefferson Avenue on the northern boundary of town. Outhouses provided a convenient option for disposing of small amounts of unwanted litter.

More than a century later, these outhouses can provide important details about residential life in early Seward. Often the general public of the twenty-first century does not realize the potential for outhouses to be storehouses of information about the past. To the archeologist however, they are as full of history as an old diary, census records or newspaper archives.

In 2001, the National Park Service bought several parcels of land in downtown Seward as part of a planned expansion of the park's headquarters. One of the parcels was Block 10, sitting on the east side of Third Avenue, adjacent to the main commercial district on Fourth Avenue. This unassuming group of town lots held two outbuildings, but hidden just under the surface were the remains of three outhouses (dating from about 1905 to 1920) that stored

a variety of historical artifacts with the potential to shed light on Seward's early years.



The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 is a federal law that seeks to recognize and protect historically significant properties (see NHPA sidebar page 38). This law required the National Park Service to evaluate the historical significance of the Block 10 properties before

Block 10 sits in the southwest corner of downtown Seward, just west of the main business district. Image courtesy of Google Maps.

undertaking any development, which led to the discovery and archeological excavation of the outhouse remains. The value of the information gained goes far beyond simply satisfying laws, however. It is an opportunity to literally dig into Seward's past and establish a physical connection with the town as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century, and to share that connection with anyone who wants to experience it.





6-17-12 R.S. Field & Park

In 1902 surveyors and work parties began arriving at the future townsite of Seward. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 30.1.6.



6-4 Mrs. Mary Lowell and family

Mary Lowell and family on the Lowell home site at the head of Resurrection Bay, 1902. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 20.1.2.



Head of Resurrection Bay.

6-11 Head of Resurrection Bay Almouth Sound, 1902. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 20.1.4.

*Prologue:
Resurrection Bay
Before Seward*



NPS Photo.



Prologue: Resurrection Bay Before Seward

Seward is a natural spot for humans to settle. Nestled at the head of a rugged fjord the town site sits on the forested alluvial fan of Lowell Creek which slopes gently down to Resurrection Bay. The creek provides ample fresh water, and the bay provides easy access to the productive Gulf of Alaska. Oral traditions and archeology document that Native peoples have made use of this favorable location for thousands of years. Historians have pieced together other patterns of use by examining the journals, reports and artwork of early explorers and visitors. Census records, newspaper articles and photographs also help to fill in the story of Resurrection Bay.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, Imperial Russia made

efforts at colonization in the form of trade posts and forts in Alaska. Under Grigorii Shelikhov, Aleksandr Baranov established a fort and ship building site in Voskresenskaia "Resurrection" Harbor at the head of Resurrection Bay in 1793. A rectangular stockade was erected that enclosed workshops, storage sheds, living quarters and a kitchen. Quarters for Native workers were constructed outside the stockade. As far as the historical records are concerned, just one ship, a wooden frigate named the Phoenix, was built and launched there in August of 1794. This 73-foot, three-masted ship was built almost entirely of local materials and sailed between Russia and Russia's Alaskan outposts for several years before being lost at sea near Kodiak Island in 1799.

In 1794 the Russian vessel, Phoenix, was launched in Resurrection Bay. British shipwright, James Shields, recorded the event in the drawing at right. Russian State Military History Archives, Moscow, Call Number: VUA collection, ledger 1, No. 18077 (f. VUA, op. 1, No. 18077).



The Russians occupied Voskresenskaia for a number of years, but by the 1820 census only one Russian resident and one small building remained. A total of 295 Natives were recorded as being under the jurisdiction of this department at that time. By 1851 a visitor to the site noted

seeing the ruins of the Russian fortifications at "Voskressensk Bay." Russia's interest in the area had ended, but this lull in colonial activity was merely an interlude between Russian and American colonial activities.

Though the United States government purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, significant settlement of the new territory did not take place until the gold booms of the 1890s. Some prospecting took place before the stampede to the Yukon in 1898, and the first recorded American presence in Seward came in the form of an independent seafaring trader named Frank Lowell. Lowell, a New Englander who was employed by the Alaska Commercial Company's English Bay station, settled in Resurrection Bay in 1884. Lowell and his wife Mary, a woman of Russian and Native ancestry, raised their family near the site of the old Russian fort. Mary Lowell eventually bore Frank nine children and the family



The Lowell family cabin, one of a number of structures on the Lowell homestead at the head of Resurrection Bay. Photo by W.A. McPherson: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 21.1.4.

made a living through a diverse blend of gardening, fox farming and gold prospecting among other things. The family also provided a connection between the early gold fields in Turnagain Arm, forwarding mail from steamships calling in Resurrection Bay.

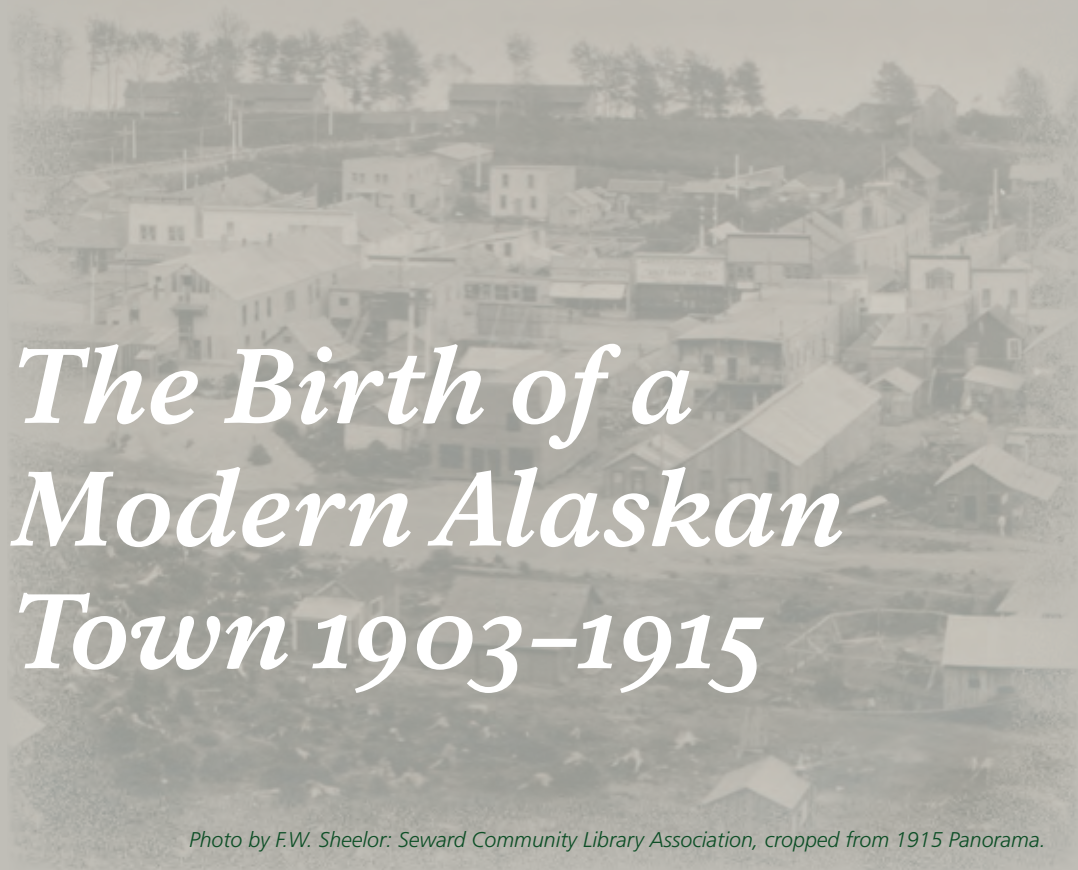
In 1893, Frank Lowell abandoned his wife and family for a new life in Kodiak. Mary Lowell, displaying the toughness often ascribed to both halves of her ancestry, stayed on with her family and filed for homestead rights in 1903. When Seward's planners arrived to build the town, they negotiated with Mary Lowell and her adult children for the land they needed, and the modern town rose on the site of the old Voskresenskaia fort, and around the cabin Mary had been living in for over twenty years.



Alaska Central Railway construction train heads north along the Seward waterfront, circa 1905. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Winter Collection.



Brown and Hawkins, a general merchandise store on 4th Avenue, was founded by one of Seward's 1903 pioneers, H.W. Hawkins. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Winter Collection.



*The Birth of a
Modern Alaskan
Town 1903–1915*

Photo by F.W. Sheelor: Seward Community Library Association, cropped from 1915 Panorama.



The Birth of a Modern Alaskan Town, 1903–1915

Ballaine's Vision

The story of modern Seward begins in the Yukon. The United States government purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, yet years passed before Alaska began to attract serious public interest. As is often the case, the key motivator was the discovery of valuable natural resources. Alaska has an abundance of natural resources, but it was gold that rapidly drew thousands northwards in the late 1890s. By the turn of the century, the nation had come to recognize Alaska as a place where fortunes could be made.

It soon became obvious that this boom could be sustained for some time, and

interest rose in building ports, railways and other infrastructure to support and expand the rapid economic development of the territory. Seattle became a key player in the development of Alaska for obvious geographic reasons. As the nearest major American port city, it served as a logical source for supplies and as a base for organizing many Alaskan business interests.

The early participants in the gold boom struggled with rudimentary (or nonexistent) infrastructure; everything had to be carried, dragged or packed to the gold fields by hand, on animals or in small boats. Transportation was slow, dangerous and expensive, and the

Dog teams often delivered mail and supplies in severe weather or over trails impassible by other means. A team about to leave downtown Seward, winter 1910. Photo by Sylvia Sexton: Seward Community Library Association, Sylvia Sexton Collection, 1-1385.





The arrival of a ship was often a major town event as Seward relied on regular deliveries of goods. Photo by Sylvia Sexton: Seward Community Library Association, Sylvia Sexton Collection, 1-1604.

development of a railroad serving the Alaskan interior was desperately needed. Moreover, early surveyors and adventurers had recorded more than just gold in Alaska - large deposits of copper and coal were also being explored. Mining all of these resources required railroad access. The desire for a railroad answered a political need as well since the Canadian authorities taxed supplies passing through their territory on the way to the Yukon gold fields. An American railroad on American territory would provide a cheaper, more secure means of transportation to the Alaskan interior.

One group of Seattle businessmen saw the lack of a railroad as a golden opportunity and in March 1902 they incorporated as the Alaska Central Railway Company. The corporation

quickly drafted plans to build a port city on Alaska's southern coast and develop a railroad running north to the Tanana River from this port city. The founders named John Ballaine, a member of the Washington governor's staff, as first officer with his brother Frank as assistant. In 1902 John Ballaine selected the head of Resurrection Bay as the location of this port and started planning a town there. Mary Lowell, living on the best town location in the bay, sold her homestead for \$4,000 and 37 town lots to Frank Ballaine, who subsequently purchased an additional one hundred and sixty acres to form the original town site.

In choosing to name his new town after William H. Seward, the Secretary of State from 1861-1869, who had purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867



A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD

on behalf of the United States, John Ballaine sought a name worthy of a true Alaskan metropolis. Ballaine also made a defiant gesture towards the doubters who dubbed the Alaska purchase "Seward's Ice-box." Ballaine had a problem though – several other towns in the rapidly growing territory were already named Seward. Unfazed by this, Ballaine paid a visit to the White House and a personal endorsement by President Theodore Roosevelt resulted in Ballaine's town being officially recognized as the one and only Seward, Alaska.

*Ballaine and Winter families touring on a handcar.
Resurrection Bay
Historical Society,
Winter Collection.*



The gold booms of the 1890s brought tens of thousands of people north to Alaska, but Seward was no serendipitously formed boomtown. In August 1903, John Ballaine arrived in Resurrection Bay on the steamer Santa Ana with fifty-eight "pioneers" as well as twenty-five Alaska Central Railway employees and set about putting the Alaska Central Railway's plan into action. The plan called for a modern Progressive Era town, a port city that the founders hoped would eventually rival Seattle and serve as the hub of Alaskan commerce.

*Many of Seward's
earliest structures
were constructed
of logs and rough-
hewn lumber.
Resurrection Bay
Historical Society,
Winter Collection.*





Railroad building was the driving force behind the founding of Seward. The track started at the dock in Resurrection Bay where supplies were unloaded directly onto freight cars and eventually ran to Fairbanks. Photo by Sylvia Sexton: Seward Community Library Association, Sylvia Sexton Collection, 1-650.

For the next five years Seward grew at breakneck speed as people speculated on the success of Ballaine's privately funded railroad project. In 1904 a dock and over forty buildings rose out of the forest, streets were cut and leveled, and the town buzzed with activity. Railroad construction began on August 28, 1903 with the erection of the dock and wharf. On March 28, 1904 the grading work commenced. By April, the first standard-gauge locomotive ever brought to Alaska (affectionately known as "One Spot") arrived in Seward and the railroad truly began to take shape.

By Seward's third summer in 1905,

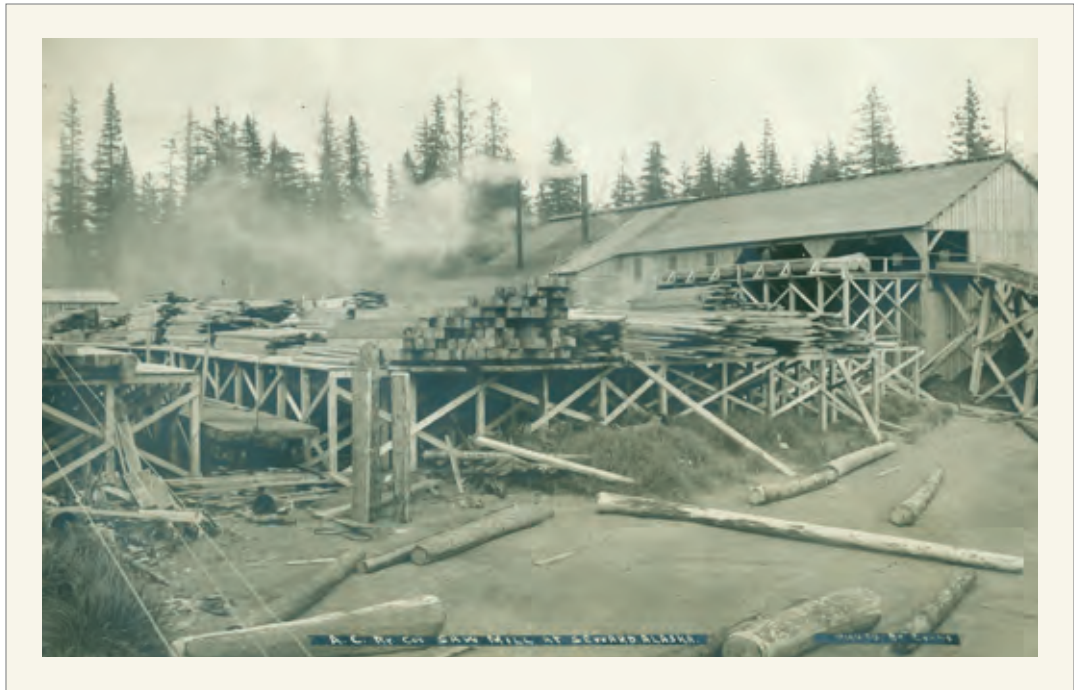
Ballaine had the town formally surveyed and divided into lots. The progress of the railroad had attracted a full range of businesses and services. Seward's newspaper, the Seward Gateway, was already in circulation, having been founded in 1904. The town boasted



Dr. John A. Baughman arrived in Seward in 1906 and served patients there for over twenty years – including some of the residents of Block 10. Baughman adopted the nickname, "The German Doctor", and had it embossed on his medicine bottles. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 601.1.1.



The Alaska Central Railway's lumber mill provided railroad ties and timbers to support the railroad's construction. Photo by Evans: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Winter Collection.



saloons, dry goods stores, a clothing store, a blacksmith, restaurants, baths, barbers, hotels, a post office, a bakery, a steam laundry, a dentist, and two doctors. Dr. John A. Baughman, affectionately known as “the old German Doctor,” was one of the latter. An Ohioan by birth but of German parentage, Baughman first arrived in Alaska amid the Klondike gold stampede in 1897. After practicing medicine in Skagway for a few years he moved to Seward with his wife, Mina, in January 1906 and set up a practice that was to last over twenty years. A keen hunter, Baughman also joined the Seward Gun Club in 1908 and eventually served as game warden in later years. Like many Seward residents, Baughman was both a town-dwelling professional and an avid outdoorsman.

While the Yukon gold rush in 1897 is often credited with sparking the settlement of Alaska, it was only the first of many stampedes that took place whenever a new mineral discovery was made. As early as 1898, trails began to snake north from the head of Resurrection Bay to various gold strikes. In 1908, the discovery of gold in Iditarod set off a small rush, and Seward residents were quick to advertise their town as the “gateway to the Iditarod” and promoted the trail beginning in Seward as the best route to the new gold strike. The trail system continued to serve as a conduit to interior Alaska until the completion of the railroad in 1923 and the advent of reliable air service in the 1930s.



By November 1906 track had been laid to mile 49, just beyond Tunnel No. 1. Here railroad workers arrived from, and departed for, Seward. Photo by Evans: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Winter Collection, cropped from original.

False Starts for the Railroad

Beginning in 1904, the railroad construction crew crept north of Seward on its way to the Tanana River. The financial backers of the Alaska Central Railway Company hoped to build a spur to the promising Matanuska coal fields, both as a source of coal for their railway and to increase the economic value of the region—and profit for the Alaska Central Railway Company.

However, the road was to get bumpy, in both the literal and figurative sense. Ice, snow and rivers proved a major challenge for the railroad builders, leading to delays, damage and rising costs. The challenges of building a railway in the Alaskan wilderness, coupled with political wrangling over the way

mining rights would be granted to the coal made the Alaska Central Railway an increasingly risky proposition. Matters came to a head when the construction company building the railroad went bankrupt in 1908 amid accusations of financial mismanagement. Seventy-one miles of railway had been built, and when construction finally halted in May 1909 the tracks ended at Kern Creek, on Turnagain Arm.

Even without snow, sled dogs could still work pulling small rail cars on short journeys. Seward Community Library Association, Sylvia Sexton Collection, 1-490.





A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD

Seward continued to grow in the 1910s. This 1915 photo shows the town site cleared of trees and new streets laid out. Photo by F.W. Sheelor: Seward Community Library Association, 1915 Panorama.



The next several years were lean ones for Seward as the railway languished in a morass of business disputes over the fate of the railway's assets, and as political uncertainty over the government's stance towards both the railways and Matanuska coalfields. The Alaska Central Railway's assets were purchased by a new syndicate and renamed the Alaska Northern Railway Company in 1909, but without more money this "railway to nowhere" could do no more than try to maintain the existing track in the hopes of attracting new investment. Though some private syndicates successfully built railroads in Alaska (most notably Kennecott Copper Corporation's Copper River & Northwestern Railway financed by business magnates J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheim family), many other private railway projects like the Alaska Central failed to complete their projects due to ballooning construction costs, financial mismanagement and falling foul of federal regulations. Calls arose in several quarters for the government to step in, purchase the Alaska Northern Railway and finish the railroad from Seward to Fairbanks.

After several years of uncertainty, Congress established an Alaska Railroad Commission to report on the best course of action for developing Alaska's railroad system. The commission concluded that privately funded railroads similar to those that crossed the continental United States were not going to work in Alaska. After much discussion and a change in presidents from Howard Taft to Woodrow Wilson, Congress passed the Alaska Railroad Bill on March 14, 1913. This law authorized the federal government to construct a railroad linking Alaska's interior with an ice-free port on the south coast. Seward was one of five ports chosen as a candidate. The town again became a hub of activity as speculators bought up land for the anticipated building boom, and supplies began to flood the dock at the end of Fourth Avenue. In March 1915, the government announced that Seward was to be the southern terminus of the new railroad. Seward's prospects once again looked bright.

Early Residents and Block 10

Running north from the dock built to unload arriving ships, Seward's Fourth Avenue was the first street to be cut from the wilderness and quickly became the commercial center of the new town – a true gateway to Alaska for passengers arriving by ship. Just to the west of this commercial district, across the alley from Brown & Hawkins' store, a smattering of cabins and houses began to spring up on the southern half of Block 10.

Block 10 was typical of Seward's urban landscape during the town's first decade. Every tree on the block had been cut down, the ground was bare, and many of the cottages, false front buildings and warehouses were unpainted

and constructed of milled lumber. Block 10's residents also typified Seward's population. They included skilled workers and professionals such as railroad workers, carpenters, and merchants who came north to the new frontier in the hopes that they would help realize John Ballaine's vision of a large, prosperous gateway city to Alaska.

The Block 10 dwellings mostly faced Third Avenue and housed some of Seward's "pioneers" of 1903. Charles Fremont "Fats" Hewitt was one of these. Hewitt was already a veteran of a number of Alaskan adventures, having first come north to Skagway in 1898. Arriving on the Santa Ana with Ballaine, Hewitt served as the first conductor on the Alaska Central Railway, and filled



Game Warden Christopher Columbus Shea (front row, second from left). Seward Community Library Association, Sylvia Sexton Collection, 1-1590.



A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD

that position for a number of years besides being active in town politics. The 1910 census records Hewitt, a bachelor, probably living on Block 10, most likely in the Harvey house (named after later owners Daniel and May Harvey). One day a spark from a stove started a fire under the house and realizing

boom made carpenters a valuable commodity, and Lashbrooke would not have struggled to find work in this whirlwind of construction. He may have even built the cottage himself, since the housing boom meant finding a place to live was no easy task.



*Jacob Graef.
Cropped from
Resurrection Bay
Historical Society,
Waterfront
Pass Collection,
46.*



J. Graef's Fourth Avenue hardware store was located across the alley from his Block 10 warehouse. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 508.2.1.

the danger, Hewitt ran for the door but broke the handle in his frantic attempts to escape, locking himself in. Running for the window, Hewitt discovered to his horror that he was too big to squeeze through. Luckily, a neighbor was able to extinguish the fire – but “Fats” had earned a nickname that was to stick with him.

A small cottage, really no more than a glorified shed, stood behind the Harvey house in Seward's early years. Frank Lashbrooke, a carpenter, may have lived in this cottage. Seward's early building

Just to the north of Hewitt and Lashbrooke's dwellings stood a large warehouse built by Jacob Graef in 1909. Graef, a Missourian, ran a hardware and furniture store on Fourth Avenue and built the warehouse to keep stock for his store. This unassuming building would stand on Block 10 longer than any other. Graef himself may have lived in a small cottage just north of the warehouse. A stalwart Seward resident and shortstop on Seward's baseball team, Graef ran his hardware store until his death in 1936.

THE BIRTH OF A MODERN ALASKAN TOWN

Block 10 also played host to the game warden for the Kenai Peninsula, Christopher Columbus Shea. Housing in Seward remained scarce for most of the first decade; the census lists Shea as living with his wife, mother, daughter and the wife of a friend. When Shea arrived in 1909 to assume his duties he took up residence on Block 10, but it is unclear exactly which house his family lived in. It may have been the small cottage next to Graef's warehouse, or they may have lived in the larger Leslie House, next door to "Fats" Hewitt.



Early Seward resident receiving styling help in 1905. Seward Community Library Association, Stauter-Mongin Collection, 4-34.

The Alaska Central Railway built a series of warehouses along Seward's waterfront to supply the railroad's construction needs. Photo by Evans: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Winter Collection, cropped from original.





Historic bottles and debris uncovered during the Block 10 investigations. NPS Photo.



NPS archeologists investigate shovel test pits on the Block 10 Lots, 2007. NPS Photo.



Archeology and the Block 10 Privies

NPS Photo.



Archeology and the Block 10 Privies



Block 10, circa 1915. The house with the false front at right in photo is the Leslie House. Running from right to left from this house: Harvey cottage, Graef warehouse and Sheal/Graef cottage. Photo by F.W. Sheelor: Seward Community Library Association, cropped from 1915 panorama.

Why Historic Privies are Important

“Fats” Hewitt, Frank Lashbrooke and Christopher Shea and his family probably never gave a second thought to the future potential significance of their out-houses (often called privies) that stood on their properties on Block 10. But without realizing it, these early Seward residents left a record of their lives in the

privies — a record that archeologists can read.

The essence of archeology is the study of humans through material - things that are shaped in some way by, or are significant to people. This material culture can take almost any form, from a simple round stone used to grind grain, to a sacred mountain, a spoon

or a nuclear power plant. For archeologists, some of the most informative bits of material culture are the most mundane: food remains and trash. The historical record often reliably records major events, but the day-to-day lives of past humans are often obscure – few people record what they eat every day, for example. Historic trash helps fill this gap in knowledge by providing a material record of the things people used and discarded in their daily lives. Often it is evidence of the daily lives of people, rather than records of exceptional events, that provide the most enriching links to the past.

As a result, privies are a valuable resource. Privies not only functioned as bathrooms but, in an era before municipal garbage collection,

deposit of historic garbage that can be associated with a particular building or even particular people. From this valuable trove, archeologists get a glimpse into the private lives of some of the first residents of Seward.

As Seward developed, almost every new house, saloon or store that was hewn from the Alaskan wilderness was equipped with a privy behind it. Despite being so numerous, these essential structures were rarely ever noted in contemporary maps. But in historical panoramic photos of the town, these little privy sheds can be seen peppering the landscape. By poring over high-resolution digital scans of these photos, historians and archeologists

can often associate a privy with a specific house or commercial building – thus precisely locating the privy in time and space. Sometimes, it is even possible to connect the structure, and the artifacts within it, to historical people we know by name.

On occasion, the remains of these privies survive later development of the land and can be studied. In the case of Block 10, archeologists were lucky to find not one but three privies associated with as many as three different houses on Third Avenue. This presented a rare opportunity to provide specific concrete details of what the daily lives of some of the first Seward residents were like, and to share that story today.

they also served as convenient locations to deposit trash that would otherwise have to be thrown out into yards or alleys. Garbage was also used to help fill in privy holes whenever the privy was removed or relocated. This results in a conveniently concentrated and buried



*Privies contain a wealth of artifacts connecting the structure to its historical users. Some items, like this liquor bottle and bowl, were imported from Europe.
NPS Photo.*



This photo shows several privies on Block 10, with their slanted roofs visible as white rectangles in the center foreground of the photo. Seward Community Library Association, Sylvia Sexton Collection, 1-1240, cropped from original.

Locating the Privies

When the National Park Service (NPS) purchased several lots on Block 10, they were required by law to investigate the historical significance of the property prior to any construction or development (see NHPA sidebar p.38). NPS archeologists and historians set out to explore the history of the property and determine whether any historically significant buildings or archeological remains existed on the property. With help from the Resurrection Bay Historical Society and the Seward Community Library, NPS staff researched historical records, and collected old maps and photos of the property. Some of these photos depict a series of privies behind the Christopher Shea, "Fats" Hewitt and Frank Lashbrooke cottages and cabins. The privies may not be mentioned in the historical record because few people thought they were worth mentioning. The data that the privies contain may be crucial in determining the historical

significance of a property, and this proved to be the case with the privies on Block 10.

Beginning in 2005, NPS archeologists took their maps and photos into the field and began excavating small test pits to determine if the privies visible in the old photos could be located in the ground. After establishing a grid on the ground and systematically testing it, archeologists found three privies close to where they were expected. Though the upper soil layers, or strata, had been disturbed by modern activity, most of the features remained buried and intact. Archeologists excavated these three privies in two stages. They excavated the two privies near "Fats" Hewitt and Frank Lashbrooke's dwellings in 2007, and returned in 2011 to locate and excavate the privy that once stood behind the cottage Christopher Shea may have lived in.

The first question many people ask when archeologists talk about excavating a privy is “Where’s the poop?” This is an important question, since an excavation potentially containing human waste presents real hazards to archeologists. Depending on the local environment and the state of preservation of the privy, the human waste in a historic privy may be totally decomposed – or not. Part of the initial survey and testing work is geared towards determining the safety risks and establishing what kinds of safety equipment may be required. Most of the time, the human waste is long gone, leaving only whatever trash was thrown into the pit behind. Luckily, this was the case with the privies on Block 10; the relatively shallow pits dug into the well-drained gravels deposited by Lowell Creek had permitted the organic contents of the privy to decompose nearly completely.

Some organic materials, such as seeds, often pass intact through human digestive tracts and are more resistant to decomposition. These materials often survive and may be collected. Several seed samples were collected from the privies on Block 10 and stored for later analysis by specialists who can give clues as to the types of food that people who used the privy typically ate.



Food remains found in the privies include bones, many of which retain cut marks from the butcher who prepared the meat for sale. NPS Photo.

Excavating the Privies

When archeologists excavate a feature like a historic privy, they attempt to relate the artifacts and soil layers to each other and to both space and time. The actual physical position of artifacts in the privy, and the shape and construction of the privy itself, can tell us much about when, how and by whom the artifacts were deposited. This, in turn,



In 2007, archeologists began digging small test pits in order to locate the remains of the privies that stood behind the Harvey Cottage. NPS Photo.



A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD



An archeologist carefully measures the excavated privy to produce a scale drawing of the side, or profile, of the excavation. NPS Photo.

can give us clues to the behavior and even motivations or world views of individuals and groups from the past.

While excavating the Block 10 privies, archeologists discovered that the privies were fairly shallow and the walls of the holes were not lined with wood or stone. This is characteristic of a fast-growing town with plenty of space but limited access to building materials as Seward was in its early years. Though surrounded by forests, Seward's townspeople often chose to use shipments of precut lumber from Seattle for building. The pressure to build housing as quickly as possible with imported materials would certainly have made the time and effort of building a wood or stone-lined

privy seem an extravagance. The uneven, shallow U-shape of the holes suggest that they were excavated by hand - probably with a pick since the soil of Seward is filled with gravel and cobbles that make digging with a shovel difficult.

Another reason for the small, un-lined nature of the privies is the fact that the small wooden outhouses that stood over them were easily portable and could be moved over a new hole when required. In old established cities - where space is at a premium - privies were fixed in one place and therefore had to be deep which often required that they be lined with stone or wood to prevent collapse or contamination of

Opposite Page: Archeologists returned to Block 10 in 2011 to excavate a third privy that stood next to Graef's warehouse, behind the Shea/Graef cottage beginning with a series of shovel tests (seen here) to determine the privy's actual location. NPS Photo.





the nearby soil. In Seward, where the built landscape was more flexible, the privy could be (and often was) moved around as needed. The old hole would be covered with powdered lime (a calcium compound that was used to mask odor and had germ-killing properties), refuse, stove ash, and loose soil or cobbles to conceal it. A comparison of historical Seward photos show privies in slightly different locations, appearing and disappearing quite often. As a result, the presence of one outhouse in a historical photo usually indicates several buried privy holes near that location.

Privies were often “mucked out”, removing most of the contents for disposal elsewhere. In early Seward, the mucked out contents would be dumped into Resurrection Bay below the high tide line. Lime powder would then be dumped in the hole to freshen the privy. But the “mucker” didn’t always do a thorough job, and the areas missed often contain concentrations of artifacts. What this means is that the bulk of the artifacts in a privy often represent the latest period that the privy was in use, since nobody bothers to muck out a privy hole that is about to be filled in and abandoned when an outhouse is moved. Yet some of the artifacts in the corners may belong to previous use, since the “mucker” may have missed them.

How do archeologists tell which artifacts were deposited when? A variety of techniques can be used. To begin

with, archeologists make use of the law of superposition. Superposition works on the assumption that, over time, soil or other materials on an archeological site accumulate in layers or strata. The oldest stratum will be on the bottom, covered by successive layers of younger strata. This can help to date a site, but it is the artifacts that are found in a site that often provide the most precise information about the site’s age. The most common ways to establish the age of artifacts are through seriation and dating using diagnostic features of artifacts.

Seriation is a relative dating method and is one of the simplest ways to place artifacts in chronological order; it operates on the principle that certain artifacts are more common in certain time periods than others. By observing and recording the different soil strata, archeologists can determine whether an artifact was deposited before or after another artifact. This method doesn’t reveal exactly when something was placed in the ground, but it does allow for the construction of a timeline showing when artifacts were deposited relative to each other. There are problems with this method, though. Soil disturbance through frost heave, human activity (such as the “mucking”) and other causes can jumble the soil strata and thus destroy the neat, stratified record that is needed in order to use the seriation technique. This is why dating through diagnostic features is used whenever possible.

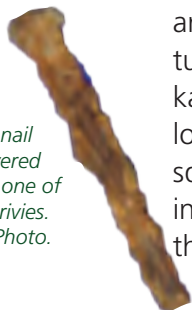


A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD



Archeologists pushed each shovelful of soil removed from the privy excavation through a wire mesh screen in order to recover small artifacts. NPS Photo.

Diagnostic artifacts are indicative of a particular time period or cultural group. A diagnostic artifact can provide direct evidence as to its age – the most obvious example would be a coin stamped with a date, but it could also be something much more subtle, such as the style of design on a dinner plate, the seam on a glass bottle fragment or the shape of the head on a nail. Within the excavated privies, all of the nails found in the privy excavation are cut wire type nails similar to those used today. These nails, made from round steel wire, replaced wrought iron square nails around the turn of the twentieth century. Since the Russian fort Voskresenskaia and the Lowell family cabin were located near Block 10, the presence of square nails in an excavation might indicate that the deposits dated back to those previous occupation periods. No



Wire nail recovered from one of the privies. NPS Photo.

such nails were found indicating that the Block 10 privies date to after 1900 (which also corroborates the photographic evidence).

While excavating the privies on Block 10, archeologists made note of each different soil strata, described its composition and gave it a unique label. They removed soil and sifted it through screens to help locate any artifacts buried in the soil. As artifacts were uncovered, they were given a label indicating which strata they came from. Some artifacts were recorded in scale drawings or photographed

to show how they were oriented inside the privy hole. Finally, after reaching the bottom of the feature and confirming that the soil below was sterile, or contained no artifacts or other cultural material, archeologists photographed and drew a profile drawing of the walls of the excavation to record all of the strata at once, as well as a top-down plan of the excavated area. This is a crucial step because excavation can only be done once – you cannot re-excavate a privy, or any archeological site for that matter. Archeologists have to take careful note of everything that they encounter so that the site (in this case a privy) is preserved in the form of field notes, scale drawings, photographs, artifacts and soil samples.

Excavating is just a small portion of the archeologist's work – much more



Artifacts recovered in the field were carefully labeled, bagged and sent to the lab in Anchorage for cleaning, cataloging and storage. NPS Photo.

must be done before and afterwards in the lab, in the library and at the computer. However some conclusions can be drawn in the field. For example, the privy at Christopher Shea’s house seemed to be an irregular shape with two adjacent deposits located in one large soil stain. At first glance the shape suggested a “two-holer” privy that could be used by two people simultaneously, but the historical photos failed to show any such privy on the lot. Further excavation suggested that the two deposits were actually skewed from each other by several feet. The most likely explanation is that the privy was simply moved several feet over a new hole, producing two deposits right next to each other. As mentioned before, archeologists also failed to find any evidence

of the Russian fort or Lowell family-homestead on Block 10. This information will be useful in future attempts to find those features, since it helps narrow down their possible locations.

Once the excavations of the Block 10 privies were complete, archeologists headed back to the lab with their data to begin analysis. Each artifact has a story to tell about the lives of individual people, and can speak to events and behaviors that never made it into the historical record. Armed with the historical record in one hand and the archeological data in the other, we can shed more light on the lives of early Seward townspeople like “Fats” Hewitt, Jacob Graef, Frank Lashbrooke and Christopher Shea and his family.



The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

The long and rich history of the United States has left its mark across the nation's landscape in a variety of forms. Some of these are obvious – battlefields, pueblos, grand historic buildings and major infrastructure like canals and bridges. Others are much more subtle, like a historic street lamp, the original map of a town, or the buried remains of an outhouse. While many of these historic sites have been preserved over the years simply due to the interest or dedication of a few groups or individuals, the federal government has gradually created a legal framework and set of criteria for evaluating, formally recognizing and helping to preserve historic properties. Archeologists and historians conduct a great deal of research through universities and museums using private funds or specific government grants. However, much of the archeology and history research undertaken today is actually required by

federal law: *the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)*. Congress, citing both the cultural and historical value of historic properties and the threat posed to them by development, passed the NHPA in order to provide some measure of protection to historically significant places.

The NHPA established the *National Register of Historic Places*, a list of properties recognized as being particularly significant to our history. The National Register also established a set of criteria for evaluating the historical significance of a property; if the property meets the criteria, it is considered eligible for nomination.

Aside from eligibility to the National Register, the critical portion of the NHPA with respect to the story of Block 10 is

Section 106. Section 106 of the NHPA stipulates that any federal agency holding jurisdiction over an undertaking (such as a construction or landscaping project) must *"take into account the effect of the undertaking on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register."*

*Bishop & Company
preserve jar.
NPS photo.*



This usually means that archeologists and historians must evaluate the property in question to see if it meets any of the criteria for nomination to the National Register. If it does, the federal agency must weigh its options in balancing the needs of historic preservation against those of modern development. In fact, until a historic building or archeological site is deemed *non-eligible* through a Determination of Eligibility process, the National Park Service must treat the cultural resource as if it were eligible for inclusion in the National Register.



they contain, the Shea lots were determined to be historically significant and eligible for nomination to the National Register. As a result, the privies were excavated so that the historically significant portion of the property – the archeological information contained in the privies – would be preserved for further study. Equally important, interpretation of the Block 10 privies would be available to the public so that Seward residents and visitors would have an opportunity to experience a connection with the past of the Gateway City for generations to come.

After surveying the property and excavating test pits on Block 10, National Park Service archeologists found that the underground portions of the three historic privies visible in early photos of Seward remained intact. Since privies are typically a rich source of archeological data due to the numerous artifacts



Cast iron stove parts, like this damper recovered from the privies, have not changed much in over 100 years. NPS Photo.



Couples enjoy their leisure time in a beached skiff along Seward's waterfront. Seward Community Library Association, Elsie Blue Collection, 15-60.



Hotel manager, George Sexton, stands behind the desk of Overland on 4th Avenue, circa 1910. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 502.1.1.



Businesswoman Jessie Ellsworth, at right, poses with stacks of merchandise in front of Ellsworths on 4th Avenue, circa 1917. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 2010.1.43.

*Visualizing Seward's
Past through
Material Culture*



NPS Photo.



A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD

Visualizing Seward's Past through Material Culture

Archeology is about learning from past people and events and applying this knowledge to the present for the benefit of present and future people. A privy is actually a perfect example of the essence of archeology. Much of what was thrown away in the past still looks like garbage— but in the eyes of an archeologist this garbage speaks volumes. The value of the privy



but they did leave records in the form of material culture in the privies on their property.

Diagnostic artifacts in the privies between Hewitt and Lashbrooke's dwellings indicate that the privies were in use between about 1905 and 1915, and the privy behind the cottage next to Graef's warehouse was dated to between about 1905 and 1919. These dates neatly straddle the 1910 census data that places Hewitt, Graef, Lashbrooke and Shea on Block 10.

comes not from the artistic qualities or monetary value of the contents but rather the unique story it tells about the past.



Metal baking powder can. NPS Photo.

The Block 10 privies are no exception. "Fats" Hewitt, Jacob Graef, Frank Lashbrooke and Christopher Shea and his family did not leave detailed diaries about their daily lives in Seward,

The Material Culture of the Block 10 Privies



Analysis of the Block 10 privies, revealed early Seward residents may have founded a new town in a rugged, unfamiliar environment, but they took great pains to make that environment as much like a modern American town as possible. None of the artifacts recovered were made locally, and the diverse origins of what were found shows just how connected to the rest of the world the new Alaskan town was. The Block 10 residents consumed imported Coca Cola, beer and whiskey produced in the





A selection of ceramic fragments collected during the privy excavation. Most ceramic goods used by Seward residents came from England, which at the time led the world in the export of tableware and ceramics. NPS Photo.

One of Dr. Baughman's medicine bottles – several of which were recovered from the Block 10 excavations. NPS Photo.



Eastern United States, as well as wine and liquor from Europe, such as a bottle of bitters from Milan found in one of the privies between Hewitt and Lashbrooke's dwellings. They even had a little champagne now and then. The privy remains largely predate the enforcement of Alaska's Bone Dry Law (1918) and subsequent national Prohibition (1920–1933). Later remains most likely would not have

contained so many imported alcohol bottles, as the town went dry through the 1920s.

The Block 10 residents imported their dinnerware from the English cities of Liverpool, Sheffield and Stoke-on-Trent, which were the chief centers of manufacture for such goods. They ate their salads with salad dressing shipped from New York, used Heinz condiments, Lea & Perrins Worcester sauce and imported Clam Tea from Seattle. A great deal of their food came from cans; a large percentage of the contents of all three privies consisted of decomposed





A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD

“sanitary cans” (essentially the same type of food can we use today). A few cans survived intact, such as a baking powder tin, but most were little more than rusty can-shaped stains. Even these rusty remains provide valuable evidence, however, showing that Seward truly was a gateway through which goods and people flowed across great distances. The artifacts paint a picture of a town very much connected with, and dependent upon, the rest of the world.

*Patent medicine bottle.
NPS Photo.*



Seward also relied on imported medicine. Christopher Shea's family treated some of their ailments using patent medicines from Chicago, Illinois and Toledo, Ohio. Prominent among these was Hall's Catarrh Cure. Popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this infamous remedy was made up mostly of grain alcohol. The townspeople also visited Dr. Baughman for more serious ailments. Dr. Baughman purchased custom medicine bottles with his name and nickname "The German Doctor"

embossed on them from the Whitall Tatum Company in New Jersey. Two such bottles were found in the Shea's privy. The excavations also yielded a small glass medicine bottle containing a zinc-based powder. Zinc compounds were used to treat a huge variety of ailments in the early twentieth century, but the most common use was as a simple antiseptic for dressing wounds.

*Hair barrette.
NPS Photo.*



Seward residents also appeared to make efforts to be fashionably current. A hair barrette found in Shea's privy along with a selection of garment clasps reinforces the ample photographic evidence that Seward's townspeople favored the latest fashions. Christopher Shea's household was entirely female apart from himself, so the barrette may have belonged to his wife Helen, his mother Bridget, his daughter Nellie, or Lillie Blackmire. Blackmire, who teamed up with Christopher Shea to win a Seward waltzing contest in 1910 may have also boarded with the Sheas.

The town gained electricity within a few short years of its founding and many outhouses were probably upgraded accordingly. The privy behind the Shea



property seems to have been equipped with a hand-made GE "National Mazda" brand light bulb, named after Ahura Mazda, the Zoroastrian god of light and wisdom. The bulbs were thrown into the privy when they burnt out. Somehow the bulbs survived the drop, burial and the next 100 years underground intact. With their hand-blown glass bulb and beautifully complex tungsten filament, today the bulbs look more like art objects than ordinary light bulbs. They are also very useful to the archeologist since their diagnostic features provide absolute dates. These particular bulbs were sold between 1911 and 1919. Christopher Shea and his family lived in Seward between 1909 and 1913, so it is quite possible that they purchased and installed the lights. Wire and at least one simple light socket in the privy were also uncovered with the broken remains of several more bulbs.

What Material Culture Can Tell Us about the Ideals and Values of the Early Seward Community

The United States at the beginning of the twentieth century was a nation in transition. Victorian ideals of genteel fashion and etiquette still held a grip on Americans' social consciousness, but the industrial revolution and the emergence of the nation as a world power brought new challenges. Many Americans saw the Victorian era as what Mark Twain called the "Gilded Age" – a veneer of gentility and economic success at the highest echelons of society that masked deep social problems below. Many Americans saw the government and large industrial syndicates as partners in a "corrupt bargain" of patronage and graft that worked to the detriment of the middle and working classes. Increasing calls for social justice and political reform to address sanitation, poverty, education, voting laws and other matters led to what has been termed the Progressive Era.

General Electric's "National Mazda" tungsten filament light bulb. NPS Photo.



"Purola" patent medicine bottle. NPS Photo.



A SLICE OF EARLY SEWARD



*A selection of alcoholic beverage flasks and bottles.
NPS Photo.*

In this period, lasting between the 1890s and 1920s, social activists and special interest groups sprang up as a counter to the political power of industrialists and other big business interests.

Both Victorian and Progressive values are visible in early Seward's history and artifacts. The artifacts recovered from the privies demonstrate that the people who lived on Block 10 enjoyed traditional table settings — they ate off of imported dinnerware. Their clothes were fashionable. They consumed alcohol imported from Europe and condiments from the great cities of the United States. Their houses clearly show a preference for conventional American town architecture. The people of

Seward were proud of their ability to be self-sufficient when the need arose, but they also appeared to have no desire to live without the modern conveniences of the early twentieth century, and adopted the same genteel fashion and manners as the rest of the Western world.

Progressivism is a bit more difficult to see in the material culture of the privies, though the movement did have major consequences for Seward's railway building project. A number of social organizations such as the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (temperance groups sought the banning or restriction of alcohol) worked towards the betterment of the

social and moral condition of Seward and its residents. The large number of bottles recovered from the privies shows that the residents of Block 10 were no strangers to alcohol, though all of Alaska eventually went dry in 1918.

Seward's City Council also played a progressive role in 1912 with the passage of an ordinance which created a Board of Health and established restrictions on the use of privies within the city

limits. From that time forward all new construction with access to public sewer and water was required to install flush toilets or "water closets." The ordinance also declared it unlawful to locate a water closet or maintain an existing privy within five feet of an adjoining lot. The Shea lot privies were clearly in violation of this ordinance as they nearly straddled the lot line between Block 10 lots 27 and 28; this could explain why eventually the privies fell out of use.

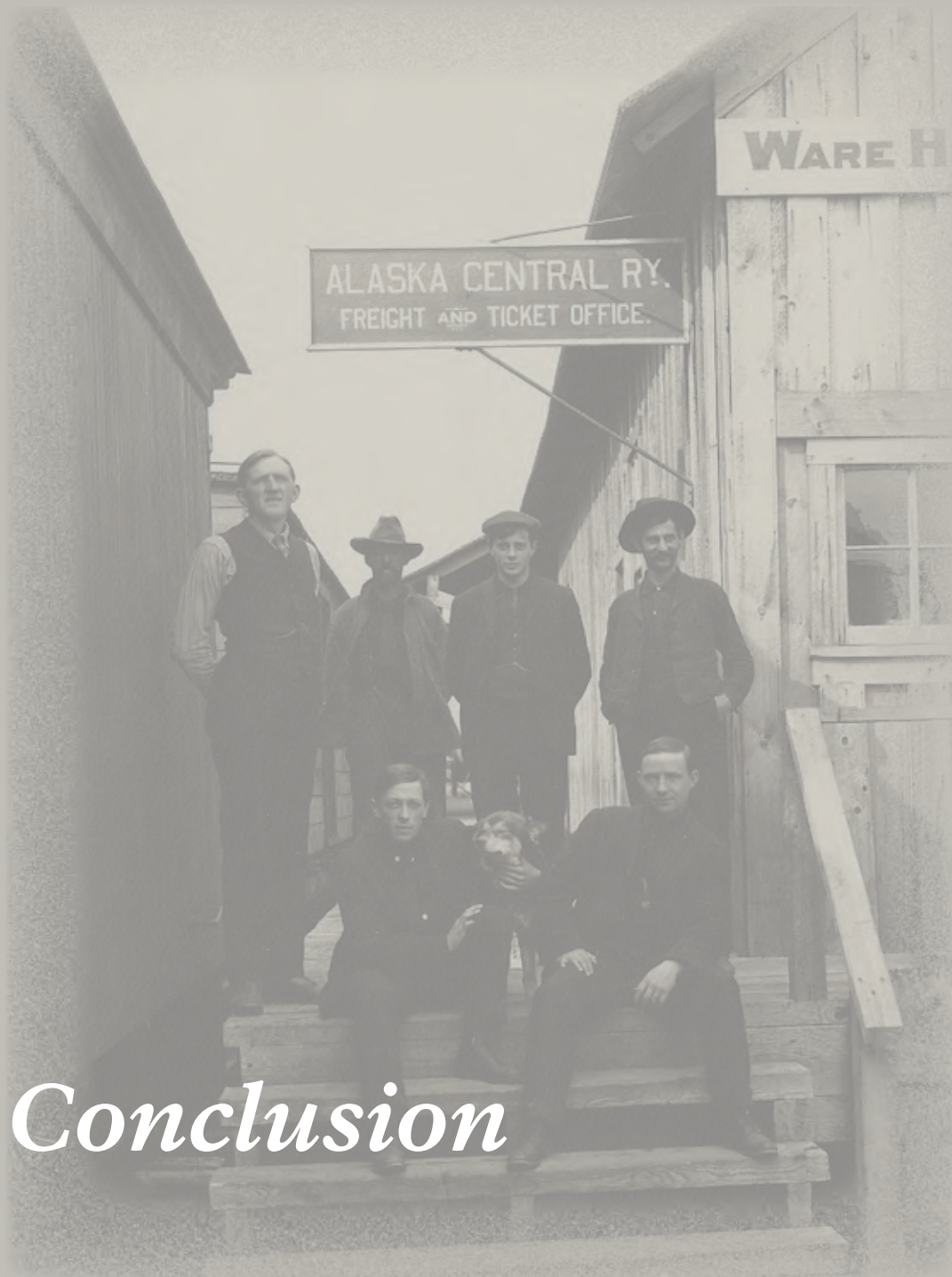




Harry and Jesse Ellsworth, third and fourth from left, relax with friends along a lakeshore, circa 1915. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 2010. 1.39



Early Seward residents had access to good fishing along the railroad tracks north of Seward, circa 1907. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, F.G. Hale Collection, 2020.1.45



Conclusion

*Seward Community Library Association,
Stauter-Mongin Collection, 4-162.*



For the first few decades after its founding, the prosperity of Seward depended on the railroad, and by extension, the railroad company. News from the company was always received with a mixture of hopefulness and apprehension. Photo by Sylvia Sexton: Seward Community Library Association, Sylvia Sexton Collection, 1-1267, cropped from original.



Conclusion

Seward's fortunes never quite matched the ambitious dreams of John Ballaine and the Alaska Central Railway syndicate. The headquarters of the Alaska Engineering Commission moved north from Seward to a tent city at Ship Creek in 1916, eventually becoming the city of Anchorage. The great railway between Seward and Fairbanks was finally completed in 1923, and although not the hub of Alaskan commerce that Ballaine envisioned, Seward continued to function as an important port and railway terminus. As the century progressed, Seward weathered the hardships of two world wars, the Great Depression of 1929, the catastrophic Good Friday earthquake of 1964 and the Exxon

Valdez oil spill in 1989. Through all of these challenges Seward persevered, adapted and thrived. Tourism has become a growing industry and in addition to experiencing the area's scenery and wildlife, many visitors are interested in learning about Seward's early history.

In bringing to light the material culture of Block 10, archeology serves as a conduit that enables residents and visitors to make a close physical connection with people who lived in Seward a century ago. Photographs are a crucial aid to history, but they also show us what the photographer wanted us to see. The same type of bias occurs in written documents. Archeology often

provides evidence of the past that people never intended to have recorded. Privies are often the richest record of both the routine and clandestine lives of our ancestors. Since every generation

inherits and modifies the culture of their ancestors, learning about the lives of past people enriches our pool of human knowledge and also brings us closer to our own heritage.



Early train station scene. Even today, the railroad continues to play a crucial role in town life by bringing thousands of tourists every summer to Seward, Alaska. Photo by Evans: Resurrection Bay Historical Society, Winter Collection, cropped from original.



Bibliography

Books

Barry, Mary J. *Seward Alaska: A History of the Gateway City. Volumes I-III.* M.J.P. Barry: Anchorage, 1986, 1993, 1995.

Khlebnikov, Kiril Timofeevich. *Notes on Russian America, Part I: Novo-Arkhangel'sk.* Limestone Press: Ontario and Fairbanks, 1994.

Newman Dorland, W. A. *The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary.* W. B. Saunders & Company: New York and Philadelphia, 1900.

Solovjova, Katerina G. and Aleksandra A. Vovnyanko. *The Fur Rush.* Phenix Press: Anchorage, 2002.

Stallings, Mike. *Index to the Seward Gateway: A Newspaper, 1904-1910.* Seward Community Library: Seward, 1983.

Reports

Cook, Linda and Frank Norris. "A Stern and Rock-Bound Coast: Kenai Fjords Historic Resource Study". National Park Service, Kenai Fjords National Park. 1998.

Kesler, Judy. "An Historical Atlas for the proposed Multi-Agency Visitor Center in Seward, Alaska." National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office, Anchorage. Unpublished.

National Park Service. "Seward Cultural Resources Compliance Report: Mai, Harbor Dinner Club, Old Solly's and Shea Properties." National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office. 2013.

National Park Service. "Seward Lot Histories: Windows Through Time, 1903-1990s." National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office. Unpublished.

Yarborough, Michael R. "Archeological Overview and Assessment of the Seward Multi-Agency Center for Marine Science Tract." Report prepared by Cultural Resource Consultants for the National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office. 1999.

Yarborough, Michael R. "Archaeology at the Alaska SeaLife Center, A Summary of Research in Seward, Alaska, from 1995 to 1997." Report prepared by Cultural Resource Consultants under contract to Rise Alaska/Leif Selkregg Associates. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office. 1998.

Archival Sources

City of Seward. City Council. An Ordinance Creating a Board of Health, Relating to the Public Health, and for Other Purposes. Ordinance 1912-010. 1912.

University of Alaska, Anchorage. Seward Gateway 1905 -1941. UAA/APU Consortium Newspapers, Newspaper Microfilm 97.





Tender cars loaded with wood fueled the early Alaska Central Railway engines. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, F.G. Hale Collection.



Members of the Lowell family are featured as "A Growing Family of Seward Alaska June 1905." Resurrection Bay Historical Society, 2020.1.7, cropped from original.



"Ericson's famous dog team from Iditarod" prepares to "mush" from the Hotel Seward on 5th Avenue. Resurrection Bay Historical Society, F.G. Hale Collection.