

The Alaskan Philatelist

The Journal of the Alaska Collectors Club • American Philatelic Society Affiliate No. 218



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The Journal of the Alaska Collectors Club

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Vice-President Angela Watson
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Membership information and sample issues of this journal are available from the Secretary/Treasurer. Price of a sample issue is \$2.00 (stamps OK). Membership levels are as follows:

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AWARDS

Colopex 2000—Silver-Bronze
Colopex 2002—Silver-Bronze
STaMpsHOW 03—Silver-Bronze





HELP WANTED: I am looking for information about the Anchorage Contract Station 11. I never found anything about it and I do have the numbers 10 and 12 and the existence of Number 11 is then logical. Dirk van Gelderen, Voorkade 74, 2771 ZB Boskoop, Netherlands. Email: info@esveld.nl

WANTED: Any old postal cards or covers from the Chitna, McCarthy, Kennecott area, 1890 - 1950. Please send list to: Thomas Kinzer, P.O. Box 107, Chitna, AK 99566-0107

HELP WANTED: I am looking for mint and used postcards depicting ALASKA LIGHTHOUSES. Russell Bartlett, 5 Saint Clare Street, Braintree, MA 02184-8239

WANTED: Any era postal cards (government preprinted stamps, not picture) used in Alaska. No philatelic, please. Don Glickstein, 1300 University St. #9G, Seattle WA 98101. Email: glickwolf@earthlink.net

WANTED: Censored civilian mail from Alaska and Western Canada from World War II. Eric Knapp, 4201 Folker Street, Unit C102, Anchorage, AK 99508. Email: eknapp@gci.com

WANTED: Mail from the gold rush era Alaska forts. Eric Knapp, 4201 Folker Street, Unit C102, Anchorage, AK 99508. Email: Eknap@gci.net

Alaska Philatelic Cover Catalog Volume 1 & 2

Volume 2 of the Alaska Philatelic Cover Catalog, covering the Alaska Collectors Club, the Gastineau Philatelic Society and the Northern Lights Stamp Club is now available.

The catalog features illustrations of all major and minor covers issued by the three clubs.

The catalog is 8 ½ x 11 loose-leaf format punched for a three ring binder.

Prices:

Volume 2:

\$25.00

Volume 1, Revised Edition:

\$25.00

Original Volume 1 Update:

\$3.00

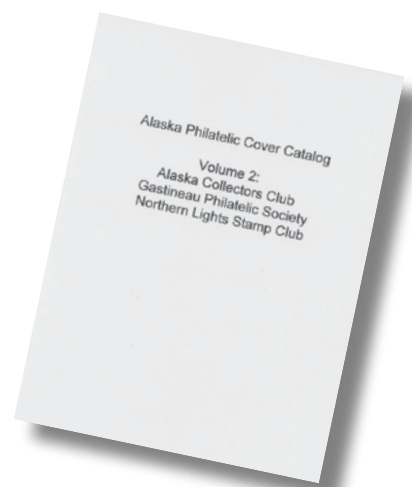
(All prices are postpaid)

For orders or more information, contact:

Eric Knapp

4201 Folker St., Unit C102

Anchorage, AK 99508



TAP DEADLINES

ISSUE	DEADLINE
1st Quarter	February 1
2nd Quarter	May 1
3rd Quarter	August 1
4th Quarter	November 1

Vice President's Message

by Angela Watson (*bleumoon@charter.net*)

Well, it's official! We have purchased the domain names *AlaskaPostalCollectors.org* and *AlaskaPhilatelic.org*. For those members who might not know what a domain name is, it is the name that is purchased by an individual or entity to name their website. Actually, it is a string of numbers that the internet recognizes, but through the wonderful world of technology, those numbers are masked by easier to remember names, such as *nike.com* or *usps.com*.

It's also official that I am the acting new webmaster. Which, if you knew how many websites I have actually put together, would be pretty scary. But the good news is that we have purchased a website assistance program through our server provider, which features a number of templates that we can utilize and (best of all) 24 hour tech support!

We will use *AlaskaPostalCollectors.org* for the primary website and purchased the other one so that we might reserve for possible use in the future. The Board of Directors approved this expenditure

Both President Jim Zuelow and myself have been lobbying hard for us to have a dedicated website, where we could have some design elements as well as a place to post information important to club members. We also wanted to have a website that would come up first when someone typed in Alaska Postal History into a search engine (Google, etc.), because what comes up now is a dealer in Las Vegas who has some very negative things to say about the current state of Alaska philately. We both felt that was not the real representation of the state of the hobby and we really wanted to come up first when those search criteria were requested by the average web user.

Jim has committed to providing copy and I am going to take care of the graphical side of things. As the website develops, we will post previous issues of TAP, some limited auction items, philatelic news and some other features considered too timely to wait for traditional publication in TAP.

We are hoping that the initial few pages of the site will be functional in about 60 days or so. We would invite each member of ACC to visit the website and see what's new.

Kind regards,



Secretary- Treasurer's Report

by Eric Knapp

First off, I want to apologize. I looked over my last couple of reports and I realized that I sounded a bit down. I have had a very busy and stressful last 6 months or so and have felt more than a little beat up. Things are getting a bit more normal now. Spring is coming and I am changing jobs at work so it should help. There still will be stress, but a different kind of stress.

I had an idea recently that I am going to pursue. I am going to contact several of the historical societies in Alaska and see what we can do about working together and sharing information. For a long time postal historians and "regular" historians have not interacted much. The current business term is that we have been "in our own silos." This is starting to change and I hope to push it a bit and see what kind of cooperation we can develop.

The club election went well. Thank you to everyone who agreed to run and everyone who voted. The results are elsewhere in this issue of TAP.

The following members have made donations above and beyond their normal dues, Caye Carufel, Robert Spaugy, Michael Senta, Wayne Selmar, Gastineau Philatelic Society, John Beirne, Jim Zuelow, and Peter Tompkins. Thank you to all of you.

We have also received six new members into the Alaska Collectors Club. Thank you to all of you for joining.

New Members: Welcome!

683 • Joe & Barbara Miller, Orland Park, IL

Interests: All things Alaska

684 • Victor Schwez, Downey, CA

Interests: not reported yet

685 • William Kucher, Colonia, NJ

Interests: Postal history, Aerophilately, First/Last day PP, General History

686 • Alice Fitzgerald, North Stonington, CT

Interests: Postal History, Territorial, Statehood, APOs, FPOs, Dog Team Mail, First/Last day PO's, Maritime Mail, Expeditions and explorations, Arctic Mail, FDC in Alaska, Yukon Territory, General Literature

687 • Thomas Tonozzi, Spring Valley, IL

Interests: Dog Team Mail, Expeditions and Explorations

Until later,

Eric

***Club members want to hear
YOUR story (don't be shy!)***

Take the form on page 9 and fill it out. Send it along with a photo and a color copy of your favorite philatelic piece to Angela Watson, 5519 E. Mezzanine Way, Long Beach, CA 90808.

2006 ACC Election Results

by Eric Knapp

The results of the club election are in. Thank you to everyone for voting.

Office/Candidates	Total votes
PRESIDENT	
Jim Zuelow.....	31
VICE PRESIDENT	
Angela Watson.....	31
DIRECTOR	
Nelson Gnirke.....	31
Dirk van Gelderen.....	29
Bob Spaugy.....	30
Eric Knapp.....	1
Caye Carufel.....	1

2005 ACC Financial Report

Starting Bank Balance.....\$5,878.45

Income

Dues & Other Contributions1,993.07
 Auction Profits661.99
 Total income.....2,655.06

Expenses

TAP production costs1,090.56
 Advertising.....126.00
 Sustaining Member Cover Expenses36.28
 Secretary Treasurers Expenses7.38
 Literature Exhibit Entry Fees.....50.00

Total Expenses1,310.22

Ending Bank Balance.....\$7,223.29

2005 AUCTION REPORT

There were three ACC auctions whose results affected the 2005 financial results. The totals for all three auctions are as follows:

Total Receipts.....\$4,411.75
 Total Paid to members3,749.76
 Total mailing expenses.....85.25
 Total profits to club661.99

Back Issues of TAP

1959 - 1973 Computer scanned and edited copies

1976 - 1984 quality photocopies

1984 - 2001 originals and quality photocopies

\$10.00 for six issues or calendar year.

\$2.00 for single issue

Shipping charges: \$2.00 for first 6 issues, \$1.00 for each additional six issues or portion thereafter, \$5.00 maximum on any order. Limited quantities available. Refunds for those not available. Donations of back issues appreciated.



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What Is It?

(Editor's Note: Club member Don Glickstein has written in with the following questions.)

I've been collecting Alaska for a while—postal cards with non-philatelic uses—but I was wondering if any *Alaska Philatelist* readers could shed light on some longstanding questions I have:

1) I see a lot of covers that are “emergency” air mail or dog sled routes. Since the covers seem philatelic, how does a collector know exactly when an emergency run is going to be made? Are dog-sled routes and emergency air flights really just fantasy covers?

2) A lot of covers that clearly aren't philatelic with Alaska cancels are addressed to West Coast Lumbermen and the Alaska Sportsman. What's the story on these, and who saved them for posterity?

Any info can be forwarded to:

Don Glickstein

1300 University Street, #1G

Seattle, WA 98101-9823

email: dglicks1@earthlink.net

Follow-up to question from last issue

(Editor's Note: John Spicer shares this letter he received from Hal Vogel on his questions from the last issue.)

Dear Mr. Spicer:

Relative to your inquiry in the current TAP concerning your Rogers/Post commemorative flight cover, I provide the following about what precipitated this even i.e. memorial erection and its dedication) from the entry I have prepared for the Polar flight section of an upcoming volume of the American Airmail Catalogue.

1935, August 15: Post-Rogers Arctic Flight Crash.

Record aviator Wiley Post with passenger, financial supporter and entertainer Will Rogers, killed in crash August 15 on take-off after a stop at Walakpa Lagoon, near Barrow, Alaska, during a planned flight from Seattle to Europe via Siberia. Pleasure flight also supposedly had commercial Arctic route survey flight objective. Modified Lockheed Orion 9E (#195)



with pontoons departed Seattle, August 7, flying via Juneau, Alaska (August 7), Dawson, Yukon Territory, Canada (August 9), Aklavik, Northwest Territories, Arctic Canada (August 10), Hershchel Island, N.W.T., and Fairbanks, Alaska (12 August), diversion to Anchorage and Palmer, Alaska (August 14) before returning to Fairbanks for the fatal continuation (August 15) to Barrow. Group from Hillsboro, Texas, USA, arrived Barrow August 3, 1938, to erect memorial, dedicated August 15.

No flown mail known. Number of telegrams sent en route and possibly some mailed communications. Variety of commemorative memorial cover servicings, including Juneau, November 4, 1935, July 28, 1936 and Barrow, August 15, 1953. Memorial monument erection party sponsored printed cached cover cancelled Barrow, August 15, 1938, and printed two-page “Will Rogers-Wiley Post/Memorial Expedition” headed explanatory enclosure.

I trust this will enable you to better understand and appreciate that piece of Alaska and polar aerophilately that you are fortunate to have.

FYI: Wiley Post already was a famous pioneer-era aviator, who already had flown several significant record flights, including some with a polar element. His passenger on this fateful flight was an equally famous American, Will Rogers, who was considered one of the most well known individuals in the USA then, being one of its most popular entertainers. The entertaining cowboy from Oklahoma has a warm, deprecating humor that appealed to most who experienced it.

Their loss during this flight was a national tragedy.

Gold Nugget

At the height of the gold rush, a gang of con men operated in Skagway under the leadership of Soapy Smith. Just as the Skagway promoters used the avalanche to their advantage, Dyea civic promoters used stories about Soapy and his gang to encourage stampeders to bypass Skagway.

One of Soapy's best cons involved his “telegraph office.” Recent arrivals were greeted by men who offered to send telegrams to their families for only \$5. Most people did not look behind the “telegraph office” to notice that the wires ended a few yards out.

What Is It?

Gold Nugget

“Klondikers”

Many of the early stampeders were tragically ill prepared for their dangerous odyssey. They carried few supplies and brushed aside warnings of doom. Sadly, some of the poorly outfitted voyagers died of exposure or starvation. The North West Mounted Police responded to that loss of life by insisting that every stamper who crossed the passes into Canada bring in a ton of supplies--enough to see him or her through a year in the Yukon.

What was in that ton of supplies stampeders carried over the mountains? They brought tents, stoves and cooking utensils, rope and saws, blankets and warm clothing, medical supplies and food. Merchants and newspapers published lists of suggested supplies. Among the foods individuals were advised to bring were 350 pounds of flour, 100 pounds of dried fruits, 50 pounds of salt, 50 pounds each of rolled oats, corn meal and coffee, 100 pounds of sugar, 25 pounds of evaporated potatoes, 25 pounds of dried beef, and 50 pounds of salt pork.

Everyone wanted to make money off of the stampeders. Merchants were quick to exploit the name “Klondike.” The word, soon synonymous with unimaginable wealth, was slapped on every product imaginable. Everyday supplies such as blankets or boots, once stamped “Klondike,” quickly sold out. The stampeders also took hold of the name, proudly calling themselves “Klondikers.”

Alaska Pacific Express History Project

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The Alaska Pacific Express Company was incorporated in 1896 and soon became involved in transporting express goods associated with the Klondike gold rush in The Yukon. That activity was followed by their participation in the Nome gold rush at the turn of the Century. Throughout its existence this company expanded its express services into many towns in Alaska south of the Arctic Circle, in Yukon Territory near the Yukon River and tributaries, and in the western parts of British Columbia. The Alaska Pacific Express Company contracted with many different transportation companies during its existence—railroad, steamship, stage line, and dog team—to move their consigned express material over approximately 15,000 miles of Alaskan, British Columbian, Pacific Ocean, Washington State, and Yukon land and water routes. In early 1911 the Alaska Pacific Express Co., went out of business and its offices and routes were replaced by Wells Fargo and Co.

Relatively little historical information has heretofore been written about the Alaska Pacific Express Company, but this lack of published data is about to be resolved and supplied. We are collecting scans and photocopies of Alaska Pacific Express artifacts to use in a report being generated about the history of this company. Contemporary items acquired so far that show this express company's name in various formats include state records, postal history covers, express labels, office building photographs, window

call cards, complimentary passes, express receipts, office letters and memos, gold shipment photographs, waybill record logs, express carriers and routes, and magazine and newspaper articles and advertisements.

Of particular interest to this author is the goal to provide an interesting discussion with illustrations regarding this express company's postal history. This topic will be divided into three categories of covers. First, those bearing the Alaska Pacific Express Company envelope frank.



Figure 1. 1898 envelope frank (enlarged).

Second, other covers that contain company corner cards. And hopefully last, covers that are specifically addressed to the Alaska Pacific Express Company, of which none have surfaced to date.

The only complimentary frank was initially issued by the Alaska Pacific Express Company in 1898 and is shown in Figure 1. This frank was printed on government, two-cent stamped envelopes (SC# U311) for the purpose of transmitting letters or papers of no particular value, by express.

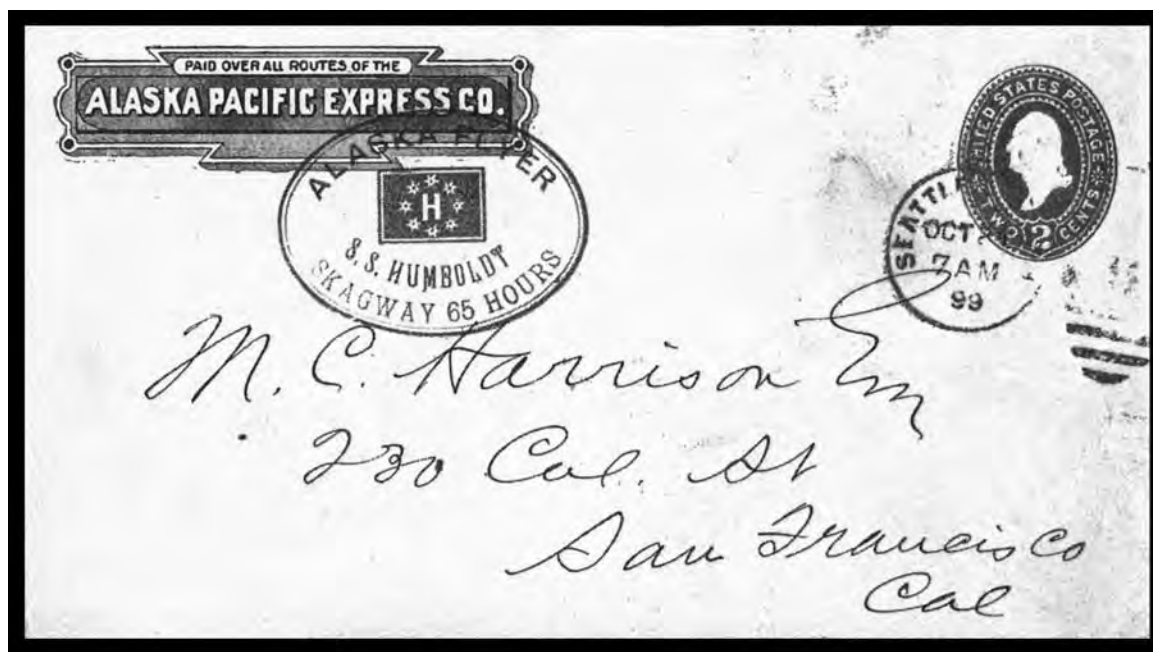


Figure 2. Alaska Pacific Express envelope frank used in 1899. Courtesy Bob Collins

Alaska Pacific Express History Project (continued)

An 1899 franked express cover is shown in Figure 2. Patrons who used this franked envelope were cautioned by the Alaska Pacific Express not to use them to forward money or valuables. The Figure 2 cover has a S. S. Humboldt ship's cancel on the frank that shows it was transported by an Alaska Flyer steamer from its original consignment location (perhaps Skagway) to Seattle where it was placed into the U. S. Mail for delivery to San Francisco.

Census Item	POD Cancel Date	Cancel City/Location	Addressed Destination	Auction & Lot
1	April 16, 1898	San Francisco, Cal.	San Francisco, Cal.	Harmer 1/14/77, Lot 431
2	May 6, 1898	Portland, Ore.	New York City	Siegel 12/16/53, Lot 520
3	May 12, 1898	Portland, Ore.	New York City	Siegel 1/13/71, Lot 745
4	July 17, 1898	Portland, Ore.	San Francisco, Cal.	----
5	Oct. 24, 1899	Seattle, Wash.	San Francisco, Cal.	----
6	Nov. 6, 1899	Seattle & Skagway RPO	San Francisco, Cal.	Harmer 1/14/77, Lot 432
7	July 17, 18??	Portland, Ore.	Unknown	Fox 8/15/66, Lot 162

Table I. Census of Alaska Pacific Express Franked Covers.

The tabulation in Table I records the other Alaska Pacific franked covers that are presently known to the author. Note that Census Item 5 is illustrated in Figure 2. We hope that more of these franked covers are in collector's hands and if reported, they can be recognized by adding their characteristics to this table prior to final publication. It is also hoped that complete illustrations of many of the Census covers can be obtained for publication.

The only recorded, corner card versions of Alaska Pacific Express covers are shown in Figures 3 and 4. The Figure 3 cover was sold in Richard Frajola's, September 10-11, 1988, Auction and only the catalog image is presently known to the author. The Alaska Pacific Express, blue rectangular logo was used for the corner card on this "EXPRESS BUSINESS" envelope that was canceled in Seward, Alaska on December 10, 1905. The illustrated cover is truncated a little across the bottom, and the presence of any markings on the back of this cover are unknown.

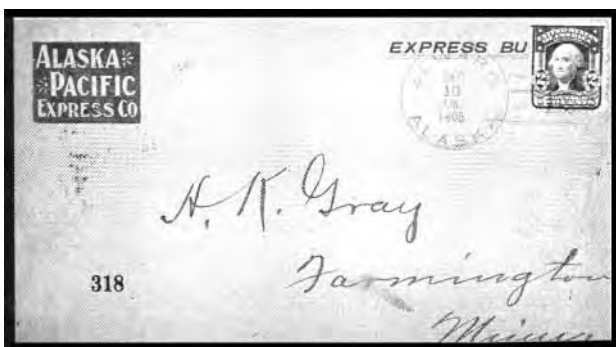


Figure 3. Express business envelope used in 1905.

The Figure 4 cover bears a more conventional corner card in the form of a return address to the company in Portland, Oregon. This cover was canceled in Portland on February 16, 1900.



Figure 4. Company envelope with the General Manager's corner card. Courtesy Bill Sammis

The complete report about the history of the Alaska Pacific Express Company is slated to be published in the Western Express upon completion, or soon thereafter. Subsequent to that initial declaration, the report will be offered to the The Alaskan Philatelist for publication. The purpose of this short article is to apprise the Alaska Collectors' Club of the status of this project and to solicit candidate postal history information about the Alaska Pacific Express Company from the membership for use in the report.

Also, any other related historical information concerning the Alaska Pacific Express would be gladly received. Please email your relevant information as a 200 dpi scan (minimum), color JPEG scans to the author at bhmexp@digital.net. Or alternatively, send color (if possible) photocopies to P. O. Box 33236, Indialantic, FL 32903. All help is gratefully appreciated, contributions will be acknowledged and contributor's material, if used, will be credited (or withheld if desired) within the published report. Thank you in advance for your valuable assistance.

State Postal History Registry

The National Postal Museum's State Postal History Registry is up and running. The Alaska Collectors Club is listed as primary contact for the Alaska part of the site. The registry is located at:

<http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/statepostalhistory/index.html>

Member Questionnaire for Newsletter Article

We're going to try a different tack with this feature. Here is the questionnaire, so now everyone can fill it out and send it in for publication in the newsletter. Please take a few minutes and send this in. We'd love to feature all our members in the newsletter. This is an especially important feature in a club with no regularly scheduled meetings. We will need three things from you:

- 1) this sheet with you filled in answers (add other sheets as necessary),
- 2) a recent photo of you (prefer clear, well- focused and good contrast photos), and
- 3) a color photocopy of your favorite piece of Alaskan Postal History.

Please drop all those things in the mail back to me at: Angela Watson • 5519 E. Mezzanine Way • Long Beach, CA 90808.
Thanks!

1. Please list your name place of residence and age: _____

2. What is your occupation? _____

3. How did you become a stamp collector? _____

4. What about Alaska Philately interests you the most? _____

5. What specialties within Alaska Philately do you collect? _____

6. What other countries or areas do you collect? _____

7. What other philatelic study groups or organizations are you a member of? _____

8. Tell us about your favorite piece of Alaskan Postal History (include the color copy so we can scan and add to your article).

9. Anything else you want to tell us about yourself (other hobbies, interests, favorite curse word, etc?)

Alaska's First Free Mail Delivery: circa 1900

by Fred Lockley

Getting to Nome

There may be more "wanderlust" in my blood than is good for me. Possibly the blood of some remote ancestor, some hardy Norseman or adventurous Viking, is cropping out. Certain it is, however, that travel and adventure have a fascination for me. "Nome," there was magic in that name. It was a word to conjure with. What dreams of treasure and adventure it called forth.

A telegraphic request to the Postmaster General secured for myself and a brother letter carrier a ninety days' leave of absence from our duties as letter carriers at Salem, Oregon, which was later renewed for an additional ninety days.

A score or more residents of Salem, formed a society which we called the Salem-Nome Society. The object of this Society was to help each other if need arose, and need did arise on various occasions.

On the 26th of May, 1900, our vessel, *The Nome City*, cast loose from the wharf at Portland, steamed down the picturesque Columbia, and next morning, crossing the bar at Astoria, we headed northward for Cape Nome on the shore of Bering Sea.

During our trip to the Far North, our vessel was caught in the ice and we spent day after day trying to find leads that would guide us to open water. We saw numerous walrus and seal; also a polar bear with its cub on the ice. On our way North, we rescued the crews of two vessels, *The Hunter* and *The Eclipse*, one of them having been wrecked on Cape Romanoff. Finally, we made our way to where *The Roanoke*, "The Treasure Ship," was trapped in the ice. As it was a larger vessel than *The Nome City*, it broke its way through the floating ice and we followed in its wake.

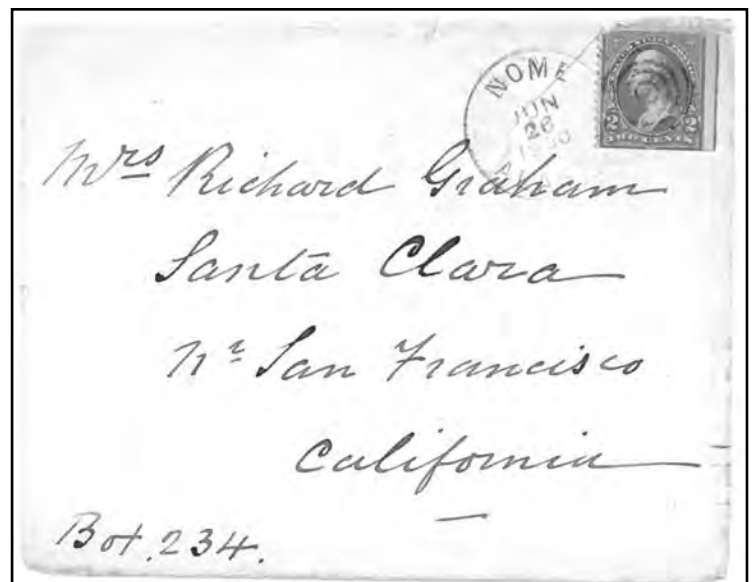
Twenty-three days after leaving Portland, we were eagerly scanning what looked like heavy blocks of ice on the shore. In a few hours we were so near that with the naked eye we could distinguish an unbroken line of white upon the beach near the water's edge. Speculation was rife. Some thought it surf; others were quite positive it was ice piled up along the shore. An examination with glasses disclosed the fact that it was nothing more or less than a line of tents, several deep, extending up and down the beach for many miles. Toward the center of the camp some frame buildings were to be seen, but in all other directions it was a city of tents. There were thousands of them, and they made a scene not often witnessed, and never to be forgotten. A flurry of snow brought to us the realization that this was the land of "cold" as well as the land of "gold."

We cast anchor about a mile off shore in the midst of a large fleet. Vessels of every description were here, from the humble schooner to the huge eighteen-knot steamer. Next day lighters put out to the ship and most of the passengers were taken ashore. Our vessel, soon after its arrival, became very shorthanded, most of the crew quitting work to try their fortunes on the beach. In consequence, our baggage and freight was much delayed in getting ashore. Men, whose tents and other camp equipage was in

the hold, had to sleep on the damp sand of the beach, in many cases for a week or ten days before their freight was landed, which resulted in their contracting severe colds.

To one who has never witnessed a mining stampede it is hard to convey a correct impression of the conditions. We stepped from the rowboat to the lighter, from which a plank led to the shore. Along the water front for a mile the freight was piled from ten to twenty feet high, the pile commencing within twenty feet of the water's edge and extending forty or fifty yards back towards the tundra. It reminded one of some gigantic anthill, and how the human ants were swarming over the pile. Lighters were being unloaded by long lines of men wearing hip rubber boots, who waded out to the loaded barges, staggering back with heavy loads. Others were sorting over the vast accumulation of freight of every description in search of their own belongings. The narrow strip of sand between the sea and the freight was thronged with men with stretchers or packstraps, carrying freight and baggage. Dog teams, consisting of eight or ten Huskie or Malemute dogs hitched tandem, were straining at their collars to drag their carts through the soft and yielding sand. Men with push carts were good naturedly contending for the right of way; and here and there a team of horses and wagon were coining money for the owner by carrying trunks at \$2 each, or hauling freight at \$10 an hour. Added to the confusion were the hoarse commands of the lighter bosses to their men, and the "Gangway there," or "Mush on" of the drivers of dog teams.

Going from the turmoil of the beach up one block to Nome's principal street you found you had gotten into confusion worse confounded—a narrow street, ten or twelve paces from store front to store front, so crowded with humanity that one could only make his way along with considerable difficulty. It was worth a long journey to see the eager thousands who are feverishly hurrying by: Here a French count, Count Jacques de Garrets,



Alaska's First Free Mail Delivery: circa 1900 (continued)

looking as though he had just stepped out of a fashion plate, is elbowing his way past a couple of Eskimos clad in reindeer parkees and sealskin muckluks; there an old salt with his rolling gait, there a "Sour Dough" just in from the hills. Miners from all over the world are here. Two dark-eyed, swarthy-visaged Greeks pass, talking in their native tongue. The delightful brogue of the "Emerald Isle" mingles with the guttural German. Verily it is a Tower of Babel. But Greek or Irish, "Cheechacer" or "Sour Dough," broadcloth or buckskin, all are crowding through the swinging doors of the innumerable saloons. The quality of much of the Nome liquor was enough to make an ardent prohibitionist of a confirmed drunkard.

We crossed Snake River, spread our blankets on the sand in the lee of the wreck of the Joe Mathews, and got a few hours' sleep. The next day we went down the beach a few miles. We met some fellow-townsmen who told us they were only making from two dollars to three and a half to the man a day. This discouraging report was confirmed by dozens of others. "This beach is a 'has been,'" said one, "undoubtedly it was rich at first, but it has been worked and reworked several times since then, and now we are only rocking the tailings." Within three days we discovered that we would not be able to make wages on the beach. A great many others had discovered the same fact, and were applying for work unloading the lighters at a dollar an hour. Men were being refused for longshore work by the hundred, so we concluded our show there was rather slim.

Lockley's Idea

We went up to the post office to get our mail. We took our place at the foot of a double line more than a block long, and during two hours that we stood in line, I learned that business men, not being able to spare two hours to obtain their mail, would pay some one to stand in line for them, or do without it until they could spare the time. A sudden inspiration came to me. How it would shorten that long line, and how greatly it would lessen the congestion of the mail if a business delivery of mail were established. I suggested it to my partner, but he told me it could not be done, as Nome was only a fourth-class post office. However, I thought it worth trying, so we walked around to the back door of a little shanty that was doing duty as a post office, and knocked. Our knock was answered by a kindly-eyed, gray-haired gentleman, John Clum, who in response to my inquiry, told me the postmaster was in the States, but that he was in charge of the office. To him I stated my suggestion, namely, the establishment of a free delivery service. He invited us in, asked us a few searching questions relative to postal work, ascertained we were letter carriers on leave of absence, and told us to report for duty as soon as we had eaten dinner.

On our way to our camp we had to pass several alluring signs which dwelt on the merits of the dinner served within at prices ranging from two dollars and a half to five dollars. I remember one which quoted T-bone steak at three dollars and a half; another, spring chicken at five dollars. We resisted their

blandishments, and ate pork, beans and coffee at our own camp. We had each brought an old uniform, thinking it would do to mine in, so, putting on our old gray suits, we went back to the office.

Mr. Clum, during our absence, had prepared for each of a typewritten letter as follows:

*Post Office Department,
Office of Post Office Inspector.
John P. Clum, Inspector.*

A system of free delivery has been established in connection with the Nome Post Office, which will be inaugurated on a portion of Front Street and extended as conditions will permit.

The bearer (Mr. Fred Lockley, Jr.) has been appointed a clerk in the Nome Post Office, and is authorized to take the names and addresses of persons who may be entitled to service within the prescribed district.

Only those who are unable to obtain boxes in the post office will be served by the carriers.

*JOHN P. CLUM,
Post Office Inspector.
Nome, Alaska, June 21, 1900.*

Taking our notebooks, we started down Front Street to get the names of our patrons. One of the first places I entered was a restaurant. I stated my errand. The proprietor, a woman, looked incredulous, and asked, "How much are you going to tax me to bring my mail?" I told her it would be a free delivery, and no charge whatever, as the Government was paying me five dollars a day for my services. "Free Delivery! Now wouldn't that paralyze you!" she exclaimed incredulously. "Going to bring us our letters around for nothing. Well God bless Uncle Sam. That is the only thing I ever heard of in this camp that was free." Almost without exception the people offered to pay for having their mail delivered, and could scarcely credit the fact of having service rendered without cost.

The inspector had told us of the condition that existed at Dawson in the early days of the stampede there, where one was almost compelled to show the color of his money to get attention. "For the credit of the service, boys, we want no grafting here," he said, and I may say right here that his request was complied with. Not only that, but it so happened that neither my comrade, Ben Taylor, nor myself smoked or drank. This fact was a constant source of astonishment to our patrons. We had dozens of saloons on our routes. As soon as I had taken the list of names to be delivered, or later, whenever I would bring the mail, the invariable query would be, "Well, what will you take?" "Thanks, I don't care for anything," I would respond. "Take a couple of cigars then," and the barkeeper would produce a box of his best. "What! you don't smoke either," he would exclaim in astonishment as I declined the proffered cigars. One man insisted that I take something, and feeling a little thirsty, and not wishing to appear discourteous, I said, "Very well, I will

Alaska's First Free Mail Delivery: circa 1900 (continued)

take a drink of boiled water if you happen to have one handy.” The look of scorn that came over his face. He paused, studying me, evidently to see if I was in earnest, and then said, as though loath to believe the evidence of his senses, “Did you say ‘boiled water?’ Such stock as that on the shelves to choose from, and ask for boiled water! Say, I have run up against all sorts of people and a few other sorts in my time, but you, you more than take the cake; you take the whole bakery. However, it’s up to you to nominate your poison, so boiled water goes,” and he poured me a beer glass of boiled water. I did not repeat the experiment; that was my first and last drink. Thereafter, I kindly but firmly declined all liquid refreshments. I did not want the population to turn out en masse to gaze upon me as a freak, if not of the first water, at least of boiled water.

We spent the afternoon in getting the names and locations of our patrons, and in arranging them in numerical and alphabetical order. Next morning we reported at the post office, and were given several pouches of letters which had been taken from the cases to make room for later mail. Breakfast was just over in the little back kitchen, so we cleared the table and used it and the floor upon which to sort the letters, and get out those belonging to our patrons. Chairs being a minus quantity (they were pressed into service in the register and money order department when not in use in the kitchen), we improvised seats from rolls of paper. We had to abandon the table presently to allow dinner preparations to get under way. In a little room about 12 x 12 eleven clerks were working. It was a case of standing room only. This condition, however, was soon remedied by taking out the partition and removing the kitchen to a tent. We found letters for some of our patrons that had been there for months. Some individuals would have a dozen letters. The paper mail had not been opened, as there were no facilities for handling it. In conse-

quence, several tons of second, third and fourth-class matter had accumulated. We worked until 11 p.m. looking through the accumulations of old letters and getting out mail for our respective routes.

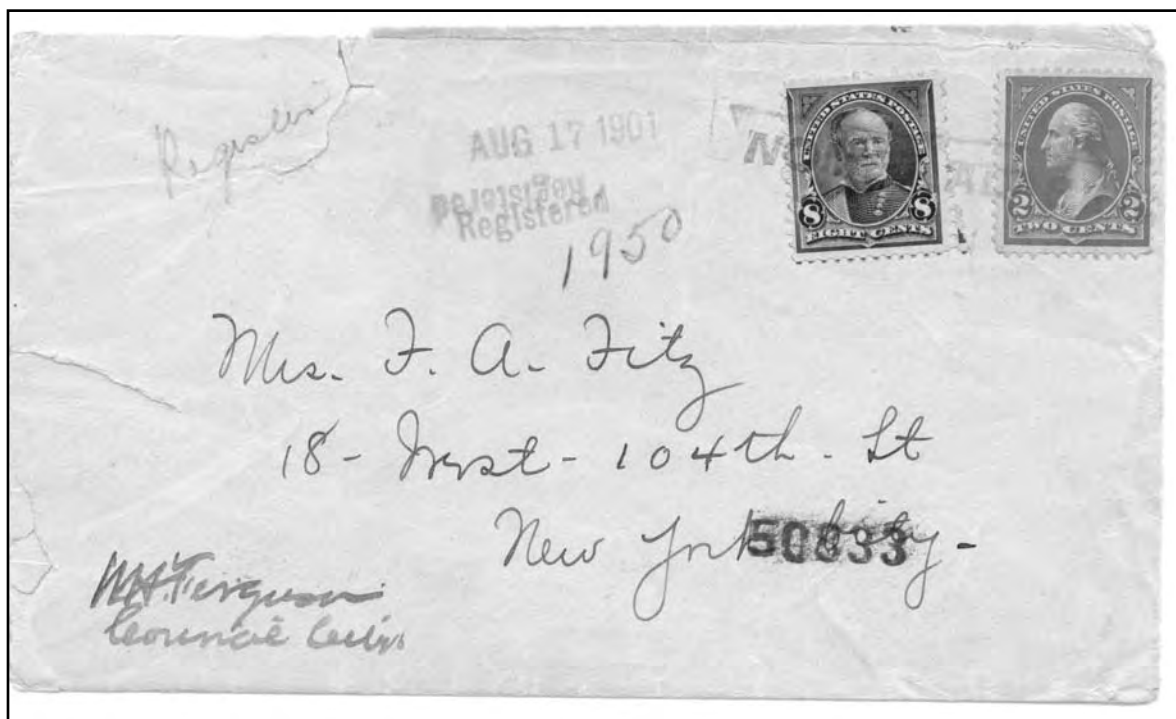
Improvising carriers’ sacks from canvas register supply sacks and valise straps, and routing our mail as best we could, we started out next morning on the first free mail delivery ever made in Alaska.

The Service Begins

The first establishment on my route was a boat anchored in Snake River, *The Minneapolis*, which was used as a private hospital and boarding house. It was one of several other similar business locations on my route. The high cost of business lots, building material and labor caused boats to be pressed into service for business purposes. The Quickstep Restaurant and Hotel was conducted on board a boat attached to the shore by a gangplank. The Pacific Cold Storage Co. employed the steamer, *Lotta Talbot*, as their place of business.

The appearance of a uniformed letter carrier delivering mail as calming in the midst of all the confusion as though home was a sight that stopped traffic almost as quickly as a fight would have done. Men bent beneath the weight of a heavy pack would stop a moment, shift their packstraps and look at me. “That is the most natural thing I have seen since I left Denver,” said one onlooker. “Blamed if it don’t make a man feel as if he was in God’s country, and that Alaska was part of the United States. Uncle Sam is a brick. I always did think so; now I know it.” They would give an approving nod and then “mush on” out over the trembling tundra in search of the elusive gold.

Before we had gone a block we were surrounded by an eager throng, giving us orders to deliver their mail to this and that place. We had to establish the rule that only those actually en-



Alaska's First Free Mail Delivery: circa 1900 (continued)

gaged in business, either as proprietor or as employee, could have their mail delivered, or we would have had half the population giving orders to have their mail left in care of different business firms. I am afraid that the rule was more honored in the breach than in the observance, however, for we would deliver mail at some saloons for a score or more of persons. When I inquired if they were all employees the answer would be, "Oh yes. They are working for us all right, but just now they are out on one of the creeks."

You often read of the postman being as an ever-welcome visitor. I never knew what that meant before. Welcome is a very mild term for the enthusiastic reception we frequently received. One man on my route was so worried by not hearing from home that he was almost ready to pull up stakes and leave. He had not heard from his wife since his arrival, and he fancied some one with a similar name was receiving his mail. I took his name, and next day handed him five letters from his wife. Welcome! Well, rather.

Speaking of persons with similar names reminds me of Peter Peterson. There were three Peter Petersons who had no middle initial, and several of that name having a middle initial, each of whom thought his correspondents might by accident have omitted his middle initial. When any one of the many Petersons called for his mail he had to tell the place from which he expected it. If he could not tell the postmark of the office or dispatch, he had to wait until the various other Peters had had an opportunity of identifying it as theirs. This rule led to the various Peter Petersons to do some wild guessing as to where their letters might be from.

The general delivery was said to be the largest in the United States, and I presume it was, as in large cities most of the mail is handled through carriers, boxes or sub-stations. In the Nome general delivery the alphabet was divided into over seven hundred divisions. For example, it required seventy boxes to case the letter "B." The most common names were assigned one or more boxes. The "Johnsons" required five separations, being divided on their initials: box one consisting of Johnsons whose initials were between A and J; the next J and M; M to P; P to S; and S to Z. Some names there were which were not apt to be duplicated: for example, such names as these, which I copied from letters in the general delivery: Ole, Yonassen, Stensfjelt and G.E. Tyszkiewicz.

When the system of free delivery had been in operation several weeks we were looking through seven pouches of letters just received by the steamer *Roanoke* from the "outside," as "God's country" was always termed. After looking through five pouches we took a rest to get our supper. During our absence the inspector and acting postmaster counted the letters I had gotten from the mail for my patrons. There were one thousand and seventy-four, and from the remaining two pouches I got several hundred more. Upon several steamer days I had taken out on my first trip more than twelve hundred letters, getting from the

same mail one or two hundred additional in going through the general delivery cases, looking up my patrons name by name from my route book.

Inside the Nome Post Office

The post office was open to the public from 8 a.m. until midnight each weekday, Sunday having somewhat shorter hours. As we could not look through the cases while they were in use, we would report at 12 o'clock at night and look through the general delivery until 6 a.m., when we would go to our tent, prepare and eat our breakfast, and at 8 o'clock, or later, start on our delivery. We were usually through by noontime. We frequently did not get to sleep until 8 or 9 o'clock, thus getting only three or four hours' sleep out of the twenty-four, so the postmaster told us not to report until 4 a.m. The night force, whose duty it was to work on the lists of "forwarded letters," "returned to writer," and "advertised" letters, worked as they found opportunity on our books, getting out mail for our patrons.

When more than one mail steamer arrived, as they frequently did, on the same day, or within a day or two of each other, we would put in long hours. For instance, we reported one morning at 4 o'clock at the paper tent, for after the first few weeks a large tent was put up near the post office in which the papers were cased by a night crew, a day force being on duty to hand them out. We worked out several sacks of papers from the cases between 4 a.m. and 6. We spent the forenoon in making a letter and paper delivery; at noon, the mail was landed from a steamer which had arrived from Seattle. We worked all afternoon looking through the newly arrived mail. Before we had finished all the pouches of "outside" mail, *The Dora* from St. Michael's arrived with several sacks of local mail, that is, Alaska mail, including Dawson and other Yukon River points. By the time we had completed the "Dora's" mail it was supper time. The acting postmaster took both carriers to his boarding place, and served us a regular banquet, including ice cream made from condensed milk. We went back to the office, routed our mail in the paper tent, and at 10:30 p.m. we started on our delivery. We were through by midnight. It did not seem so out of place to be making a midnight delivery where the daylight was continuous, and where the streets were as crowded at midnight as noonday, as it would seem at home where night-time implies darkness. From 4 a.m. until midnight--a work-day of twenty hours. Of course, this was exceptional, although on several occasions we worked eighteen or twenty hours. Usually, however, from ten to twelve hours constituted our day's work.

Whenever we had leisure on account of the non-arrival of mail steamers, we would go to the paper tent and work out papers. We built a delivery wagon from a pair of bicycle wheels mounted on a narrow steel axle, surmounted by a large drygoods box. Putting several hundred pounds of papers routed in bundles of convenient size, we would make a paper delivery several times a week. I remember one day when the rains had commenced and the streets were knee deep in mud. We were both pulling the cart

Alaska's First Free Mail Delivery: circa 1900 (continued)

when it got in a mud hole up to the hubs. We were tugging away to extricate it when a man, probably a newspaper correspondent, came up to us and said, "Hold on just a moment, boys, I want to get a picture of Nome's free delivery bogged down." He called to the proprietor of the Arctic Pharmacy who took a snap shot of us.

We often wished our comrades in the service could take a glance at us as we routed our mail. As there was no room in the post office we took it to our tent across Snake River. In lieu of a table and case we sat cross-legged on the sand and gravel floor of our tent, and would use gold pans, boxes and other makeshifts as substitutes for a case. For a routing table we would use our cots. If one made an inadvertent move the carefully laid piles of letters would, with one accord, slide toward the center of the cot, and I would find the mail for the Custom House genially fraternizing with that of the Gold Belt Dance Hall, or the S.Y.T. Co. gravely intermingling with the mail for the Yukon Saloon.

It took but a day or two for the knowledge that a free delivery had been established to become known and appreciated. Orders for the delivery of mail poured in by the score. We had to "book" them, place each new name in our route book, alphabetically arrange and verify the address given so as to place it in its proper position on our route map, and then get their mail from the general delivery. We soon had about twelve hundred patrons apiece, and, in addition to remembering their names so that we could take the letters for them from the incoming mail as we rapidly glanced at each letter before we passed it on to the box clerk, or casing clerk, we had to keep track of the changes of address which were constantly occurring.

Serving a Fluid Population

What added materially to our work was the fact that not only the individuals and firms were in constant motion like the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, but the places of business themselves were likewise not exempt. Tents gave place to frame buildings over night. When we presented ourselves with mail for the mining broker whose office on the previous day had been a tent, we found he had folded his tent and quietly stampeded to some newly discovered district or likely creek.

One such instance comes to my mind out of dozens of similar experiences. My comrade in the service received orders to deliver the mail for the Red Cross Pharmacy. It was a canvas and frame-work affair located on the north side of Front Street near the Alaska Exploration Company's store. He booked the order, delivered the mail a few days, when the whole thing disappeared. Next day I found it on my route near the "Gold Digger" office. We made the necessary corrections on our books, and I took his mail, when he again disappeared, moving to a new location on my comrade's route, and taking his house with him like a snail.

My partner booked the order and I erased it from my book. We soon lost him again and found that he had discovered a more favorable location on my side of the street, and resumed his residence there. Where one would see a tent in the forenoon there might be a building site for sale in the afternoon. That night a large force of carpenters would be put to work, and by next day a frame building would be almost ready for occupancy, cloth tackers and paper-hangers following the carpenters closely. At best the season was but short and every moment must be utilized. Most of the stores were open day and night, being run by two shifts of clerks.

A man called me into his



Alaska's First Free Mail Delivery: circa 1900 (continued)

tent one morning and asked me to deliver his mail. Next day I returned with mail for him. Imagine my surprise when I could not even locate the place where his tent had stood. I rubbed my eyes, looked up the order, got out my route map, and found the place where the tent should have been; but in its place was a frame structure upon which the carpenters were still at work. A grocer was arranging his stock. I asked him where his predecessor was. "Oh, he has mushed on," was his response. "But he told me to bring his mail here," I said. "Well, that is all right, but that was yesterday," he answered as though discussing ancient history. "I bought him out yesterday afternoon, hired a gang of carpenters and ran up this building last night, and we put our stock of goods in this morning. The man you are looking for pulled his freight for Council City this morning. I guess you had better forward his mail there." I could multiply instances, but I will only cite one more.

I delivered the mail for a second-hand man at his tent opposite the North American Trading & Transportation Company's store. As I passed along the street opposite the Barracks one forenoon someone hailed me. It was my second-hand man. He said, "Leave my mail here after this, I sold my business out last night." He had put in a stock of fruits and fancy groceries, changing not only his location but his business over night. That same afternoon I passed his way, when he again hailed me. "Hold my mail for a few days," he said. "What is up now?" I inquired. "I got a lease on this business site for fifty dollars," he answered. "This noon the Babcock Undertaking Co. offered me one hundred and fifty dollars, so I sold it and am one hundred dollars ahead of the game. I am going to auction my stuff off this evening, as he takes possession tomorrow morning." He had owned and disposed of two business enterprises within twenty-four hours, and made money on both transactions.

Faithful Carriers

It was remarkable what absolute confidence the public reposed in us. I entered a saloon one day, delivered the mail to the bar-keeper and to the men who were running the various games, such as "Black Jack," "Stud Poker," "Roulette" and "Craps" and the "Wheel of Fortune." An old gray-beard, a stranger to me, called to me. I went over to see what he wanted. "Here, son," he said, as he pushed over a pile of twenty dollar gold pieces, "I have started a little game here that is panning out pretty well. Get me a money order for one hundred dollars to send my wife in Los Angeles." I wrote down her name and address, pocketed the gold and next morning brought the man his money order. This is not an isolated case. I suppose I have bought a dozen or more money orders for men who were too busy to attend to it themselves. They would hand me fifty or one hundred dollars, throw down a silver dollar and say, "That will cover the cost of the order and pay you for your trouble."

While on my way to the post office one day I went up a side street not on my regular route. A man came to the door of his tent and motioned to me. He tried to speak but was too sick.

A spell of coughing seized him so that I had to support him to keep him from falling. His eyes were unnaturally bright, and I could see that he was a very sick man. As best he could, interrupted constantly by severe spells of coughing, he told me that he had not been able to get his mail. He was sick and alone. He had taken his place in the line and, after keeping it half an hour and having gotten nearly to the delivery window, he had become weak and fallen down, and thus lost his place. No one was allowed to ask for more than one person at a time. If he wished to ask for two persons he must take his place at the foot of the line and work up again. The sick man had no friend whom he could ask to stand in line for him, and was very anxious for his mail. Poor fellow, I felt very sorry for him. Sick, alone, possibly dying and unable to hear from home. I went back to the post office and got him his home letters of which there were more than 30. When I returned he was in bed and in a high fever. He did not seem to be able to realize what I wanted. I propped him up in bed, showed him his letters, told them they were from home and left him. Much to my surprise and pleasure he lived to get to the States.

A man stopped me as I was going in the back door of the post office one day and said he would pay me well to get his mail. I said that in justice to those who had to stand in line we were not allowed to receive money to make any "side-door deliveries." "Well, just notice if there is any mail for me, and if there is not I will be saved the bother of standing in line and waiting for it; if there is I will take my place and get it." Laughing at his persistence I asked him his name. As soon as I heard it I recognized it as the name of a man who had married a young lady of my acquaintance who, while on a protracted visit to an adjacent state, and met and married him. While I had never seen Grace's husband, I had often heard of him through his wife's relatives who lived not far from my home. In a moment or two I came out with a letter in Grace's familiar handwriting. "Well, Grace did not forget you," I said as I handed him the letter. I asked him several questions which showed a thorough familiarity with his business and the affairs of his friends and acquaintances. I left him speechless with amazement, so astonished in fact that he did not even inquire my name. I presume he is still wondering how I could tell, by looking at the handwriting on the outside of the letter, his wife's first name, the nature of his business, and the affairs of his friends and relatives. As I do not think his wife knew of my trip to Nome, I presume his natural curiosity will forever remain ungratified.

The Nome Post Office did a large business in the money order department. It is the only post office, to my knowledge, in the United States that accepted gold dust in payment for money orders, the usual price allowed for gold dust being from fifteen and a half dollars to sixteen dollars per ounce. One day a man came in, produced his "poke," poured out a quantity of gold dust on the scoop and presented an application for a money order. The gold dust did not look quite right to the money order clerk, so he called Inspector Clum and the assistant money order clerk

Alaska's First Free Mail Delivery: circa 1900 (continued)

to examine it. They did not like the looks of it, either, so a little acid was poured upon it to test its purity. Instantly heavy green fumes arose, showing that it was bogus gold dust, composed of brass and copper filings. Later a man, I think the same one, was arrested for attempting to pass some bogus dust.

Speaking of gold dust reminds me of a little instance I witnessed on the street one day. A man stepped up to dealer and made some little purchase, paying for it with gold dust. The dealer shook out more gold dust in the scoop than was necessary, and after weighing out the proper amount in payment for the purchase, he attracted the customer's attention, at the same time holding the scoop to one side and pouring out about half a teaspoon of gold dust on the ground. Then, taking the customer's pouch, he poured in the remaining gold dust, scrupulously shaking in every particle. If he had an opportunity to repeat that operation many times during the day he would have a good clean-up at nightfall, as he could readily scoop up the dirt at the side of his stand and pan it out.

Final Thoughts

By every mail the postmaster received letters from anxious mothers asking him to tell them of the whereabouts of their boys. Some of the letters were very pathetic. Another class of letters that he received were very much the opposite, they were letters from forlorn and anxious damsels enclosing their photographs and requesting the postmaster to kindly hand it to some rich miner who was contemplating matrimony.

At times there would be no opportunity of sending a remittance of surplus money order funds to Seattle, and the safe would contain fifty thousand dollars or more at a time. In view of this fact General Randall, at the request of the postmaster, stationed a guard at the rear door of the post office. Night and day one of Uncle Sam's "boys in blue" paced back and forth guarding the office.

It speaks well for the service that so little mail went astray or was lost. Great care was taken to prevent loss or delay. We received one lot of letters which had occupied several months in transit from the States. They were in a damaged condition, and were endorsed "delayed and damaged by accident at sea." Upon another occasion we received several pouches, the contents of which were water-soaked. The pouches of letters had been drenched by the surf in getting the mail ashore. The letters most damaged were laid by the stove to dry. The stamps slipped from most of the letters, and many of the envelopes were unsealed. Many of the addresses were dim and almost illegible. Those that were partially obliterated, or in danger of becoming so, were rewritten. Letters which were about to part company with their envelopes had rubber bands placed around them.

To give an idea of the amount of business transacted I will quote a few statements from the inspector's report for the month of July:

- "Twenty-three clerks were employed. This number includes the day and night general delivery force at the post office proper, as well as at the paper tent. Also the register and

money order department and the carrier force.

- A trifle over \$136,000 in money orders were issued during the month, the largest day's business being on July 23rd, when \$9,252.65 represented the cash received from money orders.
- Fifty-one pouches of letter mail, fourteen pouches of registered mail and three hundred and seventy-two sacks of papers were received during the month.
- We dispatched forty-six pouches of ordinary and registered letter mail and eighteen sacks of papers.
- 1,230 registered letters were received and 1,290 registered letters dispatched.
- \$1,051.50 worth of stamps were sold and \$1,293.91 represented the amount of cancellations during the month."

In addition to the unusual sights of Nome, the sound, also were very different from those of an ordinary city. Probably the most insistent sound was the pop, pop, pop of the gasoline launches and tugs, which were always in evidence on the waterfront. Then the ceaseless high-drawn wail of the Eskimo dogs was never lacking from the medley of sounds. Day and night one could hear the cry, "Cigars, gents, two for a quarter;" "Here's your fresh kay-ow's milk, only four bits a quart;" "Mince pies, hot mince pies;" "Here's your latest outside paper, the 'P.I.,' [*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*] only a quarter."

One who wandered down the street with his eyes open would run across many famous people: Here Lucky Baldwin with his strong bronzed face; there Captain Jack Crawford, the poet scout, with his long gray locks and fringed buckskin. Across the street Stampede Kate, famous throughout Alaska, with her short skirt and high laced boots.

Though the daylight during June and July was continuous, noonday being little if any brighter than midnight, yet the sun was out of sight for a few hours, setting about 11 p.m. and rising at half-past 2 in the morning. I find this note in my journal for June 30th:

"At 1:30 a faint tinge of pink appeared in the North. Gradually the tinge deepens to salmon and rose. At 2:27 the North is suffused with a trembling play of colors, and the sun rises over the low-lying hills, lightening up the anvil on Anvil Mountain. Now it floods the whole scene with a prodigal profusion of nature's gold-sunshine. The Bering Sea responds to its caress, trembling and sparkling in its robe of sea green and molten silver. The stately ships nod and bow as they ride at anchor in the offing. Far out can be seen a plume of smoke made by a steamer bearing disappointed treasure-seekers whose motto, 'dust or bust,' has turned out to be the latter, and who are now as anxious to sight home as a few short weeks ago they were to sight Nome."

Fred Lockley was a postal clerk in Nome in 1900 and was also a correspondent for the Nome Nugget newspaper. Later, he continued his writing career with the Oregon Journal, New York Herald and London Globe. He passed away in 1958.