

The Valdez Museum & Historical Archive Celebrates Alaska's 50 Years of Statehood in 2009

In 2009, the Valdez Museum and Historical Archive is gearing up for Alaska's celebration of 50 years of statehood. To celebrate the occasion, the museum is erecting a plaque honoring the memory of William A. Egan, Alaska's first State Governor, born and raised in Valdez.

Installation of the plaque will be funded by proceeds from sales of 600 commemorative medallions, commissioned by the state of Alaska in a limited supply of 7,000. The coins are a recast of the original statehood medallion minted in 1959; they exhibit the Alaska State Seal on one side and the outline of Alaska superimposed on a map of the Lower 48 on the other.

Also in celebration of statehood, this summer the museum will present a double exhibit: "Creating Alaska: the Origins of the 49th State", a traveling exhibit from the University of Alaska; and an in-house exhibit about the illustrious career of Anthony J. Dimond, another Valdezian who made history. "Creating Alaska" was launched in 2005 to celebrate the 50-year anniversary of Alaska's Constitutional Convention, a historic gathering of delegates to craft the State Constitution.

The Constitution was a document that was hailed as an exemplary model, and has stood the test of time as Alaska graduated from a territory into a state.

Anthony Dimond was influential in the passing of the Constitution and a strong advocate for statehood. The godfather of Egan, Dimond arrived in Alaska as a prospector in 1904 and began law practice in Valdez in 1913.

After serving briefly with the Third

Judicial Division Court, Dimond became Mayor of Valdez and a member of the Alaska Territorial Senate. Dimond is perhaps best known for his stint as an Alaska Territory Delegate in the United States House of Representatives from 1933-1945. During that time,

Dimond was a strong champion for statehood, and was prescient in many Alaskan matters such as the need for militarization in Alaska – which Dimond advocated prior to the outbreak of World War II.

The Valdez Museum's upcoming exhibit will illustrate the highlights of Dimond's career, as told through the museum's collection of over 6,000 photographs, objects and documents from the collection of Dimond's secretary Dorothy Awes, herself a representative at the Alaska Constitutional Convention.

The Dimond collection is part of the museum's impressive collection and archives of over 60,000 photographs, documents, and objects that document the story of Valdez dating from pre-European Native cultures, to the town's gold rush origins in 1898, up to the present day.

In 2007, the museum installed brand-new climate controlled storage equipped with efficiency shelving for easy retrieval. Since then, the museum has engaged in an intensive collection management program to ensure that this extensive collection will be properly catalogued and stored for generations to come.

The museum's collection is onstantly growing, thanks in large part to the many visitors who have donated materials.



Replica of the original statehood medallion minted in 1959. Only 7,000 available in 2009. Photo courtesy Valdez Museum.



Over 60,000 photographs, documents, and objects are catalogued in the Museum's new climate controlled storage area.



Above: Circa 1940, Anthony Dimond, Alaska's Territorial Delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, confers with his colleagues. Right: During WWII, Anthony Dimond discusses the path of airplanes en route to Russia via Alaska as part of the United States' Lend-Lease Program. Photos courtesy Valdez Museum.

Some highlights of 2008's acquisitions include ski poles owned and used by World Extreme Skiing competitor Dean Cummings; a homemade brass cowbell, found on the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail; a collection of 1940s photographs of the Dayville cannery and Alaskan roadhouses; an 1897 cookbook published for Alaskan prospectors; and a felt pennant made in the 1910s advertising nearby Fort Liscum.

This year's statehood celebration has driven much of the collecting, as the museum has acquired coins, stamps, and all manner of statehood memorabilia produced over the years.

Sometimes the archive is added to by the same people who contact the museum to do research – each year, scholars, filmmakers, and gold rush descendants visit the archives for a hands-on encounter with history. The collaboration between the museum and its contributors has helped to make the collection one that is dynamic and speaks to the history and experiences of the people of Valdez and the surrounding communities.

Any time of year, the Valdez Museum and Historical Archive is a must-see attraction.

The museum is open and stays active year round through exhibits, preservation and restoration of historic artifacts, historic research, education and public programs.



In 2009, Copper Valley Electric Association will also celebrate it's 50th year. CVEA is proud to have provided service to members since Alaska's statehood in 1959.

For more information on the Valdez Museum, call 835-2764 or visit www.valdezmuseum.org.