

The States Pictorial

KNIK FILE

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STATEHOOD



The States Pictorial

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WHOOPS!

The following credits were inadvertently omitted in last month's issue. Our apologies to Doc's Photo Lab. The pictures on pages 7, 11, 13, 14 and 15 are his. Roger Fisher took the shot on page 16. Jacob Pike took those on 28 and 29. The picture of Ed Sullivan was through courtesy of Ed Sullivan. Jack Hutchinson took the picture of the Girl of the Month on page 34.



COVER PICTURE

Our cover picture for this issue was planned and photographed by staff photographer Reginald Hendricks. Golden star is symbolic of the addition of Alaska to Union.

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Beginning history of old Knik and Wasilla
as related in letter from G. Stanley Herning
to Walter Teeland, April 28, 1953

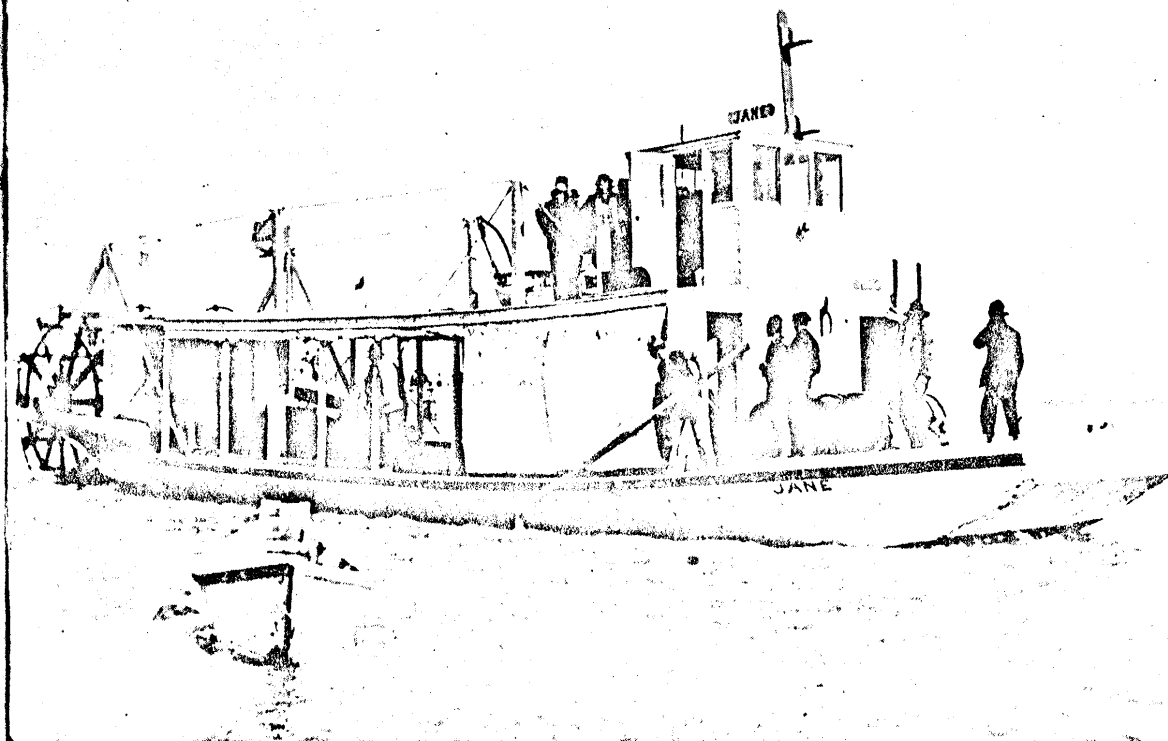
OLD KNIK

Knik was originally an Indian village, and some time in the early 90s the Alaska Commercial Company established a store and trading post, with George Palmer as manager. Around 1895 the U. S. Army sent a small group of soldiers, under the command of Capt. Glenn, to Knik, and they built four log buildings at Soldier Creek, one mile below Knik. Their mission was to find a passable road route into the Yukon. They spent two seasons scouting through the Chickaloon district but were unable to find any easy route, so moved from Knik to the Prince William Sound region, and were to scout for a route from there. In 1898, beside the Indian village at Knik, there was only the trading post, a roadhouse, post office and a U. S. Commissioner, and a few white men who trapped and prospected.

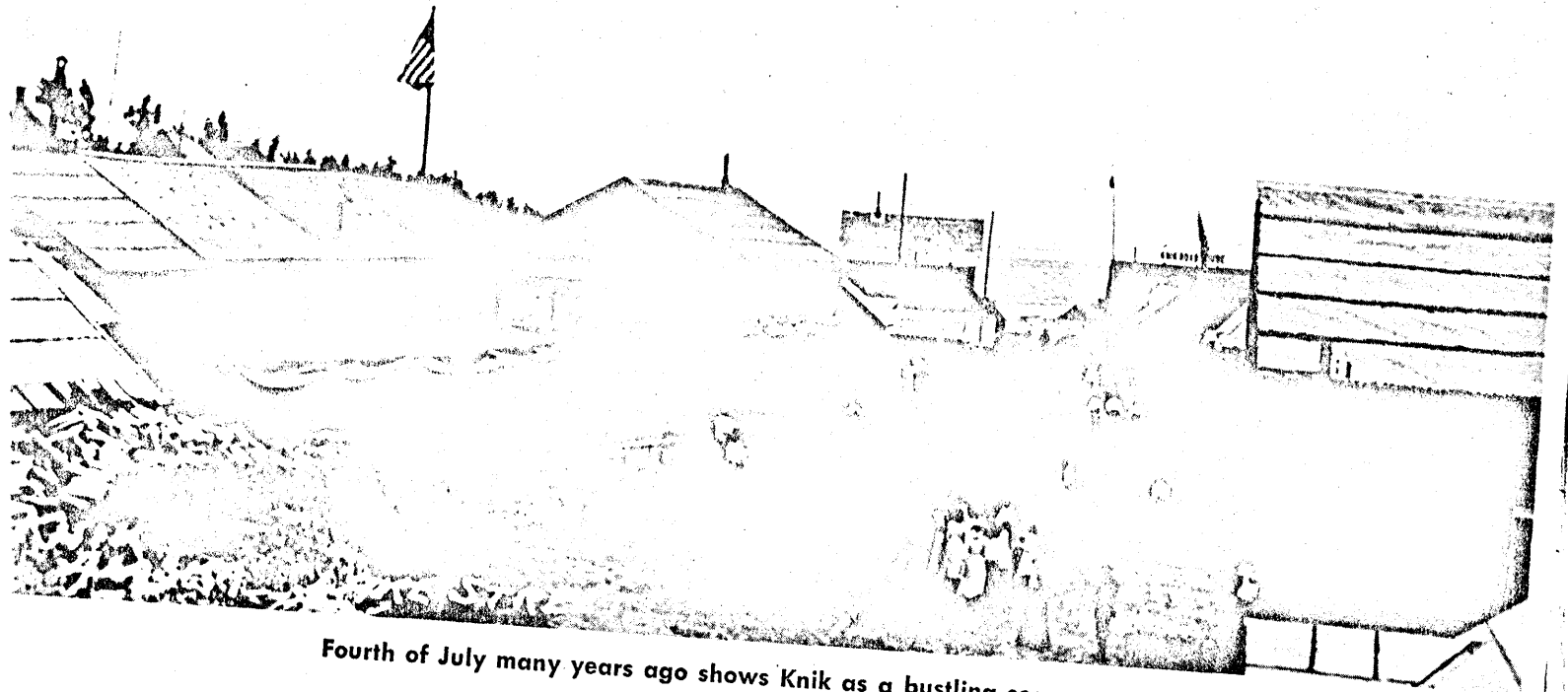
The only means of transportation to Knik in those early days was by boat in the summer months, and by dog team from the lower Inlet in the winter. The only type of early day life at Knik was, living in your cabin, with a woodburning stove, light by candles or a coal oil lamp, getting your water from the lake (Knik Lake), and packed to the cabin in buckets, reading a paper or book whenever some one came to town with any. Mail was delivered twice a year, the first boat up the Inlet in the spring and the last boat in the fall, before winter ice freeze-up. Entertainment was none, only moving from one cabin to another for visits with your neighbors.

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(PHOTOS COURTESY W. TEELAND)



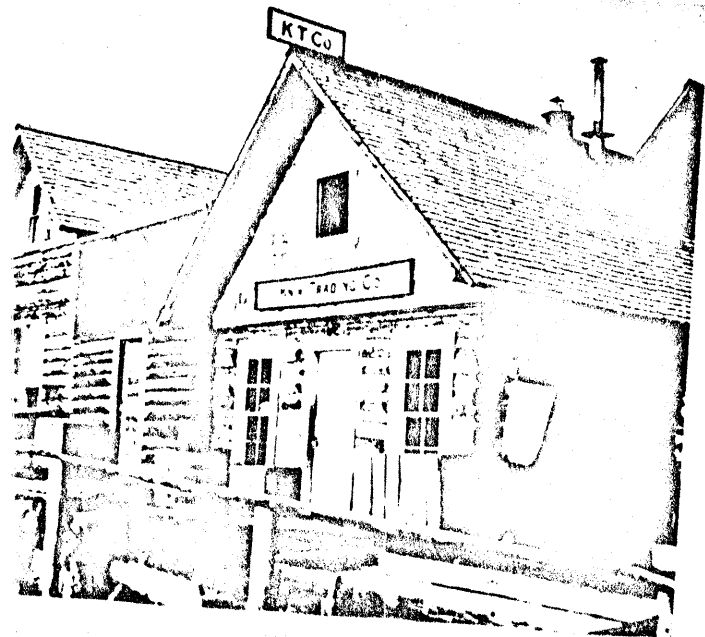
Vessels of all descriptions plied the waters of Cook Inlet. Knik was home port to many a stern wheeler in the old days.



Fourth of July many years ago shows Knik as a bustling sea port town.

In 1904, O. G. Herning took over the old Alaska Commercial company building, and opened the Knik Trading Post. By this time, Knik has two trading stores: Palmer's and Hernings.

Goods were landed on the beaches and horse drawn sleds were used to take the supplies to the trading posts. All types of goods were carried from food to mining supplies.



OLD KNIK, (continued)

Letter from G. Stanley Herning, 738 North 74th Street, Seattle, to Walter Teeland, dated April 28, 1953 — relating to the early history of Knik and Wasilla, Alaska.

The Hernings came to Alaska during the Gold Rush days. In the spring of 1898, a mining expedition was formed at Boston, Mass., known as the Boston Klondike Developing Co. Two separate units were formed. One unit of men was to go to the Dawson strike, to try to locate or purchase mining claims, to develop and work. The other unit, with O. G. Herning in charge, was to proceed to the Cook Inlet country, where gold was reported struck in the Cache Creek district of the Talkeetna region.

The party left Seattle in the spring of 1898 with a year's outfit, on a three-masted sailing schooner, and after sailing for some five weeks, entered Cook Inlet and landed at the trading post and Indian village of Tyonek, at the mouth of the Big Susitna River. (This is 20 miles across the Inlet from Anchorage.) Upon arriving at Tyonek (Tyonic) the party learned that a new gold strike had been made on Grubstake Creek in the Willow Creek district by Billy Morris and Doc Herdon. After assembling a knock-down river boat, which the party had shipped in with them, they loaded their outfit and sailed and poled up the Big Susitna River, past the native settlement at Susitna Station, some 20 miles up the river from Tyonek, until they came to Willow Creek, which emptied into the Susitna River. They poled up Willow Creek to the big canyon. Here they left the boat and packed their supplies to Grubstake Creek, some 10 miles.

After spending the latter part of the summer staking ground and building cabins, the party settled down for the long winter months. Mr. Herning and one or two of the party decided to journey by foot to the trading and native settlement of Knik, some 35 miles distant. Knik was located at the head of Cook Inlet, and was the trading center for the Upper Inlet district, which included Upper Talkeetna, Willow Creek district, Chickaloon district, Eklutna district, and even as far as the Tazlina and Copper River district. Most of these districts included a few white prospectors and trappers, but mostly were Indian settlements, which did trapping for a living, and came to Knik once or twice a year to sell fur and purchase supplies.

Mr. Herning spent 1899 and 1900 with his unit of men mining by hand in the Willow Creek district, but without very good results. The Cache Creek and Willow Creek districts by 1900 were quite lively, and a few hundred men had come into the camps by that time, with the gold rush fever. By 1900 many of the prospectors built cabins and wintered at Knik, so the town grew some.

The Alaska Commercial Co., which had a trading post at Knik, sold their stock to their manager, George Palmer, who opened up his own trading post. They sold because there was not enough business to justify them keeping their post open. Palmer moved the stock into his own building, so the A. C. Co. building was empty.

In the fall of 1900, O. G. Herning notified his company at Boston that the only way to see if money could be made mining, was to install a hydraulic pipeline with Giants in order to handle a large yardage of dirt — so the company purchased a plant of this type, along with four horses and sleds. This was shipped to Knik, and was to be hauled to the mine by horses after the winter freeze-up over a snow-packed trail. Upon this shipment and with the company at Boston guaranteeing this work, Mr. Herning went to Seattle in the winter of 1900-1901. He had notified his wife, Mattie Herning, who was living in Naugatuck, Conn., and Mrs. Herning, with their son, Elmer, was to come to Seattle and journey north with Mr. Herning to the mining camp and Knik in the spring of 1901. This was done. One of the Army cabins at Soldjer Creek below Knik was purchased by the Hernings and this was made over for their home. It consisted of one large room. Beds were made out of a pole bottom, with a mattress of hay or grass; two stoves were used, a cook stove and a large heating stove. Cupboards were made by setting one box on top of another against the log wall; the table was made of boards, and the chairs were empty boxes — just real pioneering in a frontier country.

By 1904 the mining did not turn out as was expected, so the company at Boston disbanded. By 1904 the town of Knik grew some. Due to the few years of the gold fever, many prospectors returned to the States or moved to other parts, but many stayed in the camps and made Knik their headquarters. In 1904 the Bartholf brothers,

who were prospecting in the Willow Creek district, made a new strike on upper Cragie Creek. This was a gold quartz vein, the first of this type of gold found in the camp. This mine was named the Gold Bullion, and produced for years. It was the making of the now famous Willow Creek quartz mining district. This strike by the Bartholf brothers touched off a new stampede into the district, and many new people came to Knik to go into the district. Mr. Herning saw that the town was growing quite rapidly, so he purchased the log building from the Alaska Commercial Co., which had been empty for a few years. He ordered a few supplies from the States, which arrived on the last boat in the fall, and in the late fall of 1904 he opened this store and trading post known as the Knik Trading Company. The settlement by this time had grown: two trading posts, the Herning and the Palmer stores; two roadhouses, the Knik House and Duffey's; a saloon was opened by the Names brothers; a small eating house was opened by O. C. Miller and Sam Cramer. By 1904 there were perhaps 150 Indians, some 40 single white men, and about four or five white married women in Knik.

All types of goods were carried in the stores — groceries, clothing, hardware, mining and fishing supplies, and drugs.

The only church in Knik was conducted by the Rev. Peter Shadura of the Russian (Orthodox) Church of Kenai. He came to Knik each summer and held Russian services for about a week. This was for the natives in the settlement, church services usually being held in one of the Indian homes.

Through 1905 and 1906 the settlement at Knik grew considerably. The quartz gold strike that had been made by the Bartholf brothers had developed into a small paying proposition, and many miners and new prospectors came into the Willow Creek camp and Knik was the gateway to the camp. Two or three more quartz mines had been located with good paying ore. William Hughes, an old cow-puncher, had arrived at Knik with a few horses, wagons and sleds, and the Government had helped cut a temporary summer road into the mining camp from Knik. Hughes hauled supplies by horse and wagon during the summer into the camp, and in the winter months used horses and sleds. This summer road went from Knik to the Canyon (at Mile 14), which is now

Continued on Page 42

LONESOME STRANGER (Continued)

"Figured you wouldn't mind my brewin' a pot of this," he said, looking sheepish.

"This is luxury," I said, "waking up to coffee already made. I'll rustle breakfast."

"No, no." He gulped the last of the coffee and pushed himself to his feet, grunting. "Ain't much for eatin' early in the mornin'. Muller House is only a couple hours away."

"You're more than welcome."

"Reckon I know that." He stood awkwardly, and there were signs of a struggle in him. I saw him resist briefly, then decide to accept defeat. In a tone of calm resignation he said, "I didn't git your name."

"Charlie Turner."

"Why, sure." He picked up the bedroll. "I'm winterin' at Muller House. Maybe you could drop in some time, Charlie."

"Could happen, Bill."

"Well . . ." he shook my hand and his eyes flashed downward in my direction, started to slide by, then fixed themselves on mine, bravely, for quite a time . . . "so long."

"So long."

His step was springy, not at all like the dumpy shuffle of an aging fat man, as he turned and walked out of the tent. I got up and held the flap aside and watched him go. Before he left the creek and turned into the alder brush he broke off a wand and waved it vigorously, beating the dew from the yellowing leaves before him as he went. □

OLD KNIK, continued

on the Wasilla Road to the Little Susitna district (Fishhook Road). It passed between Lucile and Wasilla Lakes, where the town of Wasilla now stands. In fact, the present road from Knik to Wasilla and from Wasilla to the Little Susitna Lodge, is the original early-day road.

In 1904, in the first settlement at Seward, a few houses were built along the Glacier stream. The only main settlement in the Prince William Sound district was the town of Valdez. Mr. Herning had built a house at Seward, population about 50. This house was built so that the family could live in a better climate, and be close to water transportation during the winter. The early settlers of Seward were: the Bartholf families, the Sextons, the Ar-

thur Grays, the Kimbells, the Lowells, and a few more. During the winter of 1904-5 a second son, Stanley, was born to the Herning family. While the Hernings wintered at Seward, a man was hired to run the trading post at Knik, and once a month Mr. Herning would mush by foot from Seward to Knik, some 130 miles, to check the running of his trading post.

In 1906 the Herning family built a three-room house onto the rear of the trading post in Knik and gave up the idea of living at Seward in the winter.

By this time the Gold Bullion Mine had shipped in mining equipment such as a stamp mill, cables, ore cars, steel, and materials for buildings. This was hauled to the mine and set up, and the mining and milling of ore was started, with good-paying results. A crew of some 20 men was hired during the summer months to work at the mine. The early day mining equipment was run by water power, so when the snow and freeze-up came, the mines had to shut down till the next season.

By 1907, Carginie and Bob Hatcher had made a quartz strike on Fishhook Creek, now part of the famous Independence Mine. The Bartholfs, who located Gold Bullion, with Tom Cavney, had made another strike on Reed Creek, now known as the Mable Mine. The camp by this time was known far and wide, and in the summer was filled with gold-seekers and prospectors, and the town of Knik had grown by now to some 100 white people.

By now large quantities of merchandise and mining supplies were being shipped from the States. Larger boats had entered the Seattle-Cook Inlet run. These boats came as far as Seldovia, where they unloaded, and smaller boats would pick up the freight and haul it to its destination, either Knik, Susitna Station, or Tyonek.

By 1908 the town of Knik had taken on a new growth, of more white people. Many new cabins had been built and a winter trail had been made from Seward, through Knik, overland to the settlement of Susitna Station, up the Yentna and Skwentna Rivers, Happy River, over Rainy Pass, down the Rohn River into the Kuskokwim valley to McGrath, Iditarod and Flat. The Government let a mail contract, and this was hauled once a month by dog

team from Seward to Iditarod, some 400 miles. Roadhouses sprang up along the road about every 30 miles. The mining people from the interior, now when the summer season was over, came over this trail after the freeze-up, by dog team to catch the boat at Seward for the States where they would the winter. In the spring before the break-up, they would come back to Seward and travel again by dog team back to the mining camps. With this winter travel and with the monthly mail teams busy, there was always travel in and out of Knik.

This means of travel and seasonal mining and trapping kept Knik about the same for a period of 4 to 5 years. In the fall of 1913 the Government put on a large advertising program, about the possibilities of farming in the Matanuska Valley, where now Wasilla and Palmer are located. In the spring of 1914 the first boats up the Inlet were packed with people heading to locate farms in the Matanuska Valley. Many families arrived, horses, cattle, pigs, chickens and all types of farming equipment were unloaded. This boom filled Knik with people who built cabins so the families could stay while the men walked or rode saddle horses from 15 to 30 miles into the Valley to locate and stake homesteads. Many of these families had to stay at Knik during the winter of 1914 and '15 while the men were clearing some land and putting up cabins to live in and building barns for the stock. Knik grew in this short time from about 200 people to some 500.

In 1912 the first school was started at Knik, May Cody was the teacher, and there were 8 pupils, 5 white and 3 natives. In 1914 a new school was built to handle some 60 pupils. Jenkins and Farrington started another hauling and transfer company. Mary Morrison built another small rooming and eating house. Frank Cannon, who had taken over Duffeys Road House, built a new hotel with dining room to handle 100 people. Hershey and Fulton opened up a pool and card room. Brown and Hawkins of Seward opened up a general store as did Newton Pilger. The Madsen family opened the Knik Laundry, 3 doctors opened offices: Drs. Spaulding, Kvig, and Carmichael. Two dentists also opened offices, Dr. McCallay and partner. A candy and snack store was opened by Cathrine Howard and Margaret Shea. The Rev. Howard, who came to Knik

OLD KNIK, continued

in 1913, built a large building, housing 3 stores, 4 offices, and a large auditorium, which was used for church services on Sunday, dancing during the week, and had a movie show once a week, run by Ray McDonald and Ira Brown. Brown and McDonald opened up a restaurant, the Railroad Kitchen. The first U. S. Marshal was located at Knik in 1913. He was Mr. Brown, son of Judge Brown of the Third Division, with headquarters at Valdez. Holben and Davis of Seward opened up another saloon, and the first saloon, opened by Names Bros. was taken over by Geo. Palmer, who still runs one of the trading posts.

By this time (1914-1915) the Government had many survey crews in the country and the Alaska Road Commission also had road crews working on the main road to the mines, as well as making trails to different parts of the Valley for the homesteaders. Also, by this time 4 docks had been built on the waterfront, and there were some 10 or more gas boats moving steadily in the Inlet hauling passengers and freight.

Also, by this time, new mining locations had been set up: The Independence Mine, the War Baby Mine, the Lucky Shot Mine, the Web-Foot Mine, and the Fe Mine, were all located and being developed. The road to the mines had been improved, and there were 3 to 4 four-horse teams busy daily moving freight and supplies from Knik to the mining camps.

Also, in the late fall of 1914 a small force of Government men landed at Ship Creek, which was the beginning of the work for the present Alaska Railroad. Ship Creek is still called by the same name, and it divides the City of Anchorage from the Alaska Railroad yards.

NOTE . . . (In 1905 and '06, a private enterprise with Eastern capital, came to the settlement in Seward with a survey crew. They were looking for a route to build a railroad to the interior of Alaska. After spending a summer scouting, they decided to start it, and a right of way was surveyed out past Kenai Lake, past Moose Pass, down off the Pass by Specer Glacier, across the head of Turnagain Arm, and following the north side of that Arm to Cook Inlet. Boat after boat of supplies came into Seward, including

building material: road-bed ties, steel, timbers, and all the essentials needed in building a railroad. Crews of men were put to work, cutting a right of way. Many teams of horses with scrapers were used in making the road bed, ties were laid, steel put down. The present town of Seward was surveyed out, lots were sold, and a town was built in one season. This work was going full force, and when the rails were laid as far as Mile 72 out of Seward, that is, to Kern Creek on the north side of Turnagain Arm, the work was stopped, and after a few seasons the railroad was idle and stayed this way until the season of 1915. During the construction of this first railroad, known as North-Central, the present town of Girdwood was started, also the towns of Sunrise and Hope, which were on the south side of the Arm. (end of note)

There was one log cabin, belonging to Tom Jeters, at the mouth of Ship Creek, where he had a ranch-site staked. The Government purchased the cabin and ground from Jeters and put up a few temporary buildings. Many people came from the states to work for the Government on starting the Alaska Railroad, and many people came to work there from other parts of Alaska also. A tent town was scattered in a short time over the high mud flats of Ship Creek where the present A. R. R. yards are located. The Government had taken over the old North Central Railroad as far as it was completed, and crews began to survey a route from Ship Creek south to connect with it, — while other crews were locating a route north from Ship Creek up Cook Inlet, across the Knik and Matanuska Flats, and around the west end of the Willow Creek Mountains (Talkeetnas), past Talkeetna and on north. Crews also worked out of Seward repairing the old right-of-way and the steel track and building new bridges where they were necessary. The link was completed from Seward to Ship Creek some time in 1916 or early 1917. The present townsite of Anchorage was surveyed out by the Government in 1917, and lots were sold and the town started. By the summer of 1917 rails were laid out past the present town of Wasilla.

The old tent town of Wasilla started in the fall of 1916; it was along the present Railroad right-of-way, where the depot now stands and

the Cadwallader warehouse, there were two stores, the H. W. Wilmoth Store and Hernings. Mrs. Small had a tent road-house; Kidds had an eating place; Clark Davis had a soft-drink card-room; and Harry Shough had a transfer company with horses and two Ford cars. In the spring of 1917 the Wasilla Town-site was staked, lots sold, and the town started.

In 1915 and 1916 both Knik and Anchorage had baseball teams, and there was great rivalry between the two places. By the late fall of 1916 over two-thirds of the people of Knik had moved to Ship Creek (Anchorage), where there was plenty of work. Also, a few had moved to Wasilla, and since the rails were at Wasilla and trains were moving, freight could now be shipped from Ship Creek to Wasilla—hence Wasilla was shaping up as the gateway to the Willow Creek mining district. This meant that Knik, once the hub of the country, was dying a natural death.

In this boom the Road Commission had put large crews to work building wagon roads in the farming valley and making a good road to the mining camp. During the time of the rail-laying, the town of Matanuska was started, so many of the farmers in the Palmer area had a settlement real close where they could trade. By 1919, the once-booming town of Knik was just a ghost town, with not over a handful of Indians left and a few whites, mostly old-timers. The last store in Knik was run by George Palmer. This burned to the ground in 1919. The only other business left was the post office and the pool room run by the Blodgett family and the small road-house run by the Simmons family. In the summer of 1917 Mr. Herning moved his stock to Wasilla and closed his trading post at Knik.

By the fall of 1917 the town of Wasilla had taken shape. The Wilmoth store and the Herning store were completed and doing business. Earl Hartman and wife built the Wasilla hotel (log, now Cadwallader's Road House). The town was full of business, freight crews were moving twice a day. Construction men and crews would eat at Wasilla and also trade at the stores. Also, in winter, all the dog team travel which had gone through Knik to the interior now came to Wasilla where it met the railroad.

(History of Old Knik continued in next issue)