

## BUILDING HISTORY

If only these walls could talk.....The history of the oldest building in town, the 120-year old Pioneer Hall, is as storied as the community where it stands, Ketchikan, Alaska.

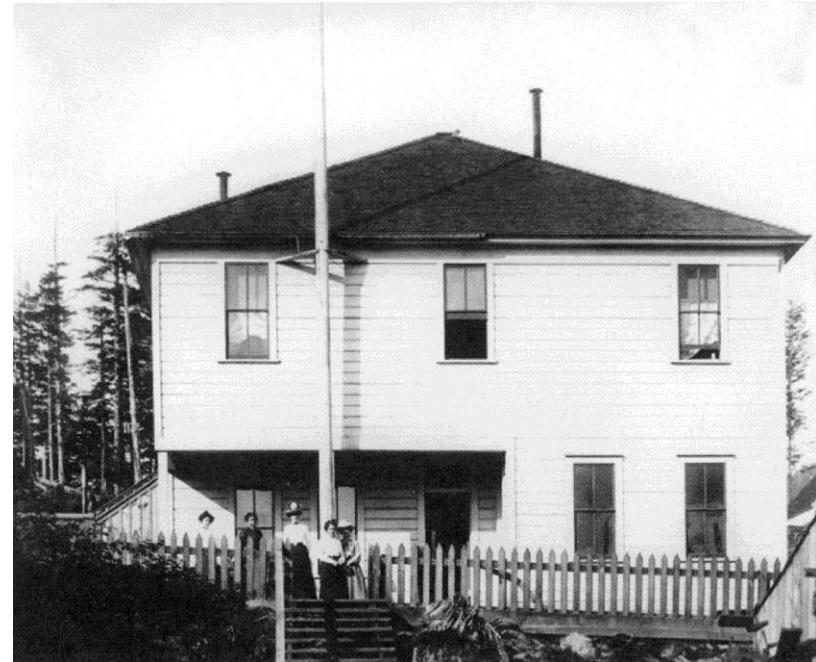
### Building Construction & Custom House

The Tongass and Cape Fox Tlingit Alaska Natives first settled Ketchikan in the 1800's as a summer fishing camp. Concentrated at Ketchikan Creek, the early residents enjoyed the bounty of the returning salmon each summer. By the early 1890's approximately 40 people lived in permanent dwellings along the shoreline west of the Creek mouth. By the turn of the century, Ketchikan was a bustling center of commerce featuring mining and fisheries activities and was home to 700 full time residents.

The Pioneer Hall was an early symbol of the entrepreneurship of the men and women pioneers who arrived in the town. Construction began in 1899 on the building now known as the Pioneer Hall.

Orlando W. Grant, a local businessman, constructed the building. He was known as Six-Shooter Grant due to the two nickel-plated, ivory handled guns he wore. And, Grant Street, running parallel to the Hall, bears his name today. Like many gentlemen of the day, Six Shooter was an advocate for Ketchikan's development. Seeing an opportunity, he was instrumental in encouraging the U.S. Customs operation located on Mary Island to move to Ketchikan. It's unclear if he had the idea to move the Customs operation to Ketchikan first or if he started construction of the Hall in 1899 then encouraged the move. Nevertheless, the building was

finished in 1900 and he negotiated with Customs officials for the rent of his building, located '50 feet off of Main Street and fronting Front Street' where it continues to stand as the oldest property in Ketchikan. Six Shooter was later appointed as the town's first Deputy U.S. Marshall and he became a Pioneer of Alaska member.



*1901 SW side (Front Street) of building.*

*Note flagpole, clap board exterior, window layout, covered porch, and metal flues on roof.*

The rental of the Pioneer Hall in 1900 by U.S. Customs was not without controversy. The Deputy Director of Customs at the time was concerned about the Customs agents living in the building unless the U.S. Government owned it. Therefore, the agent was required to pay the rent for him and his family to live upstairs in the building. However, the agent complained

since he hadn't paid rent while at Mary Island. He was assured he would receive a raise to cover the rent cost incurred.

U.S. Customs continued to lease the Hall until Fall, 1907. During that time, a large flag post was erected in front of the Customs House/Pioneer Hall with a large American flag on prominent display. The flag became a beacon for seafarers traveling to Ketchikan as it dominated the waterfront. The flagpole remained in place until November, 1913 when a high windstorm blew it down.

The original building was a two-story 34' X 38' X 50' wood frame building with a hip roof. It featured "an open porch on the southwest side of the building and a picket fence, with boardwalk access. It originally was covered with clapboard siding and featured corner and eave trim and drip boards over the tall double sash first floor windows, a characteristic of early Ketchikan buildings. There was a transom, probably of leaded glass, visible over the front door.

The building interior had wood plank floors, nice wood wainscoting, plaster walls, and milk glass ceiling light fixtures.

In 1902, the building survived a Sunday evening fire that started in a room on the second floor. According to records of the time, the "prompt application of water from the big tank at the rear of the building by an active crowd" avoided serious damage. After the fire, Mr. Grant replaced metal flues with brick chimneys.



*1904 NW (Pioneer Alley) and SW (Front Street) side of building.*

*Note flag pole still present on SW side, roof line is symmetric, and chimney present on NW side*

### **Building as Rooming House**

The occupancy of the building between 1907 and 1913 is undocumented, but speculation is it operated as a rooming house. In 1913, a Mrs. Mercer leased the building to open a private club and boarding house. At some point during this time period, the building was called the inside Inn Boarding House.



*1913 circa N corner of building.  
Note flagpole still present, roofline symmetric, and no doors onto Pioneer Alley.*

In 1919, W.C. and Annie Blanchard transferred the property to Camp 20 of the Alaska Artic Brotherhood, a fraternal organization precursor to the Pioneers of Alaska, leased the building.

### **Pioneer Hall and Men's Igloo #16**

In the early Territorial Days of Alaska, a number of organizations formed for civic and social purposes. These organizations filled a gap in the absence of clearly defined government, including the lack of a viable court system. Often, the organizations provided food, shelter, medical and

other assistance and encouraged civic order in government, the courts and education.

From the many organizations, rose the Pioneers of Alaska, who formed in Nome in 1907 to provide an "Alaskan Order". Chapters, known as Igloos, sprang up across the State, with Pioneers of Alaska Igloo #16 being established and chartered in Ketchikan in June, 1917 and received its charter in March, 1918. The Igloo initially met at the Redman Hall, located across the street from the Pioneer Hall. The members immediately showed their civic duty by hosting the visiting U.S. Secretary of Commerce, William C. Redfield. Meeting minutes of the time reported that "the reception (for the Secretary) was a success and that Ketchikan was now on the map to stay with a brilliant future promised".

The early members to the Ketchikan Igloo # 16 reads like a veritable "Who's Who" of the frontier community and included Axel Osberg, XXXX, Peter F. Gilmore, attorney at law, Alec A. Brindle, founder of Ward Cove Cannery, Eugene Wacker, XXXX, and Captain Eric Forss, XXXX. By 1922, members determined that they needed their own meeting space and they purchased the now Pioneer Hall from the Artic Brotherhood for the princely sum of \$4,000.00. The funds were secured through private loans made by the members who were later paid back by the membership's fund raising efforts.

Throughout the 1920's, Igloo #16 was instrumental in the growth of Ketchikan, advocating for various infrastructure projects within the region, including new schools, health care facilities, an "aeroplane" landing site, a post office for Hyder, a Federal building, and a cemetery, (later Bayview Cemetery),

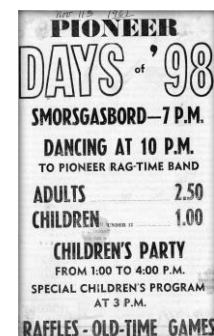
Of particular note is the significant role played by the Pioneers of Alaska men in obtaining the funds necessary for a “dockage facility to protect small boats”. Every year, the fishing fleet of 1,000+ small boats, including halibut schooners, trollers and cannery tenders, plied the Ketchikan waterfront. Many of these boats wintered over, anchoring off the mouth of Ketchikan Creek where they were at the mercy of inclement weather. Pioneer member and former City Council member, Walter Thomas, an “enthusiastic booster” of the development of the area as a small boat harbor. He started his campaign in 1922 with the Pioneers supporting his efforts, including sending a delegation to Washington, D.C. to lobby Congress for funds. Finally, in 1931, with funds secured, the dredging began. Sadly, Mr. Thomas passed away, before his vision reached fruition. To honor his substantial contribution to the effort, The Pioneers were adamant that the harbor be named in his honor, and it is now known as Thomas Basin. (MINUTES SHOW MR. THOMAS GAVE HIS PROPERTY and money TO PIONEERS IN HIS WILL. “Mr. Thomas gave all his property in that part of the city to the Pioneer Lodge” The 49<sup>th</sup> Star, 10/1930

They called attention to the local economy, supporting mining matters such as requesting instructors from the federal government “to instruct miners and prospectors how to distinguish different minerals and their value to save time and unnecessary waste”. They were particularly concerned about the “true conditions of the fishing industry” and advocated for the protection of the fisheries resources and fishing streams. They presented a resolution to the Territorial Legislature for protecting fish and game “against the abuse of aliens who hold no licenses but come and take whatever they please without consideration”.

When President Warren Harding came to Ketchikan in 1923, the Igloo was actively involved in working with City officials on his welcoming, which included his being bestowed with an honorary membership to the organization.

In those early community years, Igloo #16 helped provide for the social needs of not only members, but also nonmembers alike. Space at the Hall was regularly provided for the activities of other organizations, including St. John’s Guild and the Royal Order of the Moose. The members conducted ‘welfare checks’ on residents, offering assistance of food, shelter and companionship as needed. The group often covered the costs of burial expenses for members and others. For example, Pioneer Brother William Matzdorf was reported sick. The members voted to “ascertain his condition physically and financially and his wishes with a view to the Igloo taking such action as may seem necessary for his benefit”. Brother Matzdorf applied to the Sitka Pioneer Home and the Igloo wrote a letter encouraging his admittance. The Igloo covered his travel costs. Throughout the years, the minutes are full of such assistance stories.

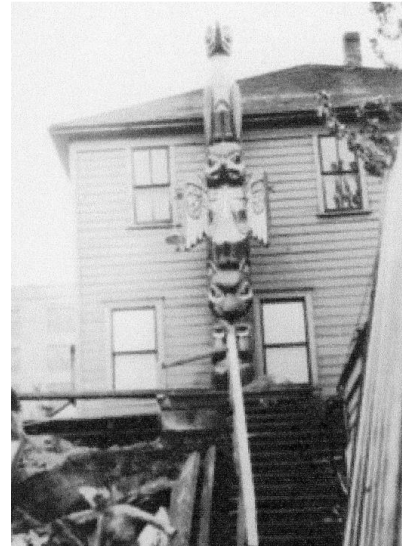
The Igloo sponsored an annual Alaska Day Carnival (also known as the Days of '98) celebration, often occurring over a three-day period that included a smorgasbord, a “grand ball”, games of chance, and general socializing for community members. Revenue from the event funded their activities, including the welfare support mentioned previously and donations to many causes, such as the hospital, Sitka Pioneers Home and, starting in the 1940’s, Pioneer Haven.



In the 1920's, the building experienced its first major exterior alteration. The porch was removed and replaced by a covered door on the NW (Pioneer Alley) side of the building. At this time, the many double-hung windows were still visible, but over time these were boarded over as other buildings were constructed around Pioneer Hall.

The building's interior remained essentially the same, with the exception of modest changes to the interior, which was repainted and papered in 1925. Minutes indicate that there are still boarding rooms during this time being rented on the upper floor, an estimated six rooms renting from \$15.00 to \$20.00 a month.

In 1924, the iconic Kyan Totem Pole was raised on the Front Street facing side of the Pioneer Hall. The pole was not without controversy. Information found indicate that the pole was on the property of a Mr. Collings (a Pioneers of Alaska member) who made the pole available to the Pioneers. The only caveat was that the pole be removed from his property. HAVE INFO ABOUT THE CONTROVERSY.



*1925 early View from Front Street.  
Note flagpole, porch and door are gone. Totem pole is present. Note clapboard siding and double hung windows. (Excavation on the left is for the Citizens Light and Power building)*



*1925 late View from Front Street.  
Note totem pole, POA sign and clapboard siding on SW (Front Street side). Note covered entrance on NW (Pioneer Alley) side. (Excavation on the left is for the Citizens Light and Power building)*

Mr. Todd Yeltatzie, “who handled the totem poles at the St. Louis Exposition was in charge of the repairing and painting of the totem.....” The pole was removed in 1964 for repair. First National Bank sponsored its repairs and the pole was to be installed at the bank’s west end branch.....NOT SURE THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED.....

### **Pioneer Hall and Women’s Igloo #7**

In the 1920’s, the Statewide Pioneers organization, known as the Grand Igloo, opened membership to women, albeit restricted to the spouses of the men in existing igloos. Immediately, the women of Ketchikan formed their Igloo in June, 1922.

Charter members included another who’s who of Ketchikan at the time. They include: Harriet E. Hunt, XXX; Wanda Zimmerman, XXX; Bertha Hunt Wells, XXX; and Martine Oaksmith, small business owner of Martine’s Dress Shop and XXX.



*1926 Pioneer Hall interior.  
Igloo#7 Costume Party. Note wood plank flooring*

The Pioneer women, known as Igloo #7, are also noteworthy for their social, civic and philanthropic activities. Early on in its history, Igloo #7 involved themselves in matters of community importance, including establishing an ‘historical building’ (museum), advocating for an “institution for Alaskans in Alaska for indigent people with illnesses” rather than shipping them outside, and promoting a facility for widowed women ‘without means’. They were equally involved in the infrastructure projects of the community, including the playground, hospital, public health clinic/center and schools. They even lobbied the City for more trashcans around town.

In 1937, the upper floor of the Hall was renovated with partitions removed and new flooring installed to accommodate a museum. Minutes from Igloo #7 indicate efforts by Igloo #7 and the Civic Club to “prepare the Harriet E. Hunt Memorial Museum”. A large mineral collection was put

on display along with a variety of photographs featuring scenes throughout the Territory and curios. Women were encouraged to donate 'relics or antiques'.



*1937 Pioneer Hall interior.  
Note wood plank floor. Also note on the wall to the right that nice wainscoting is still present and wallpaper is visible.*

Starting in the 1938, the minutes reflect the interest of Igloo #7 members to establish a "home for aged and disabled women". 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. She started a Jumble Shop in 1947, located in the Thomas Basin area, "donating my labor and bus fare", to raise funds for it.



*1947 circa  
Pioneer Women's  
Jumble Shop*

With material assistance of two other Igloo members, the estate of Charter member Mrs. Wanda Zimmerman and Mrs. Elsie Robinson, the Pioneer Haven took shape. Mrs. Zimmerman donated 14 acres, known as the Zimmerman Mining Claim, located north of town. The estate of 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. In 1953, Mrs. Hanson reported that "We should be proud of Pioneer Haven, as the folks living there say they were never so happy in their lives...". Pioneer Haven remained in service until 1981 when the Pioneer Home opened. It was razed with a controlled burn in 1987 to widen Tongass Highway.

Again, the Pioneers of Alaska Women answered the call to assist Ketchikan's elder population when plans were being made to develop a senior living facility. When property was needed for the construction of the facility called Pioneer Heights in the 20XXs, Igloo #7 donated the remaining Zimmerman property for this purpose.

The women also provided aid to those in need, including providing “Christmas Cheer Boxes”, conducting welfare checks, helping shut ins. They showed concern and care for the Igloo members, recognizing those sick, birthdays, anniversaries and births with special gifts.

Like the men’s Igloo, the women were greatly involved in the welfare of community members. In 1946, the Health Committee reported that “something should be done about the purity of our milk for children in the community as we know our milk is below standard, both from a nutritive as well as a purity standard”.

Starting in the 1930’s the women consistently donated funds to the Salvation Army, March of Dimes, Forget-Me-Not Orthopedic Auxiliary, Red Cross, Girl Scouts and Pioneer Haven, Sitka Pioneer Home and a myriad of other community causes.

To support their good deeds, they assisted the men’s Igloo with the Days of ‘98 fundraiser, constantly held bake/food sales, raffles, bingo, dances and cake and rummage sales. The minutes indicate a wide variety of raffle prizes, including a stove, radio, and Mixmaster. Later on a TV was raffled as well as other ‘modern’ appliances. A popular fundraiser at this time and into the 1970’s was a “Pound Party” at which members brought to meetings a pound (or more) of food and groceries/goods for donation to the food basket gifts.

In 1947, the Pioneer Hall underwent a major change to its exterior. A survey error between Lot 10, owned by the Pioneers of Alaska, and Lot 12, owned by the Elks Club was discovered. To settle the error, a common wall was constructed between the Elks’ new building and the existing

Pioneer Hall. The Elks agreed to pay for the cost or do the work of moving the Pioneer Hall kitchen from the disputed property and relocate it to the NE side of the Hall. This explains the adjustment to the building’s roofline, which destroyed the symmetry of the hip roof on the NE side of the building.



*2019 NE (Parking Lot) side of building.*

*Note the two entrances onto Pioneer Alley, cedar shakes on building exterior, and asymmetric roofline.*

Also in the 1940’s it appears from pictures that the Hall interior had alterations including removal of the wood wainscoting/ replacement with painted plywood, and the addition of acoustic tiles on the walls and ceiling. Windows continued to be boarded over as well and only two remained by the 1960’s. These two original windows still remain on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor NW side near the W corner and in the apartment.





*1963 Pioneer Hall interior.*

*Note acoustic tiles on ceiling and walls and painted wainscoting*

Just as the Pioneer Hall has undergone various changes over the years, Pioneer activities gradually changed to reflect the times. During the mid-century years, donations now include the Ambulance Fund, Heart Fund, Cancer Society, Children's Home and Salvation Army. A variety of equipment (wheelchair, hospital bed) owned by Igloo #7 was available to loan out to community members. The Igloo also contributed to Ketchikan and statewide events, including the St. Michael's Church fire in Sitka, the Anchorage earthquake and the Alaska Centennial celebration during which eleven new members were initiated as a Centennial Group. The women's Igloo also paid for and had installed a wooden bench on the dock by Ryus Float for people "to rest".

In the 1970's and 80's, the women and men's Pioneer Igloos continued their advocacy roles on behalf of the local and State

citizens. They vocally encouraged the passage of the State Longevity Bonus program, increase in Pioneer Homes throughout the State, including the Ketchikan Home, mining and logging issues, National Monument designation and the Alaska State Museum.

Thanks to the lobbying efforts of both Pioneers of Alaska Igloos and numerous community organizations, the Ketchikan Pioneer Home opened in November 1981. At the outset, Igloo #7 became a 'sponsor', hosting the open house. They hold a monthly birthday party for the residents and an annual Christmas Party complete with gifts...traditions started in 1981. They hold Spring and Fall tea parties. They also provided pet care support at one time.



*2019 Ketchikan Pioneer Home Tea Party*

In 1975, the Hall underwent major interior alterations with the installation of wood paneling, drop ceiling, and replacing of the original drop pendant period lights with fluorescent lighting. Some of these lamp globes are in the building's attic. It's unclear when the cedar shake siding was added to the exterior, but period pictures indicated sometime in the late 1970's.



2019 NW (Pioneer Alley) side of building.  
Note two entrances, cedar shake siding, and asymmetric roofline

### Pioneer Hall Today

Pioneers of Alaska continues to be civic and community-minded as described above, while maintaining a strong fraternal bond with its members. It is one of two fraternal organizations that continues ownership of its building. Deceased members of both Igloos are memorialized each year on Memorial Day (originally Decoration Day) at Bayview Cemetery, a tradition that started over 100 years ago when the Igloos were formed.

Maintaining the history of Alaska's pioneers is an important aspect of the Igloos. Both Igloos are involved in history preservation, providing regular programs of historical interest. They also offer annual scholarships to students wanting to continue their studies after high school. This program, started in approximately 19XX, has given thousands of dollars to students over the years.

The Pioneer Hall remains an important focal point for Pioneer activities. The Igloos host multiple social and fund raising events throughout the year.



2017  
Christmas Bake Sale

Other organizations and community members are also frequent Hall users, including AARP Safe Driving Program, Girl Scouts, Rainbird Quilters and family gatherings.

The Hall, while still operational, is in dire need of substantial upgrades, including improved ADA compliance.

With additional help we can ensure the building will be around another 120 years.



