

The Ketchikan Pioneer Home and Pioneers of Alaska.... A Simpatico Relationship
By Michele Zerbetz Scott, Women Pioneers of Alaska #7

Ketchikan Pioneers of Alaska, Igloos #7 and #16, have a longstanding history of assisting our community's elders and those in need. From the onset of the organization established in Ketchikan by local men in 1917 up to the present, the Ketchikan men and women members of Pioneers have given of their time, money and abilities to lend a hand to this group.

Minutes of meetings for Men's Igloo #16 are full of such helps. A Pioneer brother was reported ailing. The members voted to "ascertain his condition physically and financially with a view to the Igloo taking such action as may seem necessary for his benefit". Another member applied to the Sitka Pioneer Home with the Igloo writing to encourage his admittance, upon which the Igloo covered his travel expenses to Sitka.

Over the years, the men's Igloo continually expressed concern about conditions and treatment of 'inmates' at the Sitka Pioneer Home, and at one point, appointing a committee to look into the situation. While we don't have a report on the result of that investigation, we do know that annual monetary donations and gifts of newspaper subscriptions for the Sitka Home's residents occurred and regular 'checks' on Sitka Home operations took place. In 1922, the minutes discuss the merits of having another pioneer home built to accommodate women. In 1950, thanks to the lobbying efforts of Pioneers and other civic-minded organizations, a home for women opened in Sitka.

As a precursor to a Pioneer Home in Ketchikan, the Men's Igloo paid for the furnishing of a room at Ketchikan General Hospital for use by local pioneers. The furnishings cost \$154.15- a significant cost in 1923!

The minutes for Women's Igloo #7 are equally filled with their similar assistance. Like the men's group, the women also provided monetary gifts to the Sitka Home for many years. Starting in 1938, the women expressed interest in establishing a "home for aged and disabled women" in Ketchikan. Interest for such a facility increased into the 1940's when a member, Christie Hansen, became the driving force in establishing what became known as Pioneer Haven. Ms. Hansen started a Jumble Shop in 1947, located in the Thomas Basin area, "donating my labor and bus fare" to raise funds for it.

With material assistance of two other Igloo #7 members, the estates of Charter member Wanda Zimmerman and Elsie Robinson, the Pioneer Haven took shape. Mrs. Zimmerman donated 14 acres, known as the Zimmerman Mining Claim, located north of town. Mrs. Robinson donated her home and apartments located on Water Street that provided revenue along with the Jumble Shop for the Haven's development and

subsequent operation. Three buildings were erected with four units providing homes for widows and 'spinsters' without pensions. Tenants were only required to pay for oil and utilities. Pioneer Haven opened in 1948 and remained in service until 1981 when the Ketchikan Pioneer Home opened.

In the 1970s, the Women and Men Pioneer Igloos continued their advocacy roles on behalf of Ketchikan residents, particularly the elderly. They vocally encouraged passage of the State Longevity Bonus Program and for an increase in the number of Pioneer Homes across the State, including for Ketchikan. 1972 minutes from Igloo #16 meetings indicate the men's support to include a Pioneer Home in Ketchikan. The men continued their lobbying efforts in subsequent years, 1977-1979, including collecting signatures on petitions and meeting with the Ketchikan City Manager to "discuss progress on everyone's efforts". At the time, Ketchikan was fortunate to have good representation in the State Legislature supporting these efforts, including Representatives Oral Freeman and Terry Gardiner. Long time Pioneer of Alaska member, Robert "Bob" Gore was a tireless advocate on behalf of the Pioneer Homes throughout the state and was very instrumental in securing the Home in Ketchikan.

Thanks to these efforts by Pioneers and numerous community organizations throughout the State, the Pioneer Home network began expanding in 1967 with a Home built in Fairbanks, followed by the Home in Palmer in 1971, and in Anchorage in 1977.

The Ketchikan Pioneer Home opened with great fanfare on November 16, 1981 with the Women Pioneers of Alaska #7 hosting a gala event attended by various luminaries of the time. It was a joint celebration- the Home's opening and the 101st birthday of Ketchikan Pioneer, Martine Oaksmith, a past president and vice-president of Women Pioneers of Alaska Igloo #7.

The Women's Igloo 'adopted' the Pioneer Home residents- putting on birthday parties every month for the residents and holding a holiday party annually, complete with gifts often handmade. This tradition continues to this day.

Today, Women Pioneers of Alaska, #7 and Men Pioneers of Alaska, #16 join our community in wishing a 40th Happy Birthday to our Pioneer Home, its residents and staff. We are grateful for a place so our elders may continue to live and thrive in Ketchikan with family and friends.