

Back in the Early Days

Excerpts from Alaska State Library and [Alaskan Southeaster Magazine](#)

You think you have something to complain about..... think about this:

Alaska had no legislature for forty-five years after the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. She had no representative in Congress for 39 years of that period.

Sitka was the first capital of Alaska. Juneau was officially made the capital of Alaska in 1900.

In September of 1912 Alaskans were busy planning their first election for 8 members of the Senate and 16 members of the House. There were some top-notch mushers in the group. In the case of some members of the Northwestern Delegation, it was a case of mush or stay home.

The last boat had sailed from Nome near the end of October, just before the election was held. Two of the candidates, Charles D. Jones for the House and Elwood Bruner for the Senate, had been optimistic enough about the outcome of the election to leave on the last boat. They were both elected.

The other four successful candidates, Frank Aldrich, J.C. Kennedy and Tom Gaffney for the House and Conrad Freeding for the Senate, remained in Nome until January 7th.

On January 7, the four men hitched up their dog teams and headed for Fairbanks in a howling blizzard. The legislators were due in Juneau on March 3 and had a long way to travel.

The first part of their journey ended in Ruby on January 23. All four of the Nome delegates arrived about an hour apart, after 16 days on the trail. They remained in Ruby long enough to attend a banquet in their honor. Then they left for Fairbanks by dog team.

They mushed into Fairbanks on February 1st and 2nd. The legislators were again honored at a banquet before they started the last leg of their journey by dog team that ended in Valdez.

J.C. Kennedy was the first of the Nome delegation to reach Valdez on February 12. Tom Gaffney and Frank Aldrich arrived on February 13. Senator-elect Conrad Freeding pulled into Valdez on February 15 after covering 85 miles that day.

On February 18 at midnight the "mushing legislators" boarded the Northwestern and sailed for Juneau.

Dan Sutherland of Ruby, Harry Roden of Iditarod and Milo Kelly of Knik were three more members of Alaska's first Territorial Legislature. A portion of their journey had also been made by dog team.

Three legislators listed themselves as Democrats, three as Republicans, and the rest claimed some variety of independent or no-party affiliations. All the novice lawmakers were eager to serve. They would be paid, from federal funds, \$15 per day while in session plus fifteen cents per travel mile, round trip. Mileage was said to have amounted to an estimated \$600 to \$700 for the Nome mushers.

So, when Alaska's first legislators met in the Elks Hall in Juneau on March 3, 1913 for the convening of the historic first session of the Territorial Legislature there were some topnotch dog mushers in the group.



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