



Alaska Jewish Museum Spring / Summer 2024 Newsletter

Greetings Members!

This past winter was very challenging in Alaska. Here in Anchorage, we were up 104.3 inches of snow before the end of January!

I am happy to say that here at the museum, we have had a very productive year. I hope our website visitors will enjoy perusing our new virtual exhibit *From Purchase to Prosperity: The Jewish Founders of the Alaska Commercial Company and Their Contribution to the Acquisition of America's Last Frontier*. It not only tells the story of the ACC as a fur trading enterprise at the time of Russia's departure from Alaska but details its role in the development of the region in the absence of any US civil government. The company administered justice, allocated dock space, tracked sea ice and daily weather conditions, and kept the peace. All the above was in addition to working with the indigenous peoples; running nearly 40 steamers, barges, and paddle-wheel river vessels; and operating 86 company stores. These developments laid a solid foundation for the future of the new territory.

This exhibit engages the visitor through five 3-Dimensional images, two slideshows of fur fashions, and video from the authors' interviews with former Alaska Commercial Company COO, Rex Wilhelm; it showcases government reports, letters, newspaper articles, and many never-before-seen historical photographs. Among them the E.K. Pedler Collection of early Unalaska company buildings. A group of watercolors painted by Henry Elliott show the Aleutians and the fur seals as a single beautiful landscape.

It also addresses as well how the ACC founders - steeped in the tenets of Judaism: charity, education, and social justice - embedded those values in the operations of the corporation. The San Francisco founders were noted for their philanthropy; they ran their businesses and the ACC as a family business that included their customers as such. The evidence from the historical record, that we rigorously researched, of the Unangan (Aleut) peoples in the exhibit demonstrates how well they were treated with housing, schooling, and employment at fair wages. In addition, our new website exhibit has won the Alaska Jewish Museum the 2023 Alaska Historical Society's Elva R. Scott Local Historical Society Award!

We hope you will take the opportunity to visit us in person this season. At this very difficult time in the world, we stand as a bulwark against anti-Semitism and a promoter of tolerance in Alaska.