An Oral & Written History of Fairview: Past, Present, & Future

By David Reamer, Historian
With Clare Dannenberg, Ph.D.

A Centennial Grant Project with The Center for Community Engagement & Learning at UAA
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Preface

This Centennial for the Municipality of Anchorage has been a wonderful opportunity to reflect on this place that we live and its rich history. The Center for Community Engagement at UAA engages with faculty, students and community members in explorations of creative place-making, an appreciation of our urban-ness within Alaska. Our “Urban in Alaska” activities focus on the unique neighborhoods of Anchorage in academic research and creative projects, including Fairview.

Our Centennial grant created Neighborhood Walks that were led throughout 2014 and arranged by Bree Kessler, a scholar of environmental psychology and public health. Neighborhood “experts” led the walks, which were very well-attended and judging by the extemporaneous comments, well-appreciated! Clare Dannenberg, a scholar of language and anthropology, arranged the interviews of Fairview residents, which were conducted “StoryCorps” style and in pairs; twenty residents had conversations with each other about current events, memories, and hopes for the future of Fairview.

Historical archives are included in the references for the chapter, written by David Reamer, a local historian, with Clare Dannenberg. Kristine Bunnell, Historic Preservation Office, Municipality of Anchorage, served as the “tradition-bearer” and contributed her perspective. The archival material was decisive for the narrative tone, for historical framing, and to verify emerging themes of the interviews. Fairview residents have a very strong association with the idea of community, an appreciation for the history of the neighborhood, and an ambitious vision for their future.

—Judith Owens-Manley, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Community Engagement & Learning
Come and explore urban Anchorage!

Walking and biking tours led by neighborhood residents to showcase and discover the great places that make our city!

Join us and explore the history of a neighborhood, its important issues and help to create the Anchorage Community Atlas!

Tours are free and open to the public and require registration. Please register online for one of only 20 spots for each tour! Registration and additional information available at www.uaa.alaska.edu/engage.

Tours take place from 10 a.m. -- noon and may end at a neighborhood eatery where you can choose to buy lunch and share your urban discoveries!* Then take our writing prompts if you'd like to submit a neighborhood writing excerpt for the Anchorage Community Atlas!

July 19, 2014 .......... Fairview (walking tour)
Aug. 16, 2014 .......... Mountain View (biking tour)
Aug. 23, 2014 .......... Spenard (walking tour)
Sept. 13, 2014 ........ Government Hill (walking tour)

Can’t attend the tour? Contribute to our project by using #MyAnchoragels to show us your Anchorage.

www.MyAnchoragels.com

Contact bkessler@uaa.alaska.edu with questions.

*Children are welcome to attend with parental discretion for walking/biking ability in a group.

This project is supported in part by a grant from the Alaska Humanities Forum, the Rasmuson Foundation and the Anchorage Centennial Celebration.
#snowhaus #myanchorageis #Anchorage #architecture walking tour in fairview. invest in neighborhood
Introduction

Soon after there was an Anchorage, there was a Fairview. Small home lots in what is now Fairview were an expansion of the same in the only slightly older Anchorage. One hundred years later, the course of the larger city has only sometimes paralleled the progress within the smaller neighborhood. As Anchorage expanded, the quickly enveloped Fairview became relatively neglected in favor of newer developments. The result is Fairview as a distinct neighborhood, partially set apart from its surroundings by city culture and design. Twenty long-time residents of Fairview lent their voices as part of the Anchorage Centennial celebration. They shared their recollections of Fairview’s history, attitudes towards the present, and hopes for the future. Accompanied by historical touchstones, the following is a neighborhood dialogue chronicling their perceptions of the evolving status and definition of Fairview.

Looking Back
1930s-1950s

The local landscape combined with decades of new arrivals and commercial development to shape Fairview into its irregular modern borders. To the north, the community brushes near Ship Creek. To the south lies the city’s Chester Creek greenbelt. Directly west are the businesses of the Anchorage downtown and the residences of

“My wife is buried there now and my mom is buried there. It was right on Fairbanks Street and 7th and it’s right over the—where the airplanes take off. To me, that’s really cool. So I’m going to be laying in my grave and the airplanes are going to be flying over the top of me.”
the South Addition. Fairview’s eastern border is Merrill Field, which services the city’s general aviation demand.

That proximity to an airfield is a historical constant for the area. “The park strip up here used to be the airport.” After being initially built in response to military demands, some of the housing in the neighborhood became home to many of the region’s pilots. “So what they did was the FAA built a lot of these houses over on that side and what was this called, this side of Cordova, Pilots Row?” “This 11th Avenue from here to A was Pilots Row. And then after all the pilots died and just the women lived there, they renamed it Menopause Row.” The Delaney Park Strip was Anchorage’s first airport, and early Fairview residents lived near and knew the pilots, Bob Reeve, founder of Reeve Aleutian Airways, among them.

The residents of Fairview today are constantly offered the sights and sounds of small planes overhead, as their predecessors experienced decades prior. This is one of many neighborhood links between past and present. The Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery, at the juncture of northern Fairview and downtown, is another such link. “My wife is buried there now and my mom is buried there. It was right on Fairbanks Street and 7th and it’s right over the—where the airplanes take off. To me, that’s really cool. So I’m going to be laying in my grave and the airplanes are going to be flying over the top of me.”

During and after World War II, Anchorage and Fairview expanded rapidly due to the Cold War buildup of the military. “At that time, what was driving the economy here was a lot of military

Fairview was at the periphery of the larger city. “We were the last house—like the end of third addition. There was nothing beyond this, nothing.”
construction...he [father] was out of town a lot working building a distant early warning system.” This growing infrastructure tempted some future Fairview residents. They saw Alaska as a potential cure for their unsatisfactory life in the contiguous States. The path was made both clear and possible by the 1947 opening of the Alaska Canadian Highway to public traffic. “[My father] drove home in the St. Paul, Minnesota rush hour traffic one night and said that’s it, we’re moving to Alaska.” Another resident’s father was similarly disenchanted by the cityscapes of the south. “He could not practice medicine the way he wanted to practice medicine—in Chicago where he was from.”

During the post-World War II boom years, many more people lived outside the Anchorage city limits than within. In 1950, only about a third of the area population resided within the actual Anchorage city boundary. By living in unincorporated communities such as Fairview, some sought to escape city taxes or restrictive city laws. “Right on the corner of 13th and Gambell was a fireworks store that operated all year round...I mean, there was no regulation whatsoever.” A burgeoning red light district grew at the outer edges of Fairview, clustered near Chester Creek. “It was the red light district, speakeasies, you know, gambling afterwards, buy marijuana before it was illegal and that was down there.” Others quite simply found what space was available when they arrived, typically at the edges of the growing town. Fairview became an entry point for the newly arrived—a practical location from which to begin a new life. “So then right up here at 13th and Gambell was Cordova Trailer Park, so we parked our trailer up there.” “There were actually several trailer parks in this whole area.” Fairview was at the periphery of the larger city. “We were the last house—like the end of third addition. There was nothing beyond this, nothing.”

Surrounded by other neighborhoods that more readily agreed to annexation by Anchorage, Fairview, which had its own utility service,
remained independent until 1959. Compared to today’s apartments and traffic, Fairview at this time would be unrecognizable to the modern resident.

“And none of the apartment buildings were there and Ingra was not there yet.” “So the only street that was paved in town was Fourth Avenue, everything else was dirt roads.” Within Fairview, a mud-room was essential “because at Cordova Street wasn’t paved when moved here—it was all gravel and mud you couldn’t believe.”

“The gravel pit for the whole house—the whole town was on 13th and…Cordova.” The gravel pit’s presence survives through the gently rolling nature of the land directly around the Central Lutheran Church.

“Right at 15th and Gambell, now where the Aces headquarters is, that entire area there was a huge military dump so left over from World War II—all the old military airplanes and everything.” This more directly visible byproduct of the military buildup became the source of childhood adventures for many residents. “This was kid’s paradise and there was a lot of rats in there, so we’d go in, we’d have pellet guns and BB guns, we’d go down there and shoot rats.”

Literal cesspools were utilized by residents for waste. “Ooh these cesspools. You’ve heard…this literary term and you don’t know exactly what it is, but around here, there was no city sewer and what people did is they built—they just ran their pipe out under the ground to a little crib of logs in the ground, and then they covered it over the top, and then all your sewage ran into this thing and sort of seeped away.” “There were two—there were three of them in our back yard.” Universally, then residents described the landscape of Fairview
as a swamp. “It literally was a swamp. It was big enough for us kids to have a raft on it.” “It was a really bad place to build a house because it was very soggy.”

Houses built in Fairview’s early days tended to be small due to the practical limitations of material availability and utility costs. “The houses are generally smaller, a little closer.” “A lot of the houses in this area were very small…because no one wanted to pay to heat a bigger house.” Sometimes, Fairview residents had to be creative in obtaining building materials. “Well, that guy worked for the railroad, and every day he’d bring home two or three railroad ties. Well, eventually he had enough to build that shed that’s all built out of railroad ties bolted together.” “Such a shortage of things when you moved here that the most common sign that you would buy is not a ‘For Sale’ sign, but a ‘Not For Sale’ sign.” Individuality was a lesser concern as most of these homes were built with only minor stylistic differences. Appropriated from the popular home design catalogs in the lower United States, the most common house layout in Fairview is a slight variant of the Aladdin Company’s popular Bristol design—a one floor and rectangular home with a small protruding vestibule in the front. Many examples of this style survive in the neighborhood.

The central addition to the community was the opening of the first Carrs grocery store in 1950, still standing today at the corner of 13\textsuperscript{th} and Gambell. “A huge development here was the first supermarket in Anchorage came in—that’s Carrs. Carrs was the first supermarket in Anchorage, and boy that was really a big deal. So that was on Gambell Street and then they had a permanent like little circus around and remember, they had a merry-go-round going there all the time.” “When the [Carrs] building went up, it was beautiful. It was the most wonderful grocery store in Anchorage and it was the first store to have fresh produce.” Also appreciated by the typically pragmatic Alaskan, “they were also the first store in Anchorage to use coupons.”
1960s

When the 1964 earthquake struck Anchorage, the physical damage to Fairview was relatively minimal. “My basement has still got the crack clean across the basement…the guy that came and inspected said it’s going to be okay, so we never fixed it.” Neighbors shared stories of where they were during the first tremors. “The woman next door was screaming and dad went over and said what’s wrong, what’s wrong. She said well, I just turned on the garbage disposal, this woman from Finland, and just at the moment she flipped the switch, the earthquake went off. We thought she was dying or something had fallen on her or something.” “I had just gotten this new Beatles record and we were playing it. All of a sudden, the…arm started jumping up and down.” However, as elsewhere in the city, the human losses were unavoidable. “My biology teacher got killed, she lived in Turnagain.” The community and city were small enough still that a personal impact was unavoidable.

1970s-1980s

Directly after the earthquake, Anchorage civic leadership reviewed the damage to the city and seized upon the opportunity to plan their city for the future. It is during this time that Fairview’s streets were paved, including the expansion to four lanes of the community’s hallmark traffic corridor of Gambell and Ingra streets. Similarly, the circumnavigating trails were completed in the 1970s, including the Chester Creek Trail along Fairview’s southern border in 1973.

In 1977, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline began operation, sparking
more construction in the city. “The pipeline era was going strong in the late 70s, and there was a lot of construction and such going on.” Much of Fairview was rezoned by the city to allow for the multi-residence homes and apartment buildings, which proliferated throughout the community. “When the original pipeline was built and they had to create a lot of housing for people…they rezoned a lot of Fairview to accommodate high density, and what that did was they put in a lot of rentals.”

The boom times continued essentially unchecked until 1986 when the price of crude oil dropped precipitously. In some places within the state, real estate prices were halved as unemployment soared. “We had the big crash when the price of oil dropped in the mid 80s…the whole city kind of became kind of a ghost.”

In conjunction with the local economic downturns, crime became the central concern of Fairview residents. “But it just seemed like we just had all kinds of drugs and prostitution problems at that time…that crack epidemic was just kind of a wave that kind of washed through the neighborhood and really, really kind of brought it down I would say for a number of years.” “You could not go after 11:00 o’clock at night” What had been a prosperous neighborhood became one of the more undesirable places to live within the city. “Most people have a probably negative connotation with Fairview. They think of the bad things or a lot of people’s perception of Fairview is what they see at 13th and Gambell.”

Gas prices eventually rose again in the early 1990s, and the community began to slowly revive. The amount of traffic in the neighborhood that sought solely to cut through Fairview is a neighborhood concern dating from the 1960s. “So they [city administration] got really smart with traffic…and they closed
the main access areas and then they did this really nice landscaping and fencing.” “It’s a lot quieter now, we don’t have so much traffic.” Some of the more important local institutions from Fairview’s early days survive. The original Carrs still opens every day to the neighborhood. At the northern edge of the community, the Lucky Wishbone restaurant remains as it has for decades. Mulcahy Stadium, the baseball field built in Fairview near Chester Creek in 1964, continues to host Alaska Baseball League games. The league’s original Anchorage team, the Glacier Pilots, is named after original sponsor Bob Reeve. “In some ways, it’s gotten a lot better … there’s good restaurants, there’s good entertainment.”

**Early Fairview Heroes, and a Character**

The stories of life in Fairview at this time are correspondingly rustic. “So the Gilmans lived right across the street. Their bakery was up where the Office Depot is right now. That was the only bakery in town.” “When they came in with that bread slicer, I remember that was a big deal. Oh boy, we get sliced bread now.” One cherished story shows the connections possible in a small setting. “[Roy Gilman] used to tell the kids, if we brought him cardboard boxes, which he said he needed to use to pack his bakery products in, that he’d give us a donut…if you saw a cardboard box, you’d save it and you’d go up there and if Roy was there—you couldn’t get it from the other workers—but if Roy was there, you could get a donut.” For one longtime resident, Roy Gilman’s true purpose was only deciphered decades later. “And I just realized, when I was thinking about this…I just realized he never used them [the boxes]. He was just

“**In order to get things done in this community, we have to basically audit the city, call for someone to come or make them be afraid that there’s going to be a class action lawsuit.”**
trying to get us to do something so we didn’t get free donuts. We had to do something.”
There were the characters whose habits and tics become common knowledge in the way of all small communities. “John Horning… was a pilot for Alaska Airlines.” “The reputation he had was that he’d go outside and look up at the sky and if there was any clouds, he would call in sick.” There were the people whose fame was magnified by their presence in the neighborhood. “Down at the end of, on 9th and Cordova…a lady named Helen Fischer lived there.” Fischer, a long time Alaskan politician, notably fought for the Alaska Constitution to include language that prohibited sex-based discrimination. “She was respected. She was looked up to. She was one of the leaders of the community. She signed the State Constitution…and she lived right here in this neighborhood.”

Fairview Now - Contested Space

Fairview is no longer the rural edge of a small town, but an enveloped neighborhood within an increasingly urban landscape. The transitions that resulted from the 1970s pipeline boom created shocks against which the Fairview residents still struggle. Near universally, the residents of Fairview feel disconnected from their own community and the more citywide structures, such as Anchorage’s political leadership. “In order to get things done in this community, we have to basically audit the city, call for someone to come or make them be afraid that there’s going to be a class action lawsuit.” Ultimately, the Fairview population largely feels as if the community is of relatively little importance to local government. “I still feel like we’re on the other side of the tracks.”

Even the early days of Fairview’s relationship with the city of
FAIRVIEW

Map designed by Karen Larsen, Graphic Designer, www.creativespacealaska.com
Anchorage was problematic; the annexation of Fairview to the city was only achieved after a failed legal challenge by Fairview residents. Later, Anchorage’s 1965 Neighborhood Planning Program noted that a proposed expansion of the Gambell/Ingra traffic corridor would “cut the [Fairview] neighborhood and create an island two blocks wide and ten blocks long.” When the construction began, Fairview was indeed divided by the heavy traffic, Hyder Street becoming isolated between Gambell and Ingra. “That kind of divides Fairview a little bit because you’ve got the people who live on one side of Ingra and Gambell.” “They put the freeway through there, it knocked out a lot of the businesses, you know, difficult to walk across the street. There was no consultation with the neighborhood, they just came in and bulldozed it and set it up.” Standing today at the corner of 13th and Gambell, location of the local Carrs grocer and therefore a natural destination, the local will see a wave of cars reflecting in the sun, threatening with noise and oncoming mass. “People would be like zipping through the neighborhood if the Glenn was backed up.”

Fairview lies directly between terminuses for the Seward and Glenn Highways and the Ingra/Gambell corridor was expanded in response to the need for a connection. However, in the future the physical divide within the community will be exacerbated. “It’s possible that our main business corridor, which is Ingra and Gambell, is possibly going to be a freeway.” Currently, the proposal languishes in bureaucratic limbo, officially postponed for consideration until at least 2025. Community members view this indecision as crippling their ability to promote positive economic growth in Fairview. “By postponing any sort of planning, they’ve created uncertainty in the area that needs the most certainty, needs the most planning in the Ingra/Gambell corridor.” “A prudent investor is not going to build something and start a business in that whole corridor without knowing when and what they’re going to do.” “The state DOT has
claimed Hyder [Street] for a possible alignment for like a highway-to-highway connection where they wouldn’t have any stop lights… which means if you own property on Hyder, you’re not going to invest in it, you’re not going to do anything with it.” “Almost every building is up for sale in there.”

This local antagonism with the city administration also originates from the community rezoning that allowed the installation of high-density residences. The rezoning “really had a negative impact on the neighborhood…because you have a lot of transients coming, people in and out, in and out, and when you overload a neighborhood with too many, you know, rentals and you don’t have a good sense of place.” What had been a series of small businesses and smaller homes became inundated with the relatively towering apartment complexes. “The construction of all these four-plexes in the 80s and so on, it was like a picture perfect way of how do you destroy a neighborhood.” Similarly, what had been a relatively unified population began to feel overwhelmed by the newly arrived. “There’s a lot of old time folks here, but there’s also a lot of transients, so it’s kind of, it’s real mixed up that way.” “Most of the people that are living here don’t live here for long periods of time.”

While the highway-to-highway construction currently exists as only a future possibility, one section of the community that has grown in the interim is the number of social service providers. Fairview has a long history with social services. “One of the first low income subsidized housing is where the graveyard is.” The Willow Park housing project was built in the early 1950s and originally
provided housing to returning Korean War veterans. The wider War on Poverty of the 1960s brought other services to the community. “Our youngest brother...he went to Head Start at Denali and he loved it because they had breakfast and they had little boxes, you know with breakfast brought in. Hot, hot, hot, hot!” “They had breakfast for those poor little kids in the housing project.” However, especially since the Alaskan economic downturn of the late 1980s, the placement of social service organizations within Fairview has divided the community. “There’s a real concentration of social services, Brother Francis, Beans Café, a lot of agencies.” “If you get drunk anywhere in the city, anywhere in the municipality, you get a one way ticket to Fairview at the sleep off center. They don’t take you out of Fairview, they take you into it.” “Anchorage’s answer to [social ills] is what’s called to sweep it into a corner.” Many residents believe that Fairview has become that convenient corner of the city.

Specifically, the recent placement of Karluk Manor in the community coalesced many of the inhabitant’s fears. Guided by a belief that a stable housing situation is a primary solution to social problems, Karluk Manor provides long term lodging for homeless alcoholics with sliding scale rent fees. “There was a lot of opposition in the neighborhood.” “They can drink there in our neighborhood, and you know, it’s right next door to our park.” “I remember leaders in the community came up to me and asked if I would kind of lead the fight against Karluk Manor.” In 2010, the Fairview Community Council would overwhelmingly pass a resolution in opposition to the placement of what would become Karluk Manor within Fairview. However, the Anchorage Planning Commission approved the location and it opened in late 2011. Now that Karluk Manor is established as part of the community, there is a sense that the initial discomfort has shifted towards acceptance amongst the community. “It’s more that we, as neighbors, are a stakeholder in the success of anything that’s
going to be here, because if it doesn’t succeed we pay for it.” “These [local social services] are our neighbors whether we like it or not.” “We have representative of Karluk Manor on our executive board and community council right now.”

Diversity and Inclusiveness

The Fairview neighborhood displays a pragmatic and inclusive appreciation of its diverse population, a trait viewed by residents as a strength and defining community characteristic. “So the diversity of people, you know, in the neighborhood, it means that you have…people from a lot of different backgrounds, so it adds interest in terms of the character of the neighborhood.” The core of the Anchorage area African-American population has its origins in Fairview. “The number of black people that did live in Anchorage lived across Gambell and lived in what was known as East Chester.” In 1962, the community came together to protest unfair hiring practices at the local Carrs, which to that point had yet to hire a minority employee. A nearby club provided free food for the picketers. “Racially, I would just say, you know, this neighborhood is really integrated…I mean, it was very live and let live.” The November 1969 issue of Ebony magazine praised the opportunities for African-Americans in Alaska and made note of Fairview as a cultural center. Today, Fairview possesses “one of the largest concentration of East African immigrant kids refugees. You know, they bring a lot of assets with them.” “I have a Sudanese family on the other side of me.”

“There’s no other neighborhoods that are built like Fairview where front doors face front doors, where garages are on the alleys. So that, you know, you’re forced to interact with your neighbors.”

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Shared Community

“What makes the Fairview unique as a community is the diversity of people, diversity of land uses, and its unique physical layout.” Diversity within Fairview is not just racial and ethnic demographic differences. “And it’s not all poor and it’s not all wealthy, but it’s just a working class, a lot of professionals.” As it was before its incorporation into Anchorage, Fairview is again an entry point into Anchorage. “We live in a very diverse state and to have affordable housing means that you have, you know, more access of different people who can live in that space.” Nowhere else within the Anchorage city limits is it more affordable for a family to buy a home—“in Fairview because that’s where the cheapest square foot property is available right now.” “So you know, for under $300,000 in 99501…you know, it’s Fairview.” The result of this economic reality is an influx of people who choose to live in Fairview, a group that is motivated towards the knitting of community bonds and the improvement of their shared neighborhood. This is not a trapped population, but one unified by a desire to live here and improve their surroundings.

“One thing I’d say about the community and its people, its diversity is a big piece of that, but I also think it’s a group of people who are very passionate about their own community. And I think that’s important to recognize, I think, you know, probably many people in our city who may not even associate themselves as an Anchorage resident, they may not even know what community council represents the area in which they live.” In order to face Fairview’s social issues, including those that originate externally and internally, the community’s residents face a higher urge to politically mobilize than may exist in other, more affluent neighborhoods. “Other parts of the city, they just

“Like, you’ve probably heard our kind of slogan is Fairview: Where People Make the Difference.”
don’t have those. They don’t have the social issues...as overtly as we do in Fairview.” To address the homeless problem within the community, they banded together. To clean their community, they banded together. To ensure that their opinions are heard by the city’s decision makers, they banded together. To help each other, they band together.

Even the physical structure of Fairview, its homes and roads, promotes the expansion of interpersonal bonds. “There’s no other neighborhoods that are built like Fairview where front doors face front doors, where garages are on the alleys. So that, you know, you’re forced to interact with your neighbors.” Other than the high-traffic corridor, the community is well positioned within Anchorage to allow walking or biking to destinations. “It’s in close proximity to the downtown, within walking distance of downtown, it’s within walking distance of midtown.” “I mean, you can walk to Carrs grocery, you can walk to the post office, you can walk to the senior center and below the bluff.” “And you’re only five minutes with the bike and you’re there on the coastal trail and can go anyplace.” “You don’t have to get in a vehicle and drive half an hour to get to someplace.” Walking through the community, as opposed to driving through it, allows the local to personally connect with the landscape and people. Car ownership is lower in Fairview than anywhere else within Anchorage. Those that move to Fairview may not be familiar with the little bonding rituals of a true community, but they learn them. “Yeah, that’s our father. Well, he didn’t know how to interact at all.” “Having lived in bigger cities, I mean, you rarely even see your neighbors.” “But like our neighbor that we didn’t even know...she asked us to house sit and we’re like yes, you know?” Fairview manages to combine the general benefits of its Anchorage location with the benefits of a community with an identity. “I’ve always been drawn towards the mountains and so the mountains, this place is a great place, I get up, every day I get to look at them.”
This resultant familiarity is reflected by knowing the names of neighbors, community leaders, and in the tales passed down through Fairview’s history. Old Ruth Moulton. Lee Ross. Mrs. Cruz. Judge Moody. Roy Gilman and his bakery. Verna Robinson. The Browns. Mr. Mihajlich. David Sparks. Helen Fischer. Donny and Terry. Bob Reeve. Old Man Carlson. Rolando, the nice guy at Carrs. Ray Peterson. The Bagoys. Big strong Regina Manteufeul. Allen Kemplen. Andrew Kerosky, the dancing guy. Paul Fuhs. “My neighbor Joe.” Charles, the former director at Fairview Recreation Center. Today’s inhabitants of Fairview may know all, some, or none of those names, but they will know others from the community. “Like, you’ve probably heard our kind of slogan is *Fairview: Where People Make the Difference*.”

**Present Day Community Activism**

This mobilization of the neighborhood is creating a new reputation for Fairview within the larger city. “And I think there’s a real strong activist movement definitely…my Fairview Community Council is very aggressive.” “Every time I talk to a politician, they flat out know, anybody in town they know if it’s Fairview or Government Hill community councils, they’re going to be dealing with some aggressive [people].” “We have a reputation of a Council that are doers and not talkers.” “We have youth that show up to the community council meeting. None of the other community councils have the youths that show up.” Overall, this commitment to advocacy “redefined Fairview in terms of its character because it shows that the community, at large, was willing to invest in making this part of town a better place.” “And I think that’s one of the things that really makes this town different is that there’s really a lot of opportunities…for a person to be involved in making a difference in this town.”

Fairview residents are not merely talking about improvements for their community; they are making them happen. There is now an
active farmer’s market at the Central Lutheran Church. Members of the community “advocated strongly for a gateway element that they installed, which is what you see over here, that’s the anchor. It’s one of the first neighborhood gateways in town.” It defines “the neighborhood as a neighborhood, taking pride in who we were as a distinct part of the Anchorage community.” “We do have a community gardens installed up here at Fairview Lions Park…up there between 7th and 8th and Karluk and Medfra.” There’s the annual “block party that the community council puts on that gets everybody out and really builds kind of a sense of neighborhood and a sense of place.” The small Fairbanks Park, also known as the Fairview Lions Park, was reclaimed by community activists from illegal usage. New fencing, landscaping and playground equipment were obtained. “We got a new playground in, at Fairview Lions Park just last summer and…it’s like its kid central.” At one time, the community council considered eliminating the site as a park; “Yeah, I’m pretty proud that, you know, the community decided to keep it a park and the community decided to try to improve the park.”

“We have a group that does a lot of the beautification and the planting.” “Anybody that looks at 15th Avenue now says wow, that is beautiful, especially compared to what it used to be next to 15th Avenue.” One resident noted that the sight of the flowers along 15th Avenue inspired her to live in Fairview. “As I was getting familiar with Anchorage, I saw the nice landscaping on 15th Avenue, now the little houses, I said this must be an exclusive gated community. I

“This mentality of the Last Frontier, you know, you think it’s people who really want to think outside the box and do things differently…but there was a greater sense of, you know, within Alaskans, that they were bounded to get there by a common cause.”
could never live there because it was just so nice.” “One of the great things about the Fairview neighborhood I think is that, you know, as a place that—you know, where people—where an individual can make a difference.”

Politically, the community has recently experienced successes as well. In 2007, a proposed hazardous waste facility to be located within Fairview was defeated and abandoned. The culmination of a multi-year campaign by locals, Spirits of Alaska had its liquor license revoked in 2015. Located near the corner of 13th and Gambell, the business was seen by many community members as creating an unacceptable nexus for criminal activity within Fairview. Similarly, in the face of the seemingly always distant highway-to-highway proposal, community leaders in 2014 chose to act in the present. The result was a lengthy community plan that proposed a strength-based revitalization of the neighborhood. Included within the plan’s wide-ranging emphases were improvements to aid in snow removal, safer pedestrian and biking paths, fewer lanes for the Gambell/Ingra corridor, preservation of historic landmarks, and preemptive designs for a neighborhood friendly highway-to-highway connection. “I think this will be the best part. This will be the best neighborhood in Anchorage.” In September of 2014, the Anchorage Assembly approved Fairview’s ambitious neighborhood plan.

The total effect of this community wide advocacy is not yet apparent. Fairview is not a completed product, but is instead one filled with latent possibility. “At some point, Fairview is going to be a really happening place I think.” Like there’s so much potential for the close knit community and not that we all have to be, you know, huggy-huggy, kissy-kissy, but we have each other’s back.” Further, as the Anchorage Bowl fills, there is a local perception that Fairview is going to become a premier destination within the city. Fairview’s proximity to the downtown is seen as key. “As far as from our
perspective, Downtown can only grow in one direction. You know, you got ocean on one side, you got a river on the other, you’ve got, you know, all the priced houses on the third, so the fourth side is Fairview.” “I think I’m seeing a huge wish, need, want for people who want to live near downtown.” “The ideal of what constitutes downtown means to expand.”

**Conclusion**

There is a common exaggeration to the myth of Alaska, especially for those who have yet to experience the state. The outsider believes that everyone here is on the frontier, scattered and exceptional individuals facing away from the edge of civilization. Anchorage is not that. Fairview is not that. Fairview is the truth, in that communities and not individuals are the exceptional aspect of Anchorage. “This mentality of the Last Frontier, you know, you think it’s people who really want to think outside the box and do things differently…but there was a greater sense of, you know, within Alaskans, that they were bounded to get there by a common cause.” One hundred years into Anchorage’s history and Fairview’s position within that story is uncertain. What the story becomes is up to Fairview’s inhabitants and they have only begun to seize control of that destiny.
References


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1 The sources listed here were consulted and utilized in choosing the narrative tone, for historical framing, and to verify the emerging themes of the interviews.


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Thank you to the people who participated in our Neighborhood Walks and who agreed to be interviewed for this Centennial Project!

Story transcripts and interview excerpts can be accessed at:
http://cjdannenberg.commons.ualaska.edu/oral-history-project-fairview/
An Oral & Written History of Fairview: Past, Present, & Future

By David Reamer, Historian
With Clare Dannenberg, Ph.D.

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