Exciting Changes for Tongass Historical Museum

Centennial Building First Floor Renovations

Built in 1967 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Alaska purchase, Ketchikan’s Centennial Building has been the longtime home of the Tongass Historical Museum and City of Ketchikan Museum Department. In addition to showcasing Ketchikan’s vibrant history through exhibits and public programs, the Centennial Building houses and safeguards Ketchikan’s treasured history in the form of artifacts, photographs, archives, and other important historical items. The building’s proximity to Ketchikan Creek correlates directly with the town site’s origins as a generations-old Tlingit fish camp. The creek area later developed into a salmon saltery and contributed to the booming fishing industry that fueled our young town. The Centennial Building stands today not only as a symbol of the Alaska Purchase but also of the stories reflecting our shared heritage that inspire our community pride.

As the building celebrates its 50th anniversary next year, we are excited to begin remodeling the facility into one that will carry the Museum Department into a bright future. The need for an expanded Tongass Historical Museum was first recognized by the Ketchikan City Council in 1985. Over the subsequent decades, the need for an improved and larger facility manifested as three separate proposals for new museums, which were not endorsed. After co-occupying the building since 1969, the Ketchikan Public Library moved to its new location in 2012 and the Museum gained full occupation of the building. Subsequently, the City Council committed to the Centennial Building as the long-term site for the Tongass Historical Museum and Museum Department, and directed staff and the Museum Advisory Board to develop a prioritized list of projects to improve the building for museum operations.

Museum staff and the Museum Advisory Board developed a comprehensive Capital Improvement Program to responsibly and incrementally address the needs of the aging Centennial Building while adhering to museum best practices. The 2015 City of Ketchikan Capital Improvement Program budget allocated funds for the professional design of a renovated first floor including expanded exhibit galleries, ADA compliant restrooms, support areas, and a public program space.

From August through December 2015, Museum staff, Museum Advisory Board members, the City of Ketchikan Public Works Department, and members of the public worked with Ketchikan-based Welsh Whiteley Architects to develop a preliminary conceptual design for a renovated first floor. On December 17, 2015, the City Council approved the conceptual design endorsed by the Museum Advisory Board and Museum staff. In light of current budget constraints, the proposed design minimizes renovation expenses by working within the existing building envelope and retains all structural elements that are cost-prohibitive to alter while still accommodating expanded accessible bathrooms and better serving all museum functions.

The 2016 capital improvement budget allocates $979,000 to cover the proposed scope of work inclusive of $388,000 in Commercial Passenger Vessel funds dedicated to the accessible restrooms, a critical need for downtown Ketchikan during the busy summer visitor season.

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The hundreds of salmon labels in the archives of the Tongass Historical Museum present historians with countless opportunities to study the packing, marketing, and distribution of canned salmon from the 1880s to the present. The labels are often works of art in and of themselves, with colorful depictions of flowers, birds, sunrises, beaches, and of course the vibrant, leaping salmon that is a fixture of every brand.

At least one label in the collection, however—Red Waves, a brand packed by the New England Fish Company at its Ketchikan cannery in the 1940s and 50s—is so nondescript as to barely merit a passing glance. Just a solid red background with crashing waves in silhouette and the brand name in a wavy font, the label might not appear particularly significant either historically or artistically. But a closer look reveals the inner workings of the canned salmon industry and the packers’ constant efforts to increase their market share.

Although founded in Boston in 1868, the New England Fish Company, or NEFCO for short, began operations in the Pacific Northwest in 1894. With offices in Seattle and Vancouver, and canneries scattered throughout the region from the Columbia River to Bristol Bay, NEFCO quickly established itself as one of the largest seafood companies in the Pacific.

By the mid-1930s, NEFCO had a number of high-selling brands of Alaska canned salmon, including Belleanna, Seacraft, and Pink Beauty. As the company packed more and more Alaska reds, executives wanted to add a new brand—one that had “Red” in its name. NEFCO would quickly learn that other packers not only had the same idea, but also beat them to the trademark office.

In December 1935, after brainstorming dozens of possible names from Red Acorn to Red Wolf, NEFCO executive Harry R. Beard wrote to the company’s lawyers, Synnestvedt & Lechner of Philadelphia, asking them to investigate the trademark status of their top three choices: Red Wing, Red Oak, and Red Sky.

Red Wing was definitely out. The lawyers identified no fewer than eight registrations under that name by other companies selling not just canned fish, but everything from fresh fruit to ice cream to maple syrup to corned beef.

The possibilities for Red Oak were somewhat better, but still not worth pursuing in the opinion of the lawyers. Canned fish was then being marketed by other companies under the names Oak Leaf, Oak Hill, and Council Oak.

Red Sky was also a poor choice for the same general reason. NEFCO resignedly shelved the idea of a Red-themed brand.

A decade and a half later, the company tried again. “We decided to go ahead and develop a trademark either for a red bear or red triangle,” Beard wrote to the lawyers on May 24, 1949. The summer fishing season was just weeks away, and Beard wanted to nail down a brand name as quickly as possible. He instructed artists in NEFCO’s marketing division to mock up a few label designs so they could move quickly once the trademarks had been secured. One artist made a snap decision to change “bear” to “cub” since, as Beard later put it, “the words ‘red bear’ have a Russian flavor to them and it was thought best to get away.”

But neither Red Cub nor Red Triangle would ever see grocery store shelves for NEFCO. Variations on both names had already been trademarked by other companies. And while Red Triangle was used only to sell popcorn, not salmon, Synnestvedt & Lechner still recommended against the name.

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Renovations continued

City Council approval of the conceptual design is an exciting first step in improving the look and function of the Centennial Building as the home for the Tongass Historical Museum and Museum Department. Museum staff, the Museum Advisory Board, and Public Works continue to work with Welsh Whiteley Architects to prepare a 50% schematic design. Once approved by the City Council in spring 2016, the Centennial Building first floor renovation project will accept contractor bids with the intent to begin renovation construction in the fall of 2016. During the construction period, the Centennial Building will be closed to the public and will reopen in summer 2017.

This initial remodel provides an excellent foundation for the development of a permanent exhibit of Ketchikan’s history as well as a larger temporary gallery for rotating or traveling exhibits. We look forward to involving the community in this exciting next phase.


Salmon Can Labels continued

Red Duck was the next to fall. Then Red Fox, Red Swan and Red Ball all went down in quick succession. “We much regret,” the lawyers explained to a frustrated Beard, “that we have run up a blind alley on so many of these searches involving word combinations and/or symbols incorporating RED, but suppose that is practically inevitable in view of the characteristics of the product with which we are here concerned.”

Finally, the team found a winner. “It does not seem to us that there is any confusing similarity between Red Wave and any of the references found to date,” wrote Raymond Synnestvedt on June 30, 1949. “There are several ‘Wave’ combination marks, including White Wave, Silver Wave, Ocean Wave, Polar Wave, Top Wave, and Wave-Kist, but none of these is in our opinion likely to involve confusion with Red Wave.” Synnestvedt advised NEFCO to choose a label design markedly different from those of the other brands so as to further distance themselves from any possible infringement claim.

U.S. trademark law required that before a mark could be registered, interstate commerce involving the product had to take place. On September 27, 1949, NEFCO accordingly shipped twelve cans of Red Waves canned salmon from Seattle to the Norman P. Sanborn Co. of Providence, Rhode Island. Sanborn promptly paid the invoice and included a note that NEFCO later submitted as part of its trademark application. “We are pleased to acknowledge receipt of shipment,” stated Sanborn. “The trade reaction is fine and we have hopes of building some nice business.”

Red Waves canned salmon remained an active trademark for NEFCO until the company, beleaguered by dismal sales, low fish prices, and poor corporate management, filed for bankruptcy in May 1980.

The Red Waves label, like hundreds of others securely filed away in the Museum’s archives, is a tangible artifact that embodies this history in its admittedly bland design. Every salmon label at the Museum has such a history behind it. Let’s hope there are researchers out there who are willing to dig into the backstory of each one and recover a small piece of our past.

—Ross Coen, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Washington Dept. of History

KIC Scholarship Opportunities for Native Arts Studies Program Students

In January 2016, Ketchikan Indian Community (KIC) Council voted to make opportunities to learn traditional arts and culture a top priority by expanding the Esther Shea Scholarship program. Many Native Arts Studies Program students at the Totem Heritage Center have greatly benefited from the additional scholarships for enrollment in classes in Northwest coast carving and weaving. In addition to increasing the number of awards given, KIC is currently awarding Esther Shea scholarships to residents of Saxman as well as Ketchikan in order to ensure all KIC members are able to benefit, and is also assisting students with class material fees.

KIC has also begun a weekly Family Craft Night on Tuesdays during the school year, providing another opportunity for students of all ages to participate in traditional Native arts and culture.

For more information on scholarships and KIC Family Craft Night, call 228-9397 or e-mail sskan@kictribe.org.
Ketchikan Museums
Tongass Historical Museum
Totem Heritage Center
629 Dock Street
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

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Now on Display Through September 2016!

Welcome to the Ketchikan Museum’s Spring Classes Program!

**Spring Classes**

**Tool Making for Carvers**
Jake Beimler, March 25 - April 9, 2016

**Tool Sharpening**
Woody Anderson, April 15 - 16, 2016

**Handmade Adze**
Steve Brown

**Going Digital!**

If you’re receiving this newsletter by mail, would you consider signing up for our electronic newsletter? Ketchikan Museums will be transitioning to a monthly email newsletter over the course of 2016 to better serve you and our budget! While we are happy to continue to send the newsletter to you by mail, switching to an electronic version saves printing and mailing costs.

To sign up for our electronic newsletter, email staceyw@city.ketchikan.ak.us or "Subscribe to the Museum Mailing List" at www.KetchikanMuseums.org.

**Then & Now**

Isabella Schreckhise and Mary Ida Henrikson connect at the Then & Now exhibit opening reception. Isabella’s family recreated a historic photo of the Henrikson family on the dock — Isabella posed as young Mary!

**Totem Heritage Center and Tongass Historical Museum admission is FREE for locals and their visitors!**

www.KetchikanMuseums.org
www.totemheritage.org

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Daily
May-September

369 Dock Street
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901
(907) 225-5900

Summer Hours

Museum Department and Ketchikan Museums collect, preserve, interpret and creatively share the history and culture of our region to serve, educate, engage and enrich our community.

**Museum Director**
Lacey Simpson

**Administrative Secretary**
Tara Hofmann

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**Registrar**
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**Senior Curator of Programs**
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**City of Ketchikan**

www.KetchikanMuseums.org
www.TongassHistoricalMuseum.org

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