

# THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES IN THE REGIONS...

# February

# 2008

A MONTHLY CALENDAR OF EVENTS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

## Dogsled Mail in Alaska, 1890s–1963

Delivering the mail to Alaska has always presented a formidable challenge to the U.S. Postal Service. Letters, parcels, and supplies from the “Lower 48 states” often took weeks or months to reach their destinations. Steamships transported Alaska-bound mail north from Puget Sound in Washington to southeastern coastal towns. After reaching these towns, mail was carried to some sections of interior Alaska by river steamers and, later, by Alaska Railroad trains for delivery to smaller, outlying villages. The harsh Arctic weather and limited trail and road system also made mail delivery extremely difficult. In the more isolated sections, carrying the mail required methods far different than those traditionally used elsewhere in the United States.

Dogs proved superior for the winter transport of mail. Dogs were capable of covering long distances, day or night, and could travel over frozen lakes and rivers and pass through dense forests. The Native malamute, the Eskimo dog, or Husky were of all the same breed and was the most valued dog for teams. Malamutes were strong, with thick coats and furry paws, and thrived on dried salmon and needed no special housing. Newfoundlands, St. Bernards, setters, spaniels, and collies were also used. As in earlier frontiers, horses were also used in Alaska, but they posed special problems. Feed was costly and hard to supply and horses required special care in extreme cold.

By 1901, a network of mail trails throughout Alaska was in use, including a system that followed almost the entire length of the Yukon River. The historic 2,300-mile Iditarod Trail was the main dog trail that carried mail

from Seward to Nome. Over-night roadhouses served mail carriers, freighters, and other travelers who used dog sleds or horses.

Mail dog teams varied in size, with eight to ten dogs the most common number for pulling a sled. Typical of the dog teams that have carried Alaska’s mail is the string of Malamutes shown on the postal card, “Alaska Dog Team.” The dogs are working with a light racing sled. On a mail run, they would haul a heavier, longer sled. On average, dog teams pulled sleds containing between 500 - 700 pounds of mail, which meant that each dog had a load of up to 100 pounds (although they hauled less on the more challenging trails). Mail sacks usually weighed 50 pounds each. Rubber-lined waterproof bags were used to protect precious mail from snow, rain, and mud. The dogs wore moosehide moccasins to protect their feet as much as possible from jagged pieces of ice.

In 1963, the U.S. Post Office Department honored Chester Noongwook of Savoonga, on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea. He was the last mail driver and with his retirement, regular sled dog mail delivery ended in Alaska.



**Color post card no. P987, "Alaska Dog Team" (attributed to Eric A. Hegg), ca. 1905-1914**

ARC Identifier #297824

Sir Henry S. Wellcome Collection

NARA Pacific Alaska Region, Anchorage

# NARA West Coast February 2008

U.S. Mail Crew at Mail Tent No. 2.  
Moose Pass, Kenai Winter Trail, 1923  
ARC ID# 605254  
RG 30, NARA Pacific Alaska Region,  
Anchorage



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
						Seattle, WA <b>Nearby History— Overview of the NARA Website</b> Lecture/General Public 206-336-5115
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
			Seattle, WA <b>Pacific Northwest Indian Records at NARA</b> Workshop/Genealogists 206-336-5115			Seattle, WA <b>Becoming a National Archives Volunteer</b> Lecture/General Public 206-336-5115
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	Anchorage, AK <b>Introduction to Genealogical Research at NARA's Pacific Alaska Region</b> Workshop General Public 6-7:30 P.M. 907-261-7820			Seattle, WA <b>Brick Wall Discussion</b> Workshop/Genealogists 206-336-5115		
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
						Denver, CO <b>Using NARA Primary Resource Materials</b> Workshop K-12 Teachers 303-407-5749
24	25	26	27	28	29	
					Seattle, WA <b>Blue and Grey: Civil War in the Pacific Northwest</b> Conference General Public 206-336-5115 2/29/08-3/1/08	

**NARA's Pacific  
Region**

**Laguna Niguel** 949-360-2641  
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# NARA Midwest February 2008

**Two Toboggans at the Silver Valley Winter Sports Area, Huron Manistee National Forest, Michigan, 1940**  
RG 95, Records of the U.S. Forest Service  
NARA Great Lakes Region



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	
	<b>Exhibit:</b> Lee's Summit, MO <i>George Washington Carver</i> 2/4/08-2/18/08	<b>Exhibit:</b> Raytown, MO <i>George Washington Carver</i> 2/19/08-3/2/08	<b>Exhibit:</b> Excelsior Springs, MO <i>Civil Rights, Civil Liberties</i> 2/11/08-2/29/08		<b>Chicago, IL</b> 1 <i>Maps in the Great Lakes Region</i> 2/1/08-6/30/08  Kansas City, MO <b>Film Nite at WWI Museum</b> Film Screening of "Wings"/General Public 816-268-8017	2	
3							
	4 Excelsior Springs, MO <b>Introduction to Genealogical Research</b> Lecture/Genealogists 816-268-8072			6 Parkville, MO <b>Introduction to Genealogical Research</b> Lecture/Genealogists 816-268-8072		8 Kansas City, MO <b>Film Nite at WWI Museum</b> Film Screening of "Hell's Angels" General Public 816-268-8017	9
10							
					14 Kansas City, MO <b>Trail of Tears</b> Lecture/General Public 816-268-8071	15 Liberty, MO <b>Teacher Professional Development Conference</b> Information Booth K-12 Teachers 816-268-8016	16
17							
					21 Raytown, MO <b>Introduction to the National Archives</b> Lecture/General Public 816-268-8071	22 Kansas City, MO <b>Film Nite at WWI Museum</b> Film Screening of "Dawn Patrol" General Public 816-268-8017	23
24							
			26 Chicago, IL. <b>Illinois African American State Lawmakers</b> Lecture/General Public 773-948-9004	27 Chicago, IL. <b>The Life and Times of John W.E. Thomas</b> Lecture/General Public 773-948-9001		29 Kansas City, MO <b>Film Nite at WWI Museum</b> Film Screening of "Blue Max" General Public 816-268-8017	<b>Exhibit:</b> Oak Grove, MO <i>Fashion Court</i> 2/8/08-2/26/08

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**NARA's Southwest Region**  
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