

INTRODUCTION:

KENNECOTT KIDS ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Barbara Rose Watkins and her daddy Dick.

DURING THE WEEKEND OF JUNE 15-17, 1990, A REUNION HELD AT KENNICOTT GLACIER LODGE, KENNECOTT, ALASKA, BROUGHT TOGETHER MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN WHEN THE KENNECOTT MINES AND MILL OPERATED DURING THE 1920S AND '30S. INGER JENSEN RICCI AND ELEANOR TJOSEVIG EIDEMILLER, TWO "KENNECOTT KIDS," DEVELOPED THE IDEA FOR THE REUNION. RICH AND JODY KIRKWOOD, OWNERS OF THE KENNICOTT GLACIER LODGE, HELPED ORGANIZE AND HOST THE EVENT.

TWENTY-ONE "KIDS" ATTENDED THE REUNION AND ALL HAD A WONDERFUL TIME IN THE GHOST TOWN WHICH WAS THE THRIVING COMPANY TOWN OF THEIR CHILDHOOD. THEY SPOKE FONDLY OF KENNECOTT AND THE RELATIONSHIPS THEY DEVELOPED WHILE GROWING UP IN THE MAGNIFICENT SETTING OF THE WRANGELL MOUNTAINS. THE "KIDS" HIKE THE GLACIER, THUMBED THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS, WALKED THE TOWN, PICNICKED IN MCCARTHY, AND TOLD THEIR STORIES AS PHYSICAL REMINDERS PROMPTED THEIR MEMORIES.

THE SUCCESS OF THIS INITIAL REUNION LED TO A NETWORK OF “KIDS” TRYING TO LOCATE MORE OF THEIR CHILDHOOD FRIENDS. IN 1994, A SECOND REUNION WAS HELD AT THE KENNICOTT GLACIER LODGE WITH 25 “KIDS” IN ATTENDANCE. SOME OF THE ORIGINAL 21 “KIDS” COULDN’T MAKE THIS SECOND TRIP AND THERE WERE AT LEAST 15 NEW FACES IN THE “KIDS” CROWD. THE EXCITEMENT OF RETURNING TO THEIR CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT HAD NOT DIMINISHED BY 1994 AND PLANS BEGAN TO DEVELOP FOR A THIRD REUNION IN 1998. EVEN MORE NEW FACES APPEARED IN 1998. THE ENTHUSIASM AND JOY EXPRESSED BY THE “KIDS” WHILE TOGETHER AT KENNECOTT WAS CONTAGIOUS, NEVER WANING.

IN COOPERATION WITH THE REUNION HOSTS, A TEAM OF HISTORIANS FROM THE ALASKA REGIONAL OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS WITH THE KENNECOTT KIDS. HISTORIANS SANDRA FAULKNER (ANDERSON), LOGAN HOVIS, AND ANN KAIN INTERVIEWED THE “KIDS” WHILE LINDA COOK TOOK COPY-AND-GLUE PICTURES OF THE HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS BROUGHT TO THE REUNION. ADDITIONAL NPS STAFF FROM WRANGELL ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE INCLUDED

ANNE WORTHINGTON, CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGER, AND HISTORIAN GEOFF BLEAKLEY. THE INTERVIEWS PROVIDE THE HISTORICAL COMMUNITY WITH A COLLECTION OF PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL ON THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF KENNECOTT AND MCCARTHY. OPPORTUNITIES SUCH AS THIS DO NOT OCCUR OFTEN. THE MINING AND INDUSTRIAL HISTORY OF KENNECOTT IS WELL-KNOWN, BUT THROUGH THE INTERVIEWS WE WERE ABLE TO KNOW KENNECOTT AS A LIVING COMMUNITY RATHER THAN A MINING GHOST TOWN.

THIS PUBLICATION IS THE RESULT OF MANY HOURS OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED OVER THE COURSE OF THE THREE REUNIONS. THE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS ARE, FOR THE MOST PART, IN THE PERSONAL COLLECTIONS OF THE “KIDS.” THE NPS HAS SINCE ACQUIRED THE KENNECOTT MINES NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK AS A PART OF WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE.



ANN KAIN,
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE HISTORIAN