The purpose of this document is to make the story of Gustavus’s early history, published in 1988, more available to the public without reprinting it or producing a second edition. As well, it was an opportunity to correct several minor factual errors, to fix some grammatical, clarity, and punctuation issues, and to increase the number of photographs. I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions.—Jim Mackovjak, February 2021
Original Publication Information

This book is dedicated to my wife, Ann, and to our two young children, Anya Rose and Christopher George. May they have a place in their lives that will be as special to them as Alaska and Gustavus are special to their parents.

*Hope and Hard Work: The Early Settlers at Gustavus, Alaska*

James R. Mackovjak

Goose Cove Press, 1988

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Introduction

In January of 1987, Willis Matthew Peters died at St. Ann’s Nursing Home, in Juneau, Alaska. Mr. Peters was a member of the Kogwantaan Eagle Clan of the Tlingit People and was born at Strawberry Point—now Gustavus—on October 15, 1900.

I wonder where at Strawberry Point he was born. Given the time of year, his family may well have been smoking silver salmon along the Salmon River. In 1914, when the first white settlers arrived, there was a Tlingit smokehouse about a mile upstream of today’s Salmon River bridge. And homesteader Hank Johnson once showed me a spot along Falls Creek where a Tlingit family had stayed long enough to plant and harvest a crop of potatoes.

Probably we will never know the precise circumstances of Willis Peters’s birth. But the south end of Glacier Bay at the turn of the century was not without activity. John Muir had made Glacier Bay famous, and tours ships laden with sightseers cruised past Point Gustavus during the summer months. A salmon saltery was located in Bartlett Cove, in lower Glacier Bay, and halibut fishermen worked their gear in Icy Strait.

The Tlingits, of course, were active in hunting and fishing and gathering all along the coast, and there must have been prospectors passing through, spilled over from the Klondike gold rush. Add to these novelist Robert Service’s “men who don’t fit in,” and present were the makings for some interesting living in the region where the community of Gustavus would develop.

Historian R. N. DeArmond, in the Southeastern Log, March 1985, explained the naming of Gustavus:

In 1793 the English explorer Captain George Vancouver named Point Adolphus for Adolphus Frederick, the seventh son of King George. Eighty-five years later, in 1878, William Healey Dall was at work for the Coast Survey in the Icy Strait area. He noted the name Adolphus on the map and apparently assumed that it was named for King Gustavus II of Sweden, whose full
name was Gustavus Adolphus. The eastern entrance point to Glacier Bay, across Icy Strait from Point Adolphus, was known locally as Strawberry Point, but there was no name on the chart. Dall put the name Gustavus there, and so was at least partly responsible for the naming of, after the elapse of another sixty years or so, of a new community.

DeArmond’s statement that Point Gustavus was once known as Strawberry Point may be incorrect. I asked early homesteaders exactly where “the point” in Strawberry Point was, and they said it was basically a stretch of beach near the Salmon River.

The community of Strawberry Point was formally named Gustavus in 1925, when a post office was established—in Jennie Parker’s kitchen. Jennie said the local people had nothing to do with the change, that the Postal Service simply said that the community’s name was now Gustavus. The service’s reason may have been that there was a clam cannery, the Strawberry Point Packing Company, in Boswell Bay, in Prince William Sound, which likely had a mailroom. It would have been confusing to have two Strawberry Points in Alaska. In the following pages, Strawberry Point and Gustavus are used interchangeably.

In this book, I have attempted to trace the lives and experiences at Gustavus of some of the settlers and all the homesteaders who came here, mainly between the years 1914 and 1939. Because Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve has greatly affected how Gustavus has developed, I have included a section on the early relationship between the park and Gustavus.

**Gustavus’s glacial history**

The Pleistocene Epoch (“Ice Age”) is considered by geologists to have begun some three million years ago and was characterized by continental glaciers periodically occupying the upper latitudes of both hemispheres. At times during this period, southeastern Alaska was covered by a vast ice sheet that at some locations near Gustavus extended about 5,000 feet above today’s sea level and was responsible for the region’s typically glacial topography. What is now Gustavus was
periodically uncovered between glacial advances, but since the last distinct advance of continental ice scraped Gustavus to below the present sea level, there is no evidence of an ancestral Gustavus.

A period of warmer, probably drier weather caused the last great ice sheet to retreat, and by 13,000 years ago it had retreated into mountain valleys around Glacier Bay, in locations further back than today’s termini. There were no icebergs, and forest communities flourished in the upper reaches of Glacier Bay.

However, some 3,500 years ago, the climate again became cooler and wetter, and the glaciers advanced once more. Called the Neoglacial or “Little Ice Age,” this period culminated about 1750 A.D. and was the major determinant of the present topography of Gustavus.

During this period, an ice sheet advanced south over Glacier Bay to a point about three miles into Icy Strait, at least seventy miles from its present remnants (Grand Pacific Glacier, Muir Glacier, etc.). Gustavus was not covered by this ice sheet, but was built up of material (silt, sand, and gravel) carried by it. As the ice melted, it generated streams that carried the material and deposited it over Gustavus. The Salmon River was one of these streams, and it is estimated that 250 years ago it carried about 10–20 times its current water volume. Material that the river systems transported was sorted by weight. Larger rocks were deposited near the glacier, gravel was deposited further downstream, followed by sand and finally by silt, much of which found its way to tidewater.

The ice sheet had another direct effect on Gustavus: the weight of the ice caused the earth’s mantle beneath and around it to compress, which decreased the elevation of the land and caused an encroachment of the sea. At some locations in Gustavus, the beaches were more than a mile inland of where they are today. As the glacier retreated, however, the bedrock rebounded, and the land began to rise. At Bartlett Cove, the rate of rebound has been measured at 1.5 inches per year.

The rising land has changed some of the patterns of land use in Gustavus. For example, the portion of Ernie Swanson’s rutabaga crop that was flooded by an especially high tide in 1917 was stacked along what is now a dry slough a bit south of today’s Four Corners intersection. And when the Parker family arrived, the Salmon River and Good River were navigable farther upstream than they are now, owing to the rivers’ bottoms having risen with the land. And into the 1930s, extreme high tides flooded
into the front yard of the White family homestead (later Gustavus Inn), where a garden now grows. Also, the rising land has generally increased the natural drainage in Gustavus and made the land more developable.

Figure 1. Homesteads, Gustavus, Alaska.
It was in a Seattle billiard parlor in 1913 that Verne Henry, a college student, first heard of Strawberry Point from an old steamboat captain who spoke fondly of an attractive and nearly level foreland along Icy Strait. Verne was interested in the possibilities of homesteading in Alaska, and related what he had learned of Strawberry Point to his friend Bill Taggart, a clothing salesman. Bill was also interested in homesteading, as was his friend John Davis, who had recently inherited a sum of money.

The three men, all in their early twenties—Bill was the only one was married and had been so for about a year—formulated a tentative plan to homestead at Strawberry Point. John Davis agreed to finance the endeavor in exchange for the first preference of a homestead site and the cooperation of the others in building a cabin that would eventually be his. They looked upon homesteading as an adventure that might lead to a permanent residence.

In April 1914, Bill and Verne traveled by steamer to Juneau as an advance party to assess the possibilities at Strawberry Point. In Juneau, they checked with authorities about the legalities of homesteading, and at Young’s Hardware outfitted themselves with camping gear and other equipment deemed necessary for their stay at Strawberry Point. They also purchased a skiff, in which they planned to row the seventy-mile distance to their prospective homesteads. As it happened, however, they were able to load the skiff and their gear, as well as themselves, aboard a boat bound for the salmon cannery at Excursion Inlet. The following day, a cannery tender took them to the mouth of the Salmon River, from where Bill and Verne, in pouring rain, rowed upstream to a location on the river’s west bank, just above the present Salmon River bridge, where they pitched their tent.

The next several days were spent hiking about the land, assessing its potential and looking for possible homestead sites. The men were especially impressed by the luxuriant growth of rye grass along the Salmon
River, as well as the abundance of open land that could so easily be cultivated. Bill Taggart referred to it later as “a beautiful, beautiful, spot.”

Bill and Verne sent word of Strawberry Point’s suitability to John Davis, who arrived there in May. John fancied himself a sportsman and was attired in stylish hunting clothes. During his stay of only several days, the group completed its plans. They would homestead at Strawberry Point and support themselves by raising cattle and growing produce. They even considered diverting the Salmon River into bogs where they believed cranberries could be grown. Between the thriving gold-mining town of Juneau, the Native village of Hoonah, and the nearby canneries, there was a ready market for nearly anything they could produce.

John returned to Seattle and traveled to the Midwest to marry his fiancé, Bernice. Bill and Verne remained at Strawberry Point, and Bill sent word to his wife Margaret that she should join him, and Verne proposed through the mail to his girlfriend, Janet (“Janie”). Word was received that Margaret and Janie, along with newly wedded John and Bernice, would arrive at Juneau in late June aboard the steamer Jefferson.

Bill and Verne kept busy at Strawberry Point with preparations for building a cabin that would shelter themselves and the new arrivals. Several days before their partners were due, they departed for Juneau in their skiff. After two days of rowing, they reached Shelter Island, near Auke Bay, where a fishing boat transported them the remaining distance to Juneau.

The Jefferson arrived on June 26, and on the same day Vern Henry, dressed in a borrowed suit, married Janie in the home of a Presbyterian minister.

Shortly thereafter, the group departed Juneau aboard a fishing boat whose captain had agreed to transport the homesteaders and their supplies to Strawberry Point. Among their supplies was a gasoline-powered skiff, purchased because their original skiff had been stolen. Stormy weather made the trip uncomfortable, and when the boat was abeam of Hoonah, the captain stopped it and said he needed additional payment to continue to Strawberry Point. Bill Taggart told the captain that he would like to discuss the matter privately and, once alone, showed him his revolver and implied that he was willing to use it. The captain proceeded to Strawberry Point without delay, and in heavily overcast weather, the homesteaders motored in their skiff up the Salmon River to their campsite,
where they erected two more tents alongside the original. It was with skepticism that Janie Henry viewed for the first time the place where she would honeymoon and live. Margaret Taggart, however, later described herself as “ecstatic.”

Juneau’s newspaper, the *Alaska Daily Empire*, took notice of the young couples and on July 2 published an article “Young People Will Make Home in North”:

*John Davis, W.J. Taggart and Charles V. Henry, three newly wedded husbands who brought their wives to Juneau last week, have already decided to remain and grow up with the country. As evidence of their intent, they yesterday filed notice of homestead locations in the Icy Straits sections. Each claims 320 acres of land. The land is located on the Salmon River, in the wild strawberry district near Excursion Inlet.*

At Strawberry Point, each of the three tents was equipped with a cookstove and would serve as a home to one of the families until a communal log cabin could be finished. No one in the group had any experience building a log cabin, but guided by several pictures, they proceeded to do so. The men felled trees and fitted the logs into place, while the women chinked them with moss. The cabin, completed by late summer, was about twenty feet square and had a common kitchen/living room flanked by three smaller rooms, each the private domain of one family. It became known as Honeymoon Ranch.
Food was not a problem for the young homesteaders. They had brought with them a generous supply of provisions, which was augmented by twice-monthly trips to the cannery store at Excursion Inlet. They also made occasional trips to Hoonah to pick up mail. The men hunted deer on Pleasant Island, and the abundant waterfowl and ptarmigan at Strawberry Point were easy prey. They also occasionally purchased venison from Natives. “Four bits [fifty cents] for a hind quarter, two bits [twenty-five cents] more if you wanted the heart,” recalled Bill Taggart.

A garden provided the homesteaders with vegetables, some of which were preserved by canning and/or storage in a root cellar. Other than digging clams along the beach and spearing a few salmon in the Salmon River, the homesteaders seldom fished during their stay at Strawberry Point. Cannery workers at Excursion Inlet and occasionally visiting fishermen gave them ample quantities of fish, mostly salmon and halibut.

Margaret Taggart described her first attempt to make bread:

... and my mother-in-law had written out how to make bread, so I said that I would make the first batch of bread. And
I’d never cooked before in my life ‘cause I wasn’t raised that way. But I started in to make this bread, and it wouldn’t raise, and it wouldn’t raise. So I decided to throw it away. And I went outside and it was a warm day, the sun was shining, along in July, and I buried the dough and tried to forget about it. Pretty soon, Janie looked out and here the dough was raising . . . so I went out and cleaned the dough all off and made some bread.

At the cannery at Excursion Inlet, the homesteaders were advised to have as little as possible to do with local Natives, who might resent their presence. The homesteaders had heard that a Native named Aaron Sharp had a fish camp up the Salmon River. (Lonnie Newman, a Native man from Hoonah, later came to own the camp.) Their first encounter with Aaron came about six weeks after they had arrived. While the men were away from camp, the women saw two canoes coming up the Salmon River. The women were frightened, thinking naively that they might be scalped. Margaret got a gun and, as the canoes approached their camp, she shouted, “Move on. Move on.” The men in the canoes smiled profusely as they passed, trying to show that they intended no harm.

The second encounter with Aaron Sharp came several days later, when the men were again away. Quoting Margaret Taggart:

At the mouth of the river, Aaron Sharp and his wife with their guns and dogs turned to come in the river. We could see them with the glass, and, of course, we were terribly frightened. And I had my revolver in my pocket, and it was cocked. . . . And they came up to the shore and then they stopped, and so when they did, I told them to keep moving, and they didn’t. I said, “Well, you go. Go right away.” And they stopped the canoe and he helped her out [Margaret later described Mrs. Sharp as being very pleasant, tall, and stately.] And I was frightened, and I said, “You there, Janie?” And she said, “Oh, yes, I’m watching.” And I said, “Well now, if anything happens, you shoot ‘em.” And she said, “I won’t. I’ll shoot ‘em in the leg. That’s all.” And I said, “Well, okay, wherever first.” Then they wanted to peek in that tent, and there was Janie standing there
next to the bed with a gun. And he kinda turned around and patted me on the shoulder and said, “We friends. We friends.” And I didn’t just exactly like that.

As Aaron left, he told the women that strawberries would soon be ripe, and his wife would come back and show the homesteaders where to pick them.

Once news of Margaret and Janie’s encounter with Aaron Sharp got around, Natives at Excursion Inlet and Hoonah began teasing Bill Taggart, saying, “Yer klooch, she shoot Aaron Sharp.”

There were several more misunderstandings between those at Honeymoon Ranch and Aaron Sharp’s group, but they finally became friends, and Aaron became a frequent and welcome visitor.

Another visitor was Reverend George Good, a Presbyterian missionary stationed at Hoonah. Occasionally, he would spend a Sunday with the homesteaders, singing hymns and enjoying a potluck dinner.

The fall of 1914 was spent quietly. Apart from their usual chores, the men built furniture from beachcombed lumber, and the women sewed. During the week, the women wore jeans, but on Saturday evening, there would be parties, and the women would dress in their very gayest dresses and, as was the fashion at the time, even put a small “beauty mark” on their faces. Popcorn or ice cream (topped with canned wild strawberries) was made, their record player was cranked up, and their evening of blackjack and dancing began. The homesteaders’ favorite recording was “All Dressed Up and No Place to Go.”

“I was the only one that had been married for a while. The one thing they didn’t want to do was start a family right away, so they came to me and asked my advice. I can tell you how good it was, because the women all got [pregnant] within a month of each other.”—Bill Taggart

In late November, the Davises and Taggarts left for Washington, where John and Bill took an eight-week course in animal husbandry at Washington State College, in Pullman. This would prepare them for the
1915 season, during which they planned to buy calves from the dairy in Juneau, raise them at Strawberry Point, and then sell them on local markets. They would also that year attempt a cash crop of produce, and Bill ordered the necessary machinery, as well as three horses, a cow, and a number of chickens.

Bill returned to Strawberry Point in late winter, leaving Margaret with her family in Seattle. John and Bernice returned to the homestead for a while but spent most of their time in Juneau.

The animals and equipment arrived in the spring on a barge towed by a fishing boat. Using the team of horses to draw the plow, Bill and Verne began breaking the soil for their first cash-crop planting. Later in the summer, the homesteaders experienced some success in making silage from rye grass. In June, Janie went to Seattle to give birth to her and Verne’s first child, Jim. Several weeks later, she returned with her infant son to Strawberry Point, where she assisted Verne in building a two-room frame house almost directly across the Salmon River from Honeymoon Ranch. They filed on a homestead there.

Margaret Taggart gave birth to a daughter in Seattle and returned as far as Juneau. The Taggarts felt that life at Strawberry Point was too dangerous for their newborn child.

John and Bernice Davis and their firstborn child were also in Juneau, where John had prospects for a job in the booming community and seemed to be losing interest in Strawberry Point.

* * *

A certain amount of fragmentation began to occur among the homesteaders. In Juneau, John Davis was for some reason evasive about what his plans were. Bill Taggart, since he had interested John in the Strawberry Point venture, felt a responsibility toward him and was unsure about proceeding further with the project using John’s money.

Ernie Swanson, a commercial fisherman and beachcomber, wandered into Strawberry Point and began staying with and assisting the Henrys, later building a small cabin of his own, which eventually came to be referred to as the Bear’s Nest. Together, Ernie and the Henrys isolated themselves somewhat from the rest of the group. Further complicating
matters were the young additions to all the families—the homesteaders plans did not include pregnant wives and young children.

Figure 3. Circa 1917, near the Salmon River. Left to right: Orvel Rude, probably John Davis, Ernie Swanson.

Nevertheless, the second season yielded an encouraging crop of potatoes, carrots, and especially rutabagas, which because the homesteaders lacked adequate transportation to other markets, were transported by fishing boat and sold mostly in Hoonah.

That fall, Bill Taggart left for Juneau, where he worked for a short while, earning enough money to return with his family to Seattle. In Seattle, Margaret gave birth to a second daughter, and it was this event that made final the Taggart’s decision to forego their venture at Strawberry Point. Thus, the only residents at the point during the winter of 1915–1916 were the Henrys, who were living in the house that they had built, and possibly Ernie Swanson. The Taggarts had left Strawberry Point permanently, and the Davises were infrequent visitors. That was the year that Verne Henry wasn't able to shoot a goose for Thanksgiving dinner and decided that an eagle would have to suffice. After a terribly long time in the oven, the bird
was still too tough to chew, so Janie put it in a pot on top of their heating stove to finish cooking. They were able to eat the bird three days later.

Noting the isolation at Strawberry Point, Janie Henry later said that “We were very happy for visitors. We made them welcome, fed them, and bedded them down, if necessary.”

The following summer (1916), with the assistance of Ernie Swanson, Verne Henry planted and harvested an impressive crop of rutabagas and other vegetables, much of which was transported in Ernie Swanson’s boat to Hoonah and shipped by steamer to Seattle markets. Also in 1916, George Good, the minister from Hoonah, and his wife and four sons moved to Strawberry Point. They built a cabin along the east shore of the Taggart River, a stream that eventually came to be known as the Good River. The Good family lived and farmed at Strawberry Point until 1919, when they left for Killisnoo, near Angoon, where George had been offered a teaching position.

In June 1917, the Abraham Lincoln Parker and his family moved to Gustavus, taking up residence along the Good River, almost directly across from the Goods’ cabin. Of the Parkers, Janie Henry said, “We heard about these newcomers and were very anxious to meet them. They were older than we were but were very courteous and cordial. We were so glad that there were other people living here so we could get together now and then.”

By 1917, the Henrys had fulfilled the requirements for obtaining a deed to their homestead except for having its boundaries surveyed. (Strawberry Point was not surveyed for homesteads until 1920.) That summer, they contracted the services of a surveyor who, with his wife, spent two weeks surveying the Henrys’ homestead.

By fall, the last of the rutabagas had been delivered to Hoonah, where they would be loaded aboard the steamer Al-Ki for transport to markets in Seattle. The Henrys went to Juneau to await a check for the sale of their crops. The 200 sacks would yield them $200—their stake to move to Seattle, where they would await the results of their homestead application.

The fate of their crops was recounted in an October 1964 Alaska Sportsman article by Ernie Swanson, who also had grown rutabagas at Strawberry Point that season, probably with the assistance of his partner, John “Buck” Leary, on the land that John Davis had planned to homestead.
Everything grew well that year. In addition, the war had started, prices were going up and there was a big demand for vegetables in Seattle. Our first shipment consisted of 150 sacks of rutabagas and was loaded aboard the Al-Ki. The next day, which was November 1, she struck a reef at Point Augusta and stayed there.

The cargo was salvaged, however, so our shipment was not lost but merely delayed. It was finally transferred to the Mariposa. A couple of days later, on November 18, the Mariposa hit Strait Island Reef in Sumner Strait. She became a total loss, as did our rutabagas.

As their crops were not insured, the Henrys had to remain in Juneau for several months until Verne could earn enough money to move himself and his family to Seattle. Ernie Swanson, however had additional rutabagas and

... got ready another shipment, laboriously hauled it to Hoonah, and hoisted it up on the dock to await another steamer. The weather turned cold, there was no warm storage on the dock, and the whole lot froze. It was discouraging, but we figured we could still make wages for our labor with the produce we had left. We got it stacked and ready to go, stacked above the high tide line at Strawberry Point and ready to load the next morning.

Something happened to the tide that night. It came up much higher than it was supposed to, and by morning [the crop] was worthless. I lost my interest in farming right then and have never regained it.

In Seattle, the Henrys learned that a miscalculation by the surveyor had cause their homestead application to be rejected. They would not be the proud owners of a homestead at Strawberry Point. This, with consideration to the privations and difficulties of raising a family in the wilderness, terminated their plans to return to Alaska.
Information regarding John Davis’s further activities at Strawberry Point are sketchy and at times contradictory. It appears that he did visit Strawberry Point after 1917 and may have farmed in about 1919. His log cabin was used by several Gustavus settlers as a temporary residence, and as well was used as a storage building and a hay barn.

Ernie Swanson remained in southeast Alaska and in 1929 established a fish-buying station at what was known as the Gunk Hole, which Swanson later renamed Elfin Cove, after his boat, the *Elfin.*

II

The Good Family

The Reverend George Good was a Presbyterian missionary stationed at Hoonah who occasionally visited Strawberry Point to conduct services with the homesteaders at Honeymoon Ranch. When Bill Taggart decided in 1915 to forego his homesteading plans, he penned a letter to Good in which he encouraged him to consider homesteading at Strawberry Point, particularly at the site on the east side of the Taggart River (later, the Good River), where Bill had intended to file.

The departure from Hoonah of George Good and his wife, Ursula, and four sons was unplanned and, since his name was later cleared of any maliciousness, quite humorous. While preaching to his Tlingit-speaking congregation, Reverend Good routinely used a young bilingual Tlingit girl as an interpreter. For some reason, she harbored ill feelings toward Good, and she jeopardized his position in the community by one day falsely translating his service into words that were highly insulting to the people of Hoonah. As a result, the Reverend Good, with his family, was asked to leave Hoonah—immediately. Pressed for time, Good acted upon Taggart’s suggestion. The year was 1916.

When the Good family arrived at Strawberry Point, they moved temporarily into John Davis’s Honeymoon Ranch cabin, which had been
unoccupied, and began building a log cabin for themselves on the east side of what became known as the Good River.

![Figure 4. Good family cabin.](image)

That the river should come to bear Good’s name derives from the fact that some animosity toward Good must have lingered in Hoonah. Natives who visited early on with A.L. and Edith Parker at their homestead always found humor in saying, “You know Good? I know Good. He no Good.” Since the river on which their homestead was located was full of clay and devoid of fish, it was no good either, so A.L. Parker named the river after George Good.

Although they were not rural people, the Goods planted an extensive garden and built a root cellar in which to store their produce. Like John Davis, Verne Henry, and Ernie Swanson, the Goods shipped some of their produce—mostly rutabagas—to Seattle markets. Their homestead came to included two horses, which were used for plowing and hauling firewood, a cow, and a flock of chickens, part or all of which may have come from Verne Henry and John Davis’s flock.
During the salmon canning seasons, George worked at the canneries at Dundas Bay and Excursion Inlet. For transportation, he had a small gas boat, the *Tornado*, which, like other vessels at Strawberry Point, was moored in the river and allowed to go dry at low water.

![Figure 5. Ursula Good (black clothing) and Edith Parker. Bert Parker is standing behind his mother; Glen Parker, in bib overalls, is on Bert's left. The other three boys are Ursula's sons.](image)

For the Good family, life at Strawberry Point consisted of long hours of farming, building, gathering firewood, and performing the numerous cores that rural life required. Because George and Ursula had no daughters, their sons had to assist with the normally female chores of washing dishes, doing laundry, and the like. There was little time left for diversions, yet especially the Good boys found life at Strawberry Point very agreeable. Among other things, they were fond of dressing in suits camouflaged with grass and then hunting geese, which were at times so numerous on the flats that one of the boys once killed five with a single shot.

The Goods remained at Strawberry Point until the fall of 1919, when they left for Killisnoo, where George had secured a teaching position. Harry
Hall helped the Goods move out and took over the homestead, on which he eventually proved up. It was with Good’s cow that Harry got his start in the cattle business.

### III

**Lester Rink**

Lester Rink was the first person to successfully homestead at Strawberry Point. He homesteaded just before A.L. and Edith Parker, before the maximum allowable size for a homestead in Alaska was reduced from 320 to 160 acres. Rink’s homestead was patented in 1923, and he described it as being along the Rink River.

Little is known of Lester Rink. He was short in stature, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, and lived alone in a small log cabin on his homestead. He raised cattle, and fellow-homesteader Hank Johnson said that Rink had less control of his cattle than anyone in Gustavus. Rink was considered a promoter, and this probably accounts for his designating as a river what is now justifiably known as Rink Creek. In about 1936, Rink moved to Hoonah, where he reportedly married a woman with five daughters and started a bakery.

### IV

**The Parker Family**

More than any other, the family of Abraham Lincoln and Edith Parker has participated in the history of Gustavus. With four sons and one daughter and her husband, the Parkers arrived at Strawberry Point in 1917. Seventy years later (when the first edition of this book was being written),
one son and a number of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren still resided here.

A.L. Parker was described by his son Glen as a “jack-of-all-trades who tried to master them all.” As was his wife, he was independent, family oriented, religious, resourceful, and, above all, hardworking. Although they ruefully recalled much of the labor they were born into, no one held more respect for Mr. Parker than did his sons, his principal source of labor in farming, ranching, lumbering, gold mining, and constructing a host of buildings, boats, bridges, and docks.

A.L. Parker was born in 1866 in Indiana and, once an adult, migrated to Oregon, where he obtained a 420-acre timber claim. He was talented musically and played the guitar and sang onstage in Portland and Seattle. It was in Portland that he met Kansas-born Edith Haynes (born in 1868), whom he married. A water project condemned Parker’s timber claim, and the compensation he received was his stake to go north with the Klondike gold rush in 1897. He crossed the Chilkoot Pass and established a mining operation on nine claims along Spruce Creek, near Atlin, British Columbia.

Edith followed the next year. She traveled aboard the steamer Jefferson with their three children—May, Eunice, and Charles. Vivid in her memory of the trip were the oil lamps and bedbugs. With a hired helper for the children, she crossed the Chilkoot Pass and journeyed on to her husband’s claims. There, for a while, she helped make ends meet by operating a wall-tent rooming house for miners. A.L. and Edith sons Albert (“Bert”) and Leslie were born in a tent at Atlin.

A shortage of water forced the Parkers to cease their mining operations, and they moved to Skagway in 1904. There, A.L. established his reputation by moving the Dedman Hotel (later the Golden North Hotel) several blocks to its present location. Using rollers, a windlass, and a single horse, he reportedly managed the move without breaking a single pane of glass “while business continued as usual.” A.L. and Edith’s son Glen was born in Skagway.

The Parkers moved in 1914 to Douglas (across Gastineau Channel from Juneau), where A.L. went to work building houses. In 1916, he took a job as foreman at Kane’s sawmill, at Excursion Inlet, leaving his family in Douglas so his children could attend school. The story is told that one sunny summer day, he climbed to the top of the ridge that separates Excursion Inlet from Strawberry Point and, surveying the verdant flats
below, proclaimed that “Like Moses, I have found the Promised Land.” He later rented a gasoline-powered boat, and with his wife Edith traveled to Strawberry Point and journeyed up the Good River. Years later, Edith recalled that day to her granddaughter Henrietta and spoke of the beautiful sunset, dining with the Good family, and how much she liked it all.

Said son Glen: “[Dad] got interested in seeing it was a beautiful place with lots of possibilities, so he figured he’d take up a homestead here and move us out here . . . and homestead and make a go of it.”

A.L. Parker had not been satisfied with working for wages. For him, Strawberry Point was a place where his family could live and grow, a place where they could obtain a substantial holding of good land that could be developed for ranching, farming, and lumbering. Seven canneries were in operation in the region, and these, with Juneau and Douglas, would provide a sizable market for beef, produce, and lumber.

The Parkers arrived at Strawberry Point in late May in 1917. Charlie and May, along with her husband, Bill White, came first and pitched tents at a site on the west bank of the Good River, almost directly across from the Goods’ cabin. Eunice, eldest of the Parker children, was married and living in Juneau and Seattle and did not accompany her family to their new home.

A.L. followed, and then Edith, with her other sons and the family’s belongings, were transported to Strawberry Point aboard a cannery scow. All went to work immediately in establishing a camp and planting a garden of approximately six acres.

A.L. remained employed at Excursion Inlet, where some of the lumber he sawed was rafted up and towed by a fishing boat to Strawberry Point. There, his sons began constructing a house. They were assisted by Joe Simpson, a Canadian who also built and for a short while occupied a small house along the Good River. Little more is known about Mr. Simpson.
By fall, the Parkers had established themselves. Their house, insulated with sawdust, was finished—with wood heat and kerosene lamps. Their garden had been successful, and its production was stored in a concrete root cellar. In addition, they had built a silo to store silage for a horse, a cow, and nine steers that had been shipped from Juneau. And they had fenced about forty acres of pasture with trapwire fencing. (Trapwire is a heavy-duty version of chicken wire that was used on the salmon traps that canneries constructed along Alaska’s shores.)

Of horses, Glen Parker recalled that the first time his father hitched a horse he had purchased to a plow, he couldn’t get the horse to go straight and ended up with a circular field. Parker later found out that the horse had been a circus horse and had been trained to go round and round.

For transportation, they had a twenty-foot dory, the *Frisbee*, which had a seven-horsepower gasoline engine.

The boys hunted deer on Pleasant Island and ducks and geese along the beach. There were plenty of salmon to be caught, and these, coupled with the wild game and the produce from their garden, provided the Parkers with an abundance of food.
In November, Bill and May White returned to Thane (near Juneau), where they resided until early in 1922, when they moved permanently to Strawberry Point.

* * *

The winter of 1917–1918 was the Parkers’ first at Strawberry Point. It was exceptionally severe and proved hard on the Parkers’ cattle, which were prevented from grazing by an accumulation of more than five feet of snow. There was not enough silage to feed them, so the Parkers fed them root crops from the garden. Despite the family’s efforts, only three steers survived the winter.

A.L. continued working at Excursion Inlet until the fall of 1919, visiting his family so rarely that when he was seen trudging through the snow toward his family’s house one Christmas, Glen informed his mother that “Mr. Parker is coming.” While at Excursion Inlet, A.L. built the 38-foot gasoline-powered *Edith A*. The vessel would be the family’s chief means of towing logs and transporting supplies, beef, and produce for many years.

Figure 7. Looking upstream (north) on the Good River from Parker homestead. Cabin on east side of river was built by George Good.
By purchasing calves from the dairy in Juneau, the Parkers quickly built a herd of cattle, and the sale of these, along with vegetables, was their initial economic mainstay at Strawberry Point.
Gardening, especially growing strawberries, was primarily the province of Edith Parker. Of her, Glen said:

*Mother was a very ambitious person. She had a beautiful strawberry patch. She used to sell strawberries in the summertime to the canneries, too, along with beef. Usually take, oh, maybe twenty or thirty crates of strawberries over to the canneries. Big, beautiful strawberries. There’s pretty near a half acre there, I guess. She’d be out there in the morning [before she awakened the rest of her family and prepared their breakfast] working on them things. Nothing lazy about her.*

In 1919, A.L. Parker obtained a contract from the Alaska Road Commission to construct a drawbridge over the Good River. The law then required that bridges built over navigable waterways be such that vessels could pass. The Parkers salvaged round logs for the bridge off the beach and purchased dimensional lumber from the Excursion Inlet sawmill. The Alaska Road Commission provided the hardware. A.L. and his sons Bert, Les, and Glen did the construction. At seventeen, Bert was the oldest
worker in his father's crew. Bert later said of himself that since he was fifteen, he was “in the harness, bucking up against a man's job.”

Figure 10. Parker family homestead, circa 1922. Left to right: Henrietta White, Les Parker, Glen Parker, Bert Parker, May White, Edith Parker, Bill White (Charles White in Bill’s lap), A.L. Parker.

And living conditions improved. Bill and May White’s eldest daughter, Henrietta, recalled that:

*Over at Good River, my uncle dammed up that little creek in the back of Grandma Parker’s place and had a little waterwheel. And we had batteries that the waterwheel charged. And then he ran some lights for grandma. She thought that was so wonderful of him to do that.*

By 1921, the Parkers had built a sawmill of their own. Their original equipment, run by steam generated from a wood-fired boiler, was purchased from a mining operation near Juneau. Lumber was in demand by the canneries for rebuilding their salmon traps and was used by the Parkers and other locals for their own projects. About twenty to sixty
thousand board feet of lumber were cut each year until the mid-1930s, when the mill ceased to function and fell into a state of disrepair.

Figure 11. Parker sawmill along Good River. Note board-on-board roofing.
In 1922, when the Parkers built the Salmon River drawbridge for the Alaska Road Commission, it was with lumber from their sawmill. Glen Parker was fourteen then and operated the pile driver. The value of the contract for building the bridge was $1,950, and the Parkers used their earning from this project to purchase a tractor and plow.
Not everyone was pleased with the bridge. Gustavus homesteader and schoolteacher Ruth Matson wrote of Hoonah Native Lonnie Newman’s feelings toward and experience with the bridge.

*I couldn’t understand why Lonnie [Newman] and the other Indians, when they took freight to their camps upriver, always loaded it into skiffs below the bridge and lined or rowed upstream. They could easily have lifted the drawbridge and gone almost to their camps in their gas boats. Harry Hall explained to me that Lonnie had been very much opposed to the building of the bridge on the grounds that it would scare away the fish and bring in evil spirits.

To make matters worse, the first year Lonnie decided to try out the new contraption, he got in all right. But the bridge, not being used frequently, had frozen shut before he decided to come out. He became panic stricken when the bridge wouldn’t open for him and thought that evil spirits were on his trail for sure. He sawed off his mast and squeezed under the bridge, but from that day on, he believed that going under the bridge was bad luck.

The Parker family originally had about twenty acres under cultivation along the Good River, and they sold much of their produce, especially carrot and turnips, to the seven canneries (Hoonah, Dundas Bay, Port...
Althorp, Funter Bay, Hawk Inlet, and two at Excursion Inlet) that operated in the area. Potatoes and rutabagas were usually sold in Juneau because they were generally harvested after the canneries had finished their seasons. Bert Parker took orders for the produce and beef, and delivered it to the canneries aboard the *Edith A*. At times, his nephews and nieces went with him, and Henrietta (Bill and May White’s daughter) recalled that the turnips, carrots, and radishes were all tied in little bundles and stacked on the boat, and that strawberries were packed twelve baskets to each homemade crate. The strawberries sold for between ten and twenty cents per basket, and one year Edith sold $450 worth. Henrietta added that she could “remember working all summer picking strawberries for my grandmother. And then I bought myself a coat for winter.”

Figure 14. Edith Parker’s garden. Left to right: Henrietta White, Edith Parker, Charlie Parker, May White, Les Parker.
Upon reaching the age of twenty-one, the legal age for taking up a homestead, each of the Parker children except Eunice (who never lived at Strawberry Point) was expected to and did take up a homestead. Said Glen: “That’s the way it was with us—whenever you came of age.”

Of the four “Parker Boys,” only Charlie, the eldest, did not remain at Strawberry Point. A machinist and mason by trade and a prospector by avocation, he sought employment outside of the community, but he did fulfill his familial obligation by proving up on a homestead (Lucky Lands) on the east side of the Salmon River.
Charlie was patriotic, fighting in World War I as a marine, and he was intelligent and persuasive. A prolific writer, he corresponded with people such as territorial governors, U.S. presidents, and Zane Grey. His concerns ranged from an application for grazing rights on local lands (accompanied by a complete explanation of cattle ranching at Strawberry Point) to the strategic importance of Gustavus during World War II. It was Charlie Parker’s one-man letter-writing campaign in 1954 that led to the removal of certain areas of Gustavus from Glacier Bay National Monument.

During World War II, Charlie, on his own initiative, constructed an emergency airplane landing strip parallel to and east of the Salmon River. He planted a long row of spruce trees pointing toward the strip, constructed a small bunker beneath them, and notified the military of the facilities that he had provided. Additionally, he built and stocked a small cabin at what he called “Lake Independence” (Bartlett Lake).

Charlie was married for a short time following World War I, and fathered one son, Charles Jr. Crippled by arthritis, he spent his last years in
a small prospecting cabin on the south side of the Alaska Range. He died in 1972.

* * *

The Parkers’ second-born son, Bert, was the most businesslike of the brothers and early on ran the family’s boat, the *Edith A*, delivering Parker beef, lumber, and produce to Juneau and nearby canneries. His wife, Jennie, was sister to Archie Chase (who later homesteaded at Strawberry Point) and had come from Nebraska in the summer of 1924 to work at her uncle Oliver Hillman’s store in Hoonah. She was introduced to Bert by Hillman as “an imported prairie chicken,” and after a brief courtship, she and Bert were married. Their first home was the house that Joe Simpson had abandoned. They moved it to a location just north of Bert’s parents’ home, and it became known as the “honeymoon house.” Bert and Jennie later filed on the homestead that the Henry’s had relinquished, moved into the frame house that the Henrys had left, and listed their address as Strawberry Lane.

Figure 17. Bert and Jennie Parker’s homestead house.
Jennie became the community’s first schoolteacher, and with her four students—Glen Parker, Henrietta White, Charles White, and Gloria White—held classes in Edith “Ma” Parker’s bedroom. Unfortunately, territorial education funds ran out in January 1925, and school was terminated. Jennie was also the community’s first postmistress and sorted the monthly mail in her home. (The *Virginia IV*, the first mail boat to serve Strawberry Point, began service in 1925. At that time, the mail was deposited on a scow that was anchored off the mouth of the Salmon River.)

In 1939, Earl Trager, a National Park Service naturalist, visited Gustavus. He wrote that Bert Parker “is considered one of the most enterprising settlers and to have the best farming equipment on Strawberry Point. . . In addition, he owns an old Ford sedan, which was out of order at the time of our visit.” Bert and Jennie had two daughters, Alberta and Jeanne.

Figure 18. Alberta, Jeanne, Jennie, and Bert Parker with homemade skis. No one at Gustavus in those days used ski poles.
After participating in the Parker family’s gold-mining venture in Glacier Bay (see below), Bert and Jennie gradually began focusing on the marine transportation industry and Juneau. They left Gustavus in 1941, when Bert began working for the military, which was constructing a supply base at Excursion Inlet. In 1952, Bert went into the tugboat business (Parker Tug and Barge), a career he pursued until he was 73 years old. After retiring from the tugboat business, he fished commercially until his death in 1984. His ashes were spread along the shore of Pleasant Island, where Bert loved so well to fish.

* * *

Leslie Parker filed on part of the homestead that John Davis had relinquished. It was on the west side of the Salmon River, just upstream of the Salmon River bridge. He built a house there in 1926, and the homestead, which he called Hollywood Farm, was patented in 1935. Les left for prospecting with his father shortly thereafter, and after the 1940s, he moved to Seattle, operating tugboats in Alaska during the summer months and working in a shipyard during the winter. In Seattle, he married Bernice, and the couple had three sons. Like his brothers Bert and Glen, when Les retired it was to fish commercially, which, when this book was originally written, he was still doing, spending summers in his homestead house and fishing for salmon in the local waters.

* * *

How fortunate I was to find Glen, because I’d never have had so much adventure with anyone that I knew as I’ve had with Glen.—Nell Parker

Nell Crowell was born in 1915 and grew up in Fresno, California. Early in 1937, she met Mrs. Wade, a preacher who had been doing missionary work in Alaska and was looking for a companion to accompany her on her next trip north.
Nell decided to go, probably as much because of a desire for adventure as for religious reasons. To pay her way, she earned money by painting small religious banners (e.g., “Alaska for Christ”) and selling them. Also, she received a stipend from her church.

In June of 1937, the women arrived by steamer in Juneau, where they stayed for a short while in the home of Brother Charles Personious, of the Assembly of God church. Mrs. Wade had no firm plans but intended to travel to the various canneries in the area to hold bible classes. When she and Nell, along with Anna Mae Personious (daughter of Brother Charles) went to Excursion Inlet—their first stop—the found that because of some recent problems, women weren’t permitted there. The superintendent of the cannery, however, made an exception and allowed them to spend the night. Perhaps he sensed that Mrs. Wade could take care of herself and her companions, for she was well over six feet tall and weighed more than 300 pounds.

The next morning, Bert, Les, and Glen Parker arrived at Excursion Inlet. Mrs. Wade was a friend of Edith Parker, and the boys offered to repair her boat, which was leaking, and invited them to come to Gustavus. Mrs. Wade accepted the Parker brothers’ generosity, and the boat was quickly repaired and on its way to the Parker homestead on the Good River.
At Gustavus, Edith Parker confided to Nell that because her family was away from the homestead much of the time, she was often lonely and frightened. Later, she asked if Nell might be interested in staying with her. Nell thought it a good idea but felt obligated to return to Juneau with Mrs. Wade. Several days later, Glen went to the Personiouses’ home in Juneau, where Nell was staying, and asked Nell again if she would come to Gustavus and stay with his mother. Nell accepted his invitation and was soon on her way to Gustavus. She stayed through the winter and especially enjoyed Edith’s Saturday-night “bang outs,” when the family members and their guests would sing, make fudge or popcorn, and generally enjoy themselves.

My grandfather played the guitar and he got his four sons to play with him, and he was so good. And we got those guitars playing together and everybody singing. We really enjoyed them, I remember, sometimes ‘til six o’clock in the morning.—Henrietta (White) House
In the spring of 1938, Glen proposed to Nell, and on June 10 of that year they were married by Brother Personious on the front porch of A.L. and Edith Parker’s home. Their honeymoon was a ten-day trip throughout Glacier Bay on the Parkers’ prospecting boat, the L & G.

Figure 20. Glen and Nel Parker’s wedding. Left to right: Les Parker, Edith Parker, Charlie Parker, Glen Parker, Nel Parker, May White, A.L. Parker, Bert Parker.

Glen had filed on a homestead several years earlier, and it was patented in October 1938. His homestead house had been small and simple, and he now began enlarging and improving it to accommodate Nell’s needs and tastes. Glen and Nell called their homestead Evergreen Meadows.
Recalling the first two years of their marriage, Nell said, “We tried ever so many things. He didn’t ever work for any real wages. We’d just sell and animal or two and get our groceries . . . no income tax or anything. We didn’t have any big bills . . . get some gas to run the car a little bit, and the tractor.”

Nell taught Sunday school, and Angle Peterson, one of her students, remembered that she always reminded him to “Come to Sunday school. Remember your verse. And remember, no hunting on Sunday.” She was also very charitable and once donated eighty quarts of canned wild strawberries to a children’s home in Juneau.

Glen and Nell’s only child, Marguerite, was born in 1950, and the family moved to Juneau about a year later. They returned to Gustavus when Nell retired from her job with the U.S. Forest Service. Nell died in 1983. In “retirement,” Glen fished commercially and was known for his attraction to and collection of anything possessing gears or wheels, and his often original improvisations when building and repairing machinery. He once remedied persistent flat tires on his tractor by filling the tires with concrete, and his homemade drainage-ditch cleaning machine consisted of
a twenty-foot wooden skiff with a 140-horsepower engine and a huge propeller. The list is long.

* * *

And we done real good, too, on beef. No millionaire deal, but we made a living. Always plenty of food and clothes—Glen Parker

Of everything the Parkers tried at Gustavus, the most profitable was cattle ranching. To build up a herd quickly, Glen said that “We went in there [Juneau] and got all the calves we could from the dairy and put ‘em on these cows along with their own calves, and that way we’d raise double or triple the amount one cow could do.” Also, they had a Galloway bull with which they bred their cows. Hank Johnson, also a homesteader at Gustavus, described their progeny as being “just like the Galloways in that they had long guard hair and short fur. In wintertime, when it was twenty below, they’d stand and chew the cud just like it was eighty above, but the dairy cattle would freeze. They’d stand there and shiver and wouldn’t go out and eat or do anything.”
One of the biggest problems with raising cattle at Gustavus was the poison water hemlock that grew in some locations. Cattle that ate it died. Glen referred to the drainage near Cooper’s Notch, a couple of miles south of Bartlett Cove, along the Glacier Bay shoreline, as Death Valley because of the abundance of water hemlock there. His family constructed three miles of fence in the upper reaches of the Good River to keep their cattle from going into Death Valley.

Bears were another problem, and this was compounded by the fact that bears couldn’t be killed in Glacier Bay National Monument, which essentially surrounded the Parkers. On Bert’s homestead, an enclosure, said to be forty acres, was constructed. The fence surrounding it was eight feet high and made of the heavy trapwire mesh used on salmon traps, supported by wooden fence posts that were as much as a foot in diameter. Still, an occasional bear managed to get in.

The Parkers figured that it took a ton of hay to see each of their animals through a winter. The best lands for hay were those east of the Salmon River, and a large hay barn was constructed on Bill and May White’s homestead, about one-fourth mile south of their home. Some years were better than others for haying. Thus, the weather took its toll on cattle.
in Gustavus. Yet with some luck and a lot of hard work and patience, the Parkers maintained themselves in the cattle business for over twenty years. Gustavus homesteader Hank Johnson later summarized their cattle venture:

As the Parkers were building up their herd, they didn’t have any problem disposing of their cattle because of the number of canneries that were in operation at that time. There was a big demand for meat for the canneries, so they ran all summer long delivering meat. But then the canneries started to close down one after the other and finally there was only Excursion Inlet running that was buying any meat. And the herd had increased and then they bought Harry Hall’s and Rink’s cattle so that had a couple of hundred head to butcher. So they built a new slaughterhouse and the brought the meat into Juneau. The first load of meat went real quick and all the butchers wanted more. The next load didn’t go so quick, and finally they were told that the big packers down in Seattle said if you want to buy Gustavus beef, then you’ll have to buy Gustavus pork and mutton and everything else. So they couldn’t sell through the regular outlets. So the Parkers had to build their own cooler in Juneau and go and hire a butcher and sell their meat [marketed as Parker Baby Beef] themselves. There was nothing wrong with the meat, it was just the economics of the big packers froze them out.

It worked pretty well for the Parkers because they’d just started to butcher their herd when the gold mine went on strike. So they were able to sell the meat. The union sort of helped out, I guess. They paid for the meat for the strikers and they gradually disposed of their herd.

*   *   *

Jennie Parker recalled that since the time she first met A.L. Parker, he had said numerous times that his ambition was to go out and find another gold mine for his boys. With so much involvement in cattle and lumber and vegetables, however, there was no time for another major
project. But in about 1934, A.L. took ill and was hospitalized for several months in Portland, Oregon.

One of his sons visited him there and told him that if he got well, they would go out and find that mine. A.L. recovered, and when he returned to Gustavus went to work building a prospecting boat, the *L & G*, which was named for his sons Leslie and Glen and was about 30 feet long.

In 1937, A.L. Parker and his son Les left aboard the *L & G* and prospected Lisianski Inlet (near Pelican) and the Porcupine area (near Haines). The found nothing worthwhile.

They decided that the following year they were certain to find gold, so A.L. designed and built a small stamp mill with which to crush their yet-to-be-found ore. With the mill aboard their boat, they left in early summer for Reid Inlet, in the upper reaches of Glacier Bay, where Joe and Muz Ibach were actively mining. They must have been a little skeptical of their own optimism, because the first thing they did in Glacier Bay was to ask Joe Ibach if they might lease one of his claims. Joe refused, and A.L. and Les continued to Ptarmigan Creek, where they stopped to cache the mill to lighten the boat and to prospect. They found gold a short distance from where they had cached the mill, and Les staked a claim. It was July 3, 1938. Said Les: “Gold it was. Pure gold. And that was just the beginning.”

When a favorable assay of their ore came back, there was celebration in Gustavus. The song “Goldmine in the Sky” was popular at that time, and Jennie Parker said that they came close to wearing it out.

They then loaded a cannery scow with mining equipment and supplies and pitched a tent on it. Except for some of the children and Edith Parker and May White, the entire Parker and White families departed for their mine in Glacier Bay, some riding aboard the *L & G* and some on the scow that it was towing.

Their claim was called the LeRoy Mine, and once there, the family built a tractor road from the beach and hauled 3,000 feet of steel cable for an aerial tramway. Newly wedded Nell Parker cooked for the crew, and she remembered that the summer was particularly hot and dry, and that she often wore a bathing suit around camp and bathed in warm potholes.

According to Jennie Parker, she and Bert were just helping and were not going to get involved in the mine. “We had better sense than that,” she said. But one day she spotted something on the hillside and went up to look at it. She was so excited about what she found that she ran a mile to where
A.L. was working. When he looked at what she had, his eyes stuck out, and he said, “Glory be, girl. Where did you ever get that?” Jennie responded that she found it right over there, on the hill. “Well, get us some stakes in,” he said, “That’s gold!” Jennie recalled that right then and there the gold bug bit her and Bert.

The Parkers worked the LeRoy Mine until 1941. It was then leased to a group of Fairbanks miners, who worked it until 1945. Bert and Jennie ended up owning the claims.

In about 1940, Edith Parker took ill and moved into her daughter May’s home in Juneau. Her husband came in to be with her that winter, and while there slipped on ice and injured himself so badly that he had to crawl to May’s house. He was badly chilled and later developed pneumonia, which proved fatal. Abraham Lincoln Parker died at May’s house on January 29, 1941, at the age of 75.

Edith Parker was not well, and although the doctors would not say what ailed her, they did say that she needed to get away from Alaska’s cold
climate. With some of the family’s earnings from the LeRoy Mine, Les Parker purchased a house in the Seattle area and moved his mother there, where she was cared for by Les and by her granddaughters Genevieve and Dorothy, both of whom were attending bible school. Edith Parker died on May 4, 1943, at the age of 74. She and her husband are buried side-by-side in Juneau.

V

The White Family

Born in San Francisco in 1887, Bill White embarked with several friends on an around-the-world journey that took them early on to Nome and the gold rush that was in progress there. In Nome, they intended to work a while to finance the next step of their journey, but it was late in the season, and they were unable to leave. Bill remained in Nome for several years, working at various jobs that included barkeeping, gold-dredging, and stacking wood for steamers. Also, he had a dog team with which he did some hauling.

Abandoning his intentions of going around the world, Bill journey from Nome to Skagway, where he met May Parker, daughter of A.L. and Edith Parker. Bill and May were married in Juneau in 1916.

In 1917, Bill and May assisted A.L. Parker and his family in their move to Strawberry Point but soon returned to Juneau, where Bill was employed. The Parkers constantly encouraged Bill and May to join them permanently at Strawberry Point, and on New Year’s Day in 1922, May, with her three children (Henrietta, Charles, and Gloria), arrived there aboard a boat chartered from Hoonah. Bill was at the time working in San Francisco, earning money for his family’s move. May and her children lived with the Parkers until the following summer, when Bill came to Strawberry Point and built what was referred to as the Tumbledown Shack near the Good River.
Bill and May’s relationship was a stormy one, and Bill was away from his family much of the time, leaving May at Strawberry Point to tend to their children, of which there were eventually nine. Bill was very resourceful and seldom went without employment. Among other occupations, he worked as a machinist, a logger, a painter, a fast-food shop operator (selling “greaseless” potato chips made from potatoes grown at Strawberry Point) and was one of Alaska’s first mailmen. Les Parker characterized Bill as “a going concern.”

![Figure 24. The White family. Left to right: May holding Bill Jr., Gloria, Genevieve, Anne (fore), Charles, Alice (fore), Dorothy, Ed (fore), Henrietta, Bill.](image)

In 1925, the White family moved into the Bear’s Nest, a small cabin that Ernie Swanson had built near the Salmon River, and filed on a homestead there. The Bear’s Nest was originally called Swanson’s, but in 1927, while Bill was working in the garden and May was doing the family wash, their children were washing doll clothes outdoors near the cabin. The children heard a growling noise and ran to the cabin, trying to open the door with their soapy hands. Inside, May beat on a pan with a stick and told
the kids that this place was a “Bear’s Nest” and that they weren’t to leave the immediate vicinity.

Figure 25. The Bear’s Nest.

The White’s called their homestead Sunny Lee Farm, and it was, encouragingly, the best of the Gustavus homesteads for hay production. Bill and May immediately began work on a homestead house, which was completed in 1928. The land was lower then because of the residual compressive force of the weight of the glacier that was receding in Glacier Bay, and very high tides came almost to the house’s doorstep.
The White children’s first schoolteacher was Bert Parker’s wife, Jennie, who held classes for several months in Edith Parker’s bedroom until territorial education funds ran out in January 1925. In 1927, the Parkers obtained a contract to build a schoolhouse on the west shore of the Salmon River, just upstream of the bridge. (At that time, because there were few big trees in Gustavus, one could look out from the schoolhouse window and see across Icy Strait to Lemesurier Island.) The schoolhouse was not finished for the beginning of that school year, and Helen Lindstrom, the first “imported” teacher at Gustavus, lived and held classes in Charlie Parker’s house until the schoolhouse was completed. Miss Lindstrom was twenty years old.

In 1930, Ruth Matson, enroute to Gustavus to teach, was met in Juneau by Bill White, who proudly informed her that five of his nine children comprised the entire enrollment of the school. Ruth later described the school as a “neat little schoolhouse, with a large, light classroom, a small bedroom, and an apartment for the teacher.”

* * *

Figure 26. Bill and May White’s homestead house. (Later, Gustavus Inn.)
The White children were the homestead’s biggest source of labor and worked as well in Edith Parker’s gardens. May had a cream separator and made butter that she sold to the canneries and to fishermen, and the resulting surplus of skim milk was used to water cole crops. (Periodically, a wolf would be seen licking the leaves of plants in the garden.) May bartered some of her garden’s produce in Juneau for groceries, once paid the children’s dental bill with canned strawberries, and each time she had a baby in Juneau, she had a steer slaughtered, the meat from which was accepted as payment for her hospital bill.

Once, while May was in Juneau having a baby, Bert Parker saw a group of Tlingit Natives looting her house. He got his brothers and Harry Hall, who came on horseback with guns and confronted the looters, who quickly returned what they had stolen. Shortly after, Bert killed about a dozen ravens and hung them in the doorway of Lonnie Newman’s smokehouse on the Salmon River. Because in the Tlingits’ view the raven was a powerful spirit, no Tlingit would pass through the door. Instead, they cut a hole through the back of the building, moved everything out, and never returned.

When the White family needed supplies from Juneau, they sent a list to Bill, who was usually working there. He would strike from the list items that he thought were unnecessary or too costly and send out what he could obtain (during the Depression, some items were not always available), often including a treat for his children. Once each year, a relative in California sent clothing for the family. And May made some of her family’s clothing. Ever resourceful, she once tanned a dog hide and used the fur to make coat collars.

*I remember Grandma had a radio before we did because we used to walk over to Grandma’s, I think it was on Saturday, to listen to the request program. You’d write in maybe a month early, and then they’d play it on the radio.—Anne (White) Chase

*   *   *

Hope & Hard Work

James Mackovjak
They also used this as a code. Uncle Bert [Parker] was in Juneau, and if he was coming out, he would request “Wagon Wheels” be played for us ‘cause he was coming home.--Henrietta (White) House

*   *   *

I remember we’d take turns getting up and building the fire in the morning because nobody wanted to crawl out of their warm beds, you know, and go down and start the fire. So it had to be turns, and it had to be enforced. My sister, Gloria, tells about going down and starting the fire.

My uncles would give us this fat from the intestines of the animals when they’d kill them. This was good stuff to start the fire with. We’d put in the paper and kindling and lay the “cracklins” on the top of the wood and just light the match, and it would burn real good. She was cutting this fat on a cold morning, and her hands were so cold she didn’t know it but she was cutting her finger, too. Poor kid.

But, anyway, Mom was usually lying in bed with the youngest one, and she’d be all wet. And I’d have to take the child away from her and set it in the highchair and feed it, and then she’d get out of bed later on. It seemed to me she was always cold. She wore fleece-lined shoes to bed.

We took turns at cleaning the house, and the oldest one was responsible for the four under her, and the next one, Genevieve, was responsible for the next ones under her. I’d get the kids to try to scrub the floor once a week and then to take a bath. That was done once a week, too. We put chairs around the stove that was in the front room . . . and on the back sides of these chairs we’d put blankets, and then we’d put the tub in the middle there. That was a way to keep the draft from this huge big room away from them. Okay, you start out. The baby took a bath first, and by the time I took a bath it was time to change the water.—Henrietta (White) House

*   *   *
And then there were the rutabagas: *I can VERY WELL remember those rutabaga patches. Ugh! Harvest those in November . . . cold and muddy. I liked to go out when I was real mad and knock the mud off those old rutabagas, pull ‘em out of the ground, and throw them in stacks . . . and then get a box and sit down beside them and top them and knock the dirt off and throw them into tubs of water. And then from the tub, they would go into a sack, and then we would tie those sacks up.*—Henrietta (White) House

![Figure 27. Playing croquet on the lawn of Bill and May White’s homestead.](image-url)
May White’s second daughter, Gloria, said that when she went into Juneau in the late 1930s to go to high school, she didn’t dare return to Gustavus for a number of summers for fear that she might not be permitted to return to school. Yet, of Gustavus, she wrote:

In those days, there were no willows and very few trees and from our house you could see the sun set over beautiful Mt. Fairweather, and when you went rowing over to Pleasant Island in the evening, the oars looked like they were on fire from the phosphorescence in the water. The whole of Gustavus was a field of waving grass and wildflowers. In the winter, the snow sparkled like millions of diamonds, and a group would make up and ski to what we called the “Sand Dunes” [near Point Gustavus], which were small mountains of ice encased in sand. The ice has now melted, and you can’t find the Dunes anymore.
You don’t know how friendly a flickering light looks at night—in a house a mile away when it’s the only other one besides your own . . . and the silence that you can actually hear.

* * *

It was 1941, and just outside the family house, fourteen-year-old Anne White was placing pieces of firewood on a stump for her five-year-old brother Bill to split. On one piece, Bill swung the axe before Anne had withdrawn her hand, and he neatly cut off her index finger. Seeing what he had done, Bill ran and hid beneath the low eaves of the root cellar, where he remained for several hours.

Anne didn’t have the nerve to look at her hand, and she ran into the house, where she told her mother, “I don’t know if he cut my finger off or not.” She looked aside as she showed her mother the hand and noticed May had started to tremble. May told Anne to sit on the floor and sent Glen Parker, who happened to be nearby, to fetch the finger. When he returned, they “disinfected” the finger by sticking it in a jar of alcohol and then stuck it back on. Glen and his brother Les immediately left with Anne for Juneau aboard the L & G, but the weather was bad, and it was three days before they finally reached a doctor. He calmly said that the finger had rotted, asked Ann to look aside, and pulled the finger off.

* * *

With her family, May left Gustavus in 1942. Japanese forces were occupying part of Alaska, and Gustavus was considered unsafe. Divorced from Bill, she returned in 1947 and married Gustavus homesteader Archie Chase the following year.

Bill and May’s eldest child, Henrietta (nicknamed “Dude”) attempted unsuccessfully in the late 1930s to homestead along a stream just west of the Good River that eventually came to be known as Dude Creek. Two more of Bill and May’s children homestead at Gustavus after it was
reopened to homesteading in 1955. Dorothy and her husband, Charles DeBoer, proved up on their homestead, Pleasant Pastures, in 1961, and Anne, who married Archie Chase's son, Gene, proved up with her husband on their homestead, Mountain View Farm, the following year.


VI

Harry Hall

Harry Hall and his half-brother, Jake, came to Alaska in 1919 in a 26-foot gasoline-powered boat, the Sea Otter, which they purchased for the trip. They were not seamen. Harry had been a prospector/miner and professional hunter in Utah and Montana, and Jake had been a cowpuncher in Montana. Rumor held that Harry was running from the law because he had shot several men in Montana. At any rate, and even though neither man could read a marine chart, they arrived in Alaska safely and in good time.

At the city dock in Juneau, Harry and Jake met the Parkers and questioned them about homesteading at Strawberry Point. Harry became interested enough in Strawberry Point to visit there, and when the Good family left Strawberry Point that fall, Harry moved into their cabin and soon began building a small cabin of his own. He had obtained a cow from Good, and once he had moved into his own cabin, he used the Good cabin to store hay. Harry worked some at the Parkers sawmill and grew some produce, which he sold mostly in Juneau. At one time, he and Fred Matson considered becoming partners in ranching, but Matson chose instead to earn his livelihood by fishing commercially. Harry eventually built up a herd of cattle, and ranching became his principal source of income.

Jake Hall did not stay permanently at Strawberry Point. He worked some at the Parkers’ sawmill and made a small attempt to homestead the land just upstream of Harry. Mostly, though, Jake worked as an engineer aboard various boats in southeastern Alaska. Even at Strawberry Point, he
often wore a tie, and locals considered him more of a city person than a homesteader type. Jake Hall brought the first tractor, a Fordson, to Gustavus.

The same could not be said of his brother Harry, for Harry was a man of rural ways, brewing teas from local plants, making his own buckskin garments, and keeping a supply of home-brewed beer. He was extremely calm and self-confident, and once dispatched a “killer bear” by walking at night into a corral containing a herd of terrified cattle and shooting the bear point blank. Harry liked to socialize and hosted many parties, which were usually a combination of pinochle and dancing and often lasted until daybreak.

Harry Hall’s homestead was patented in 1928. His home was a large two-story log house, with a smooth floor for dancing and a large round table for those who preferred pinochle. It was in Harry’s house that Fred Matson built the 28-foot *Iola*. Matson wanted badly to build a boat but had no place in which to do so, and he could not afford both materials for a shop and wood for a boat. Harry cheerfully offered the use of his living room, and Matson went to work. When the hull was completed, they sawed out part of the wall and rolled the boat out. They closed the hole in the wall by installing several windows.

* * *

Harry Hall was never really a partner with Lester Rink in the cattle business, but one fall Rink fell ill and was hospitalized in Seattle until the following spring. It was a severe winter in Gustavus, and Rink did not have enough hay put up for his herd. Rather than allow the animals to starve, Harry fed the cattle with his own hay, assuming Rink would reimburse him. Rink refused to do so, and the enraged Harry Hall seized Rink’s mowing machine and hay rake. The feud that ensued enlivened any occasion at which both Hall and Rink were present, as neither concealed his dislike for the other, and both carried guns. The feud nearly came to an end the night of the “Great Shootout” on the banks of the Salmon River. While many of their friends watched nervously, Hall and Rink stood at either end of the Salmon River bridge, each armed and daring the other to come across. The “Great Shootout” ended late that night when both men returned to their homes.
In the spring of 1936, while making preparations for a prospecting trip into Glacier Bay, Harry Hall took sick. Fred Matson and Gene Chase took him to Juneau, where he died. Before passing away, however, he told May White and Jennie Parker about some money he had hidden, but they couldn’t understand where.

Jake Hall was Harry’s heir, and from him Bert Parker bought Harry’s cattle. When Jake died several years later, there were territorial taxes owed on Harry’s homestead. By paying these taxes, Jim and Nora Chase acquired the homestead. Behind a loose brick in the chimney, they later found a sum of money that was greater than the tax payments for the homestead.

VII

The Buoy Family

Born in 1881, Sam Buoy was a farmer who left his family in Oregon to journey to Alaska. He prospected in the northern part of the territory before coming to Juneau, where it is said he chanced to meet Lester Rink, who interested him in homesteading at Gustavus. In about 1934, Buoy moved to Gustavus, taking up a homestead near that of Rink. He built a 15 x 24–foot log cabin, with a roof of hand-split spruce shakes, and he later added board planking inside and out. Franklin Roosevelt signed Buoy’s homestead papers in 1939.

Sam Buoy’s son, Charles, attempted to homestead on the Salmon River upstream from Archie Chase, but he died during World War II before proving up. James and Nora Chase took over this homestead, but never proved up.

Sam Buoy earned his livelihood at the salmon cannery in Excursion Inlet. Each April, he would receive notice that work was about to begin, and he would set his affairs straight in Gustavus and walk the beach to Excursion Inlet. Directly across from the cannery, he would build a fire, and
someone would come across in a boat to pick him up. Sam rarely visited Gustavus during the canning season.

Buoy was an active, strong man. He did some prospecting around Gustavus and was once hired to help ascertain the feasibility of a road from Gustavus to Haines by walking the route. He had a few cattle, the hay for which he cut with a scythe. The only route from the dock at Gustavus to Buoy’s homestead was overland, and he maintained what he called his Half-way House along his trail. From the dock, he packed his supplies to his Half-way House, where he would rest for the night before finishing his journey on the following day.

During World War II, Buoy worked on the construction of the Gustavus airfield, which was built as part of the war effort. While doing so, he lived in his homestead cabin and walked to work each morning carrying a five-gallon can of cow’s milk that he sold to the construction crew.

About 1950, Buoy decided that he was getting too old to live alone in Gustavus and moved back to Oregon. When his nephew, Tom Buoy, mentioned that he was interested in moving to Alaska, Sam offered to sell him his homestead. Tom bought it, and in the spring of 1955, he came to Gustavus with his wife, Jessie, and two sons, Lloyd (“Skipper”) and Harlan. Their other son, Tom Jr., arrived at Gustavus in September of that same year and immediately took up a homestead adjacent to the one that his parents had purchased. I once asked Jessie how they expected to support themselves in Gustavus. She replied: “I didn’t know exactly how we would do it, but I figured we would somehow. Other people were living here, and we certainly could.”

* * *

Tom Buoy and his family began the journey to Gustavus by driving the Alcan Highway to Haines in a military surplus four-by-four and a jeep. (When this book was originally written, the four-by-four was still running.) Bert Parker brought their vehicles and possessions from Juneau on his barge, and once in Gustavus, the Buoys set out for Rink Creek from the south end of the runway. The four-mile journey to Rink Creek took five days, as they had to build several bridges across ditches and sloughs along the way. One on their land, they moved into Sam’s cabin.
That year, Tom worked for the Civil Aeronautics Administration, which administered the airfield at Gustavus, and the following year he worked construction for the National Park Service at Bartlett Cove.

Figure 29. Tom and Jessie Buoy’s homestead house, before fire.

The Buoy’s home burned in May 1958, the result of a chimney fire. They moved into their son Tom’s homestead house and began building a new house, many of the materials for which were purchased as surplus from the National Park Service construction project at Bartlett Cove. Tom Buoy continued working for the National Park Service until his death in 1959.

The Buoy family had a large garden that they tilled with a two-wheeled garden tractor. They also had a few cattle, which were kept for their own use. Jessie canned a lot of food—crabs, clams, salmon, goose tongue (a beach plant), and more—and, in her own words, “kept the second-hand store in Juneau busy hunting up jars and sending them out on the mailboat.”

During the winters, the Buoys hunted and trapped. Coyotes brought thirty dollars each in bounty, and Jessie paid for her kitchen furniture from one winter’s bounty payments.

In 1971, the Haines-based Schnabel Lumber Company built a road from Gustavus to Rink Creek to transport logs. John Schnabel had
purchased Lester Rink’s homestead and was logging it. In exchange for some logs from their land, Schnabel helped the Buoys extend the road to their homesteads. When the road was completed, the Buoys celebrated by hosting a party at their home. Nearly all the vehicles in Gustavus were present. There being no place to turn around, Skipper Buoy put each vehicle in a sling, hoisted it up with a crane, and set it down pointing back toward to Gustavus.  

Jessie Buoy moved from her Rink Creek home that same year. She felt that she was old enough that she should be around people more, and she moved into a trailer on a small parcel of land near the Salmon River bridge.  

VIII  

Ruth and Fred Matson  

It’s o.k. to get mad at people, because that’s normal. But living out here in the tules, you couldn’t stay mad at them, because then you wouldn’t have anybody to play pinochle with.—Ruth Matson  

Of the homesteaders in Gustavus, Ruth and Fred (“Matt”) Matson were the first with whom I became acquainted. Ruth especially was of a warm and welcoming nature. Fred also enjoyed company, and he relished heated discussions of political issues. Their home, the one that Fred built to satisfy homesteading requirements, was small but comfortable. The principal windows faced southeast and provided a good view over the Salmon River to Pleasant Island and Excursion Ridge. A pair of old field glasses were always at hand to observe anything that might be happening along the river. They called their homestead Pine Tree Knoll (it’s mostly
spruce now) after the small area of high ground on which their house stands. Ruth maintained a number of flower beds surround the house, and the plants outside her kitchen door seemed always to be the first in Gustavus to blossom each spring. Stacked neatly between several large spruce trees to the north of their house was Fred’s supply of firewood, each piece split and of uniform length.

Figure 30. Ruth and Fred Matson, 1976.

Ruth kept a journal and for many years penned a column, “The Gustavus News,” in the Juneau newspaper. She also wrote several magazine articles and one book, *Happy Alaskans, We.*

Ruth Wenz and Fred Matson grew up in the Seattle area and were married in 1927. In 1930, Ruth was awarded a contract to teach at the one-room school in Gustavus, and with Fred arrived by steamer in Juneau in late August that year. Bill White and Bert and Jennie Parker met them there, and they traveled to Gustavus with Bert aboard the *Edith A.* Ruth told me about their arrival and her students:
When we got out here, first thing Mrs. White had the children tell us to come up to their house and stay until the next day so they could get the schoolhouse and apartment all warmed up. [The school and attached apartment were at that time heated with coal.] So we stayed there and it was quite surprising to me how everything went along so nicely. That evening we had strawberry shortcake at dinner, even though it was September.

And so the next Monday I started school, and it was quite a sight to see all those little types a-strolling in. (Well, there were only about five or six.) And here one little boy had a bucket of raspberries, and a little girl had a big bouquet of flowers from Grandma’s garden.

The children were delightful to work with. They loved music and would stay after school for as long as I would pump and pedal that old organ.

The people were very sociable. If I’d have any little doings at school, why there were only Grandma Parker and May and Jennie, they were the only women here then, but they would fix it all up, and we’d have a “program.” And the children were in their glory . . . when there was a school thing, why goodness, that was the BIG THING, so Matt and I tried to have a little party every month.
Fred Matson was in his glory in Gustavus. Before he married Ruth, he had worked several seasons driving piling at various canneries in Alaska, and he was glad to be back. While Ruth taught, Fred spent his days hiking about and exploring the area.

In her book *Happy Alaskans, We*, Ruth wrote: “After we had lived in Gustavus for a few months, Fred decided this was the land for him, but in order to really live here, one must have a boat.” He wanted to build one, but did not have enough money to purchase materials for a boat as well as materials for a shop to build the boat in. In passing, he explained his plight to Harry Hall, who generously offered to let Fred build a boat in his house. Hall explained that he was planning to install windows on the south side of his living room. Fred could build the boat in the living room, and when he was finished, they could saw out part of the south wall, roll the boat out, and install the windows. Several weeks later, Hall went to Juneau to sell his carrots and returned with the materials for Matson’s boat.
By Easter, Matson had finished the hull, which was towed to the school, where he continued working on it. The boat, christened the *Iola*, was 28 feet long.

* * *

From Ruth Matson’s 1931 journal:

**Friday, July 3:** Mail day; evening bridge party at Chase’s.

**Saturday, July 4:** Beach party with the Whites; evening party at Bert and Jennie’s, fireworks. Celebrating, we had ice cream, watermelon, lemonade, roast bear, etc.

**Sunday, July 5:** Baseball game at schoolhouse. Dinner at Whites’. Lovely fried herring.

Recalling her early years at Gustavus, Ruth wrote in 1961 in her “Gustavus News” column in Juneau’s *Daily Alaska Empire* of the mail service:

*Once a month, there was a mail boat, and that went just one way. It came from Juneau and went around and down to*
Sitka, then it went directly back to Juneau from Sitka. Mail days were Thursdays [the first Thursday of each month], and many months there were five Thursdays to the month, so this meant it would be five weeks between mail days. I remember the month when I ordered a pair of shoes. The second month they came but were the wrong size. The third month I sent them back and the fourth month I got shoes I could wear.

In articles in *Alaska Sportsman* in 1947 and 1960, she added:

> With a mail boat only once a month, its arrival was a real occasion. [Glen Parker said mail day in Gustavus was “nearly a legal holiday.”] When we heard the whistle, even if it was three o’clock on a cold winter morning, the men launched skiffs and rowed out to the little dock offshore, and we [women] would all flock to the post office—the living room of one of our neighbors, where lights were shining from every window. The postmistress would just happen to have coffee and cake ready. Presently, the men would come stomping up onto the porch with the mail, shaking off the snow and shouting, “Coffee! We want hot coffee and lots of it!” . . . and we had an all-night of reading letters, drinking coffee, munching cake or sandwiches, and asking one another questions.

* * *

After two years of teaching in Gustavus, the Matsons decided that they would like to see another part of southeastern Alaska. Ruth was offered a job at Port Alexander, at the south end of Baranof Island, and they left Gustavus towing the *lola* with a small skiff, since the vessel did not yet have an engine.

By the end of Ruth’s first year of teaching at Port Alexander, Fred had installed an engine in the *lola*, and for the shakedown cruise, the Matsons journeyed north with two friends for a visit to Gustavus. Jennie Parker recalled that when the Matsons arrived back at Gustavus, the folks there nearly begged them to stay and take up a homestead.
Harry Hall spoke to them about the homestead along the Salmon River that Lou Medeke, a French-Canadian trapper, was going to relinquish. The Matsons had felt for some time that Gustavus was where they were most at home, and although they weren’t yet ready to stay put, they were ready to make Gustavus their base. They decided right then that they would homestead, and Hall immediately got his tractor and discs and broke ground for their first garden.

The Matsons spent the rest of the summer at Gustavus, living on their boat and working on their garden and house. Ruth taught at Port Alexander for another year and then transferred back to Gustavus. The Matsons proved up on their homestead in 1940.

Fred and Ruth were great friends of Harry Hall, and at one time they considered becoming partners with him in the cattle business. But Fred, whose father had been a fisherman, decided that he would rather fish commercially. In 1941, he purchased the *Joy W*, a troller and began learning the local salmon drags.

Figure 33. Gustavus children with bald eagle. There was a bounty on eagles because it was believed that the birds killed enough salmon to significantly affect the commercial salmon harvest. Left to right: Henrietta White, Angle Peterson, Billy Peterson, Gloria White, Charles White.
In addition to Gustavus and Port Alexander, Ruth over the years taught at Hoonah, Tenakee Springs, and Pelican. After she retired, Fred built the *Ruth W*, an ungainly but comfortable fishing vessel. Though they never did so, they had intended to fish together in retirement. Yet the Matsons would periodically surprise us in their later years when, unannounced and in mid-winter, they could be seen aboard the *Ruth W*, heading down the Salmon River with a load of fuel drums to be filled at Hoonah.

In 1978, the Matsons sold their home in Gustavus and retired to the Sitka Pioneer Home. Ruth died in 1980 and Fred returned to spread her ashes in her flower garden. Fred died in 1984 and his ashes are now mingled with hers.

IX

Hank Johnson

*Everyone wore hip boots there was so much of this rye grass all over the country. And it was wet most of the time. Now, it seems, the rye grass is down mostly along the beach. But at that time, there was a lot more of it, and if you didn’t wear hip boots, you had to wear rain gear. There were no roads, so in a lot of the areas where it was pretty wet, you were wearing hip boots, and you got a kind of rolling motion in your walk when you pulled your foot out of the mud. And when you walked on dry land, you waddled like a penguin. Well, that’s the “Gustavus Shuffle.”*—Hank Johnson

* * *
Hank Johnson was born in 1906 in Cleveland, Ohio, and raised in Chicago. His father, a carpenter/contractor, died in a construction accident, and several years later, in 1930, Hank’s mother died. Hank and his two brothers, Carl and Edward, had no reason to stay in Chicago, where, with the ongoing Depression, jobs were scarce. They decided to journey to Alaska, where they might find work and possibly homestead. Carl had served in the U.S. Army at Haines, Alaska, in 1928, so he knew something of the territory.

In the summer of 1930, the three brothers purchased a car and drove to Seattle, where they sold the car and bought tickets on a steamer bound for Sitka. After arriving at Sitka, Edward took one look around and bought a ticket for the next steamer south. Hank and Carl found jobs on a mink ranch at nearby Katlian Bay, where they worked for about two months.

In the spring of 1933, the two Johnson brothers, possessed by a spirit of adventure, bought a 16-foot wooden skiff. They rigged it with a sail made from bleached cement sacks and on Memorial Day started north to look for work and/or homestead land, making their way north by rowing, sailing, and occasionally picking up a tow from a fishing boat. At night, they camped on beaches, where they tried unsuccessfully to ward off the bugs by rubbing down with kerosene.

They stopped at Hawk Inlet and inquired about work, but there was none, so they continued to Excursion Inlet, where they chanced to meet Lester Rink, a Gustavus homesteader. Rink had a reputation of being a promoter and spoke glowingly of Gustavus. He invited Hank and Carl to visit him there. They accepted and at Gustavus were impressed with the flat, relatively fertile land that was available for homesteading.

Shortly thereafter, Hank filed on a homestead on the east side of Rink Creek, and Carl filed along the Salmon River, just downstream from Charlie Parker. They stayed with Rink to help him put up his hay crop, and, in exchange, Rink agreed to help them build a log cabin on Hank’s homestead. The Johnson brothers were resourceful, but they knew little of using tools or of building techniques.

When the haying was completed, Rink lent the Johnsons a team of horses and a wagon to get their logs, which came off Rink’s land, as the trees on Hank’s land then were too small to be used for cabin logs. When finished, the cabin was 12 by 18 feet and was roofed with 36-inch spruce shakes that the brothers had split. The cabin’s two windows were salvaged.
from a building in Juneau that was being razed, and the dimensional lumber was beachcombed. Until its walls were chinked and several years’ worth of magazines nailed to the rafters for insulation, the cabin was, in Hank’s words, “pretty cold . . . you could stoke the stove till it was red hot, and when it was twenty below, your back would freeze.

![Figure 34. Carl Johnson with yoked bulls. Note lumber on building. Hank said a lot of the lumber he used was beachcombed.](image)

The Johnson brothers found some work in Gustavus—logging and working at the Parker sawmill, and in 1934 Hank worked on the dock road for the Works Progress Administration, and Carl worked at the cannery at Excursion Inlet. They began raising cattle, building their herd by buying calves from Juneau and later breeding cows with the Parkers’ Galloway bull, which produced offspring that were very tolerant of cold weather. With Sam Buoy, Hank once broke two small Galloway bulls, carving a yoke for them and using them to haul firewood. The Johnsons did have a tractor, however, made from a kit that utilized the chassis of a Ford Model A.
Figure 35. Hank Johnson with bald eagle killed for the bounty, circa 1933. Note the trap on top of the pole and the salmon at its base. The eagle was attracted to the salmon, and when it perched on the pole, it was caught in the trap and later dispatched with a bullet.

Carl Johnson died in 1940, never having obtained a patent to his homestead. Hank stayed at Gustavus, continuing to raise cattle and augmenting his income by trapping and by working as a salmon trap watchman. His homestead patent was granted in 1940.

Hank took a physical for the World War II draft, found that he had tuberculosis, and spent the next several years in a sanitarium. A married man with a young daughter, he returned to Gustavus in 1946 and fished commercially until leaving again in 1950.

In 1972, Hank returned to Gustavus to retire with his second wife, Marge. (His first wife had died.) They reconditioned and moved into Hank’s
original log cabin, where they resided until illness forced them to leave in 1978. Hank died the following year.

Hank Johnson was an excellent woodsman who was appreciated for his objectivity and openness to new ideas. An intended project of his, the compilation of a guide to local fungi, is evidence of his wide-ranging interests.

X

The Chase Family

James and Nora Chase were the parents of Jennie, who married Bert Parker in 1924 and homesteaded at Strawberry Point. In 1925, James and Nora moved from their home in Nebraska to Tebenkof Bay, in southern southeast Alaska, to manage a fox farm. With them came their son Marvin and their three-year-old grandson, Gene. Gene was living with them as a result of the divorce of their son Archie from his wife, Mildred. In the fall of 1925, James and Nora moved to Juneau, where Marvin entered high school. Marvin graduated in 1928, and that same year Archie, accompanied by his second wife, Manda, moved from Seattle to Auke Bay (near Juneau), where Gene joined them.
Figure 36. Adults, left to right: Harry Hall, Jake Hall, Jeannie Parker, Nora Chase, Gene Chase, Manda Chase, Bert Parker. Children, left to right: Jeanne Parker, Alberta Parker.

Figure 37. Adults, left to right: Leslie Parker, A.L. Parker, Glen Parker, Edith Parker (sideways), Harry Hall (in sweater), Manda Chase, Archie Chase, Fred Matson, “Uncle Pearl” Haynes (Edith Parker’s brother). Children, left to right: Genevieve White, Gene Chase, Alberta Parker, Dorothy White, Henrietta White, Charles White.
When Jennie and Bert visited Juneau, they anchored their boat almost in front of Archie and Manda’s home. During their visits, they painted glowing portraits of life and opportunities at Strawberry Point, and they encouraged Archie to homestead there. Their persuasion worked, and in 1930 Archie moved with his family to Strawberry Point, taking up residence in the unoccupied Davis house (a.k.a. Honeymoon Ranch), where they spent their first winter. Just upstream, Archie began building a house for his family, planning to homestead part of the land that had been relinquished by John Davis. He would support his family by farming.

Ruth Matson noted the Chases’ arrival in her journal:

*Jennie’s brother and family have taken up a homestead. They are certainly workers. Now have tent walls and floors built and have furnished like a little bungalow. Radio, water inside house.*

Archie had little in the way of farm equipment, so Harry Hall, in exchange for young Gene’s help on his homestead, plowed Archie’s fields. Despite praise for the high quality of his produce, Archie could not tap a substantial cash market, and he usually traded most of it for groceries in Juneau. He proved up on his homestead in 1940.

*But there is one story I must mention. About Archie Chase. One winter we had a freeze before there was any snow, and there were a number of small frozen ponds which lay just outside the timber. A bunch of geese landed on one of these ponds, and Archie saw them. These geese just fell all over themselves and when they recovered, just stood there with their long necks straight up. Archie (he told me this himself, so it is true) slipped into the woods behind the geese, picked a clear path and ran through the woods and out on the pond as hard as he could run. The geese couldn’t take off, and Archie grabbed a neck in each hand as he ran through them.—from a letter by Ed Griffin to Ruth Matson*

During World War II, Archie began raising cattle and selling most of the meat locally. Like most others, he took advantage of any employment
that came along, be at the Parkers’ sawmill, commercial fishing, or road construction and maintenance. During construction of the airfield, Archie raised pigs. At maximum, they numbered about sixty and were fed slop from the Morrison-Knudsen (airfield contractor) crew’s dining hall.

Manda Chase died in 1944, and in 1948 Archie married May White, who was divorced from Bill White and had moved back to Gustavus in 1947.

* * *

Air transportation was growing in Alaska, and when the weather prevented Pan American Airways or Pacific Northern Airlines passenger planes from landing in Juneau, the planes would often land in Gustavus to await favorable flying conditions. Archie and May rebuilt May’s farmhouse into the Riverside Inn (later Gustavus Inn), where they accommodated stranded air travelers and provided rooms for visitors and work crews. On occasion, they had more than a hundred overnight guests. Eventually, the landing facilities at Juneau were improved, and the airlines began flying longer-range aircraft that could continue to Anchorage after overflying Juneau. This caused business at the Riverside Inn to decline substantially. May passed away in 1977; Archie in 1980.

Archie’s son, Gene, fought in World War II and returned to Gustavus in 1948. In 1951, he married Anne White, and when homesteading reopened in Gustavus in 1955, Gene and Anne homesteaded. They proved up in 1962 and called their homestead Mountain View Farm. Gene became the community’s postmaster in 1953. Especially adept at boatbuilding, he constructed several vessels, including the 34-foot *Kitten*, a finely crafted salmon troller. Gene and Anne had four children, two daughters and two sons.

* * *

And now we return to James, Nora, and Marvin Chase, who had remained in Juneau, were they had a repair business, the Service Motor Company. Each fall, they spent several enjoyable weeks in Gustavus, staying with Jennie and her family, and hunting geese and deer. In 1936, they sold their business and moved to Gustavus and filed on a homestead.
Their homestead site, just upstream from Archie’s, was the one that Sam Buoy’s son, Charles, had abandoned. Here, they enlarged the log cabin that Charles had built and cleared more land. That same year, James purchased the commercial fishing vessel *Fleetwing* and, with Gene as his deckhand, trolled for salmon and longlined for halibut. For a while, the Chases lived in the schoolhouse, as the building was vacant that year because there were not enough students to warrant the territory hiring a teacher.

Although they had by 1941 partially completed the construction of a large log house, they never proved up on the homestead, apparently because a quarter of their applied-for homestead was never formally relinquished by Charles Buoy, a quarter was on a Native allotment, and the remaining half and been withdrawn by the National Park Service to become part of Glacier Bay National Monument. That the Chases proceeded so far in a futile effort was partially due to the time it took the General Land Office in Anchorage to review their application.

In 1943, with their son Marvin, James and Nora acquired the deceased Harry Hall’s homestead by paying back taxes on it. After moving into Hall’s house, the Chases purchased a herd of cattle from Sam Buoy, which they eventually built up to about forty animals, including about ten cows. They sold their beef and milk locally. In 1942, Nora succeeded Jennie Parker as postmistress and sorted mail at the schoolhouse. She died in 1950, and James remarried and moved to Colorado. Marvin succeeded Nora as Gustavus’s postmaster and remained in that position until 1952, when he moved to Valdez.
John Peterson

I’d have to live twice to catch up with the amount of work he did.—Angle Peterson, referring to his father, John Peterson

Described as a large and powerful man, John Peterson emigrated from Norway to Portland, Oregon, where he worked in a sawmill. He then migrated to Alaska and worked at Kane’s store, in Hoonah, and at the sawmill and cannery at Excursion Inlet. He married a woman from Hoonah, and they had two children, Bill and Angle. Mrs. Peterson died when the children were toddlers, and an aunt in Hoonah cared for them until they reached school age. At that time, about 1935, John moved to Gustavus with his sons. They moved into the Davis house, which had been abandoned, and then into a small log cabin of unknown origin on the east side of the Salmon River, just upstream of Bert and Jennie Parker’s homestead. John applied for a homestead on the land, enlarged the cabin, and began to manually clear his land.

During the summers, John took his sons with him to Excursion Inlet, where he worked as a rigging man on fish traps. After the canning season, John returned with his sons to Gustavus, where he worked on his homestead and took advantage of whatever employment was available. At that time, the Pacific American Fisheries cannery at Excursion Inlet kept a kerosene lamp on a pile near Point Gustavus to warn mariners of the danger there. The light required filling twice monthly, and John had a contract to do so. He traveled to and from the point in a rowing skiff that was initially fitted with a square sail and later an outboard motor. He also beachcombed trap piling, for which he earned ten cents per linear foot from the cannery. His payment was in credit at the cannery’s store at Excursion Inlet, which was then open year round.

Once, when food was short, John killed a deer out of season. He was caught and jailed in Hoonah. May White took his two sons into her home, where they ate with the family and slept in the woodshed that May had fixed up for them.
John had a cow and raised enough produce to trade the surplus for groceries at a store in Juneau. He proved up on his homestead in 1943. Several years later, he suffered a heart attack at Excursion Inlet. He recovered sufficiently to do light work at the cannery but died after a few years. His son, Bill, stayed in Gustavus for a while after John’s death, working on a small frame house that he and his father had started earlier. Bill left Gustavus before finishing the house.
In 1916 and again in 1921, William Cooper, an ecologist from the University of Minnesota, made expeditions into Glacier Bay, which had been explored and made famous by John Muir several decades earlier. Cooper was greatly impressed with the area and reported about it at the annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America in 1922. Members of the society were interested in establishing Glacier Bay as a national park or monument. A Glacier Bay committee, headed by Cooper, was established to make recommendations. At the society’s 1923 meeting, the committee’s recommendations were adopted, and the society sent a resolution to President Calvin Coolidge, urging him to establish Glacier Bay as a national monument.

On April 1, 1924, Coolidge ordered the “temporary withdrawal [of Glacier Bay], pending determination as to the advisability of including same in a national monument.” The area under consideration extended from Mount Fairweather to Lynn Canal and included Strawberry Point.\(^1\)

George Parks, who later became governor of the territory, carried out an examination of the area. Settlers at Strawberry Point sent letters of protest, and Parks reported that “We would like to see this whole area included within the park, but if such inclusion is likely to cause injustice to the settlers or to prevent legitimate development of the valuable agricultural land, we, of course, do not want to stand in the way.”\(^2\)

On February 26, 1925, President Coolidge established Glacier Bay National Monument. The monument’s area, 1,820 square miles, was about half that of the temporary withdrawal. Strawberry Point was not included. (The monument’s southern boundary on the east side of Glacier Bay ran approximately through Beartrack Cove, about fifteen miles north of Strawberry Point.)

In 1939, Franklin Roosevelt enlarged the monument, adding more than 2,000 square miles, including Gustavus. The enlargement, according to a letter to Roosevelt from his secretaries of interior and agriculture, was “designed to round out the area geographically and biologically, as well as from the standpoint of administration.” Settlers at Gustavus immediately voiced complaints, stating that the monument’s expansion was ruining their economy.\(^3\) They asserted that their cattle had to graze on what was now
part of a national monument because their 160-acre homesteads were too small for cattle ranching to be profitable and no further homesteading was allowed.

In August of the same year, National Park Service naturalist Earl Trager visited Gustavus while on a fact-gathering trip to the monument. He queried several residents about the expansion of the monument and recorded their responses. Here are several:

**Hank Johnson** wanted to know if he had patented title to his land, and if he didn't, he would like to be notified so that he could “do some butchering and move on.” (Hank at the time had three cows, two yearlings, three calves, and a seven-month-old bull.)

**Hank’s brother Carl** voice similar concerns and stated that he would be “perfectly satisfied” not to build a cabin but would like to be notified before spending additional money on his homestead.

**Some unnamed residents** “stated that they would be willing to exchange their homesteads for one elsewhere . . . where the struggle for existence is less acute.”

Bert Parker conducted Trager on an inspection tour of Gustavus, Trager noting that:

**We walked fully four miles and very few steps were taken on dry ground. Part of the time we walked along an abandoned road and occasionally over slight rises where the ground was essentially dry, but most of the time we were wading in water up to our ankles, and as we went northward, we were almost continuously in water halfway between our ankles and our knees and frequently stepped in puddles deeper than the top of our boots.**

Of Bert, Trager wrote that he “is considered one of the most enterprising settlers and to have the best farming equipment on Strawberry Point . . . In addition, he owns an old Ford sedan, which was out of order at the time of our visit.”
Trager interviewed Bert and his wife, Jennie, in their home, where they reflected on some of the negative aspects of life at Gustavus. Quoting Trager:

*Mrs. Parker is the postmistress at Pont Gustavus and earns a small income through this source. On our last visit to their home, they stated very frankly that living in Strawberry Point is a hardship on all concerned. They point out that there is no resident doctor and that there have been three cases of ruptured appendix and one mastoid case which required rushing the patients to Juneau . . . in three cases, the trip was made by boat, and in one, by plane. Several patients suffered considerably because of the rough trip and probably the experience was more serious than it would have been had there been a local doctor. There is no method of communication between Juneau and Point Gustavus except occasionally, when some boat with a radio happens to be in the harbor. The school which was maintained by local residents, is to be closed in 1940 because there are not sufficient students to justify the expense. The community has no lights, no sewer nor water system . . . the soil is poor . . . there is no store of any kind.*

According to Trager, the spark of hope that caused some of the residents to hang on was the possibility of selling their homesteads to the government to enable the construction of an airport, along with the potential of the gold deposits reported to be in the northern reaches of Glacier Bay. Additionally, unnamed residents reported that the area immediately north of Gustavus was the most beautiful part of the mainland and would make an excellent area for tourists.4

In August 1940, a National Park Service official told Bert Parker “to proceed with his cattle raising scheme because the Park Service has placed no restrictions on the pursuits of Gustavus residents,” and that “he was free to use the range until he was informed to the contrary [and] when the time does arrive for reducing cattle raising for Park Service reasons, he and the other will be given ample time without causing undue hardship.”5

Responding to an inquiry by Bill White in the spring of 1941 concerning cattle grazing at Gustavus, Frank Been, superintendent of
Mount McKinley National Park (which at that time administered Glacier Bay National Monument) wrote: “In your use of the free range, you will not be authorized to erect fences cut trees or burn over the range. In other words, no ‘improvement’ of the range will be permitted.”

The time for reducing cattle raising for National Park Service reasons never came, and the last herd of cattle in Gustavus, owned by Archie and Gene Chase, was free to graze where it pleased, although its owners were occasionally notified when the animals were making a nuisance of themselves by staying on the road near Bartlett Cove. By about 1968, there were no free-ranging cattle in Gustavus.

* * *

During the 1940s, Alaska’s territorial delegate to Congress, E.L. Bartlett, and Governor Ernest Gruening lobbied to no avail in Washington for the exclusion of Gustavus from Glacier Bay National Monument. Not until 1954 did Charlie Parker, who was then a part-time resident at Gustavus, challenge the National Park Service and begin his one-man letter-writing campaign to Alaska editors protesting the inclusion of Gustavus in the monument.

Despite the inaccuracies and exaggerations of his writings, they had the desired effect, and on March 31, 1958, President Dwight Eisenhower excluded Gustavus and certain other lands from the monument. The Gustavus exclusion comprised approximately 14,741 acres. The stated reasons for the release were that certain lands in Gustavus were being used “as an airfield for national defense purposes” and that certain other lands “are suitable for a limited type of agricultural use and are no longer necessary for the proper care and management of the objects of scientific interests on the lands within the monument.”

On June 14 of that year, 8,210 acres of land in Gustavus were opened to public entry under the homestead laws. About eight percent of this land was eventually patented by six homesteaders before statehood ended homesteading in Alaska in 1959.

In 1980, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, a provision of which reclassified Glacier Bay National Monument as Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve.
Notes, Gustavus and Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve

1 William S. Cooper, A Contribution to the History of Glacier Bay National Monument, Department of Botany, University of Minnesota (1956), 11.
2 Ibid, 16.
5 Kauffman, op. cit., 41.

Sources

I Introduction. Greg Streveler, naturalist and part-time researcher for the National Park Service, provided information regarding Gustavus’s geological history.

II Honeymoon Ranch. I interviewed Janet Henry, Margaret (Taggert) Ruff, and Bill Taggart at their residences in the Seattle area in February 1977. I interviewed Ruth Swanson, the widow of Ernie Swanson, at Elfin Cove, Alaska, in August 1977.

III The Reverend George Good and Family. Bruce Paige and James Luthy, National Park Service employees at Glacier Bay, interviewed Fred Good (son of George Good) at Bartlett Cove in September 1975. Bill Taggart, Glen Parker, Henrietta (White) House, Gloria (White) Milsap, and Anne (White) Chase were additional sources of information regarding the Good family.

IV The Parker Family. My information regarding the Parker family came from conversations and some correspondence with Albert and Jennie Parker, Leslie Parker, Glen and Nell Parker, Henrietta (White) House, Gloria (White) Milsap, Gene and Anne Chase, and Janet Henry. Morgan DeBoer provided some background on Charlie Parker. Additionally, Hank Johnson is quoted from a recorded interview, and Angle Peterson is quoted from a conversation.

V. The White Family. Henrietta (White) House, Gloria (White) Milsap, and Anne (White) Chase volunteered in conversation and correspondence
much information regarding their early years at Gustavus. Also, Ruth Matson is quoted from a recorded interview.

**VI. Harry Hall.** Ruth and Fred Matson were great friends with Harry Hall and were my principal sources of information regarding him. Hank Johnson, Gene and Anne Chase, Henrietta (White) House, and Gloria (White) Milsap also provided information.

**VII. The Buoy Family.** Jessie Buoy and her son Lloyd (“Skipper”) explained their family history to me at their home in Gustavus in 1986.

**VIII. Ruth and Fred Matson.** Ruth and Fed Matson were fond of relating their experiences at Gustavus, and I spent many long evenings at their home listening as they politely took turns recounting past events. In addition to her writings in *Alaska Sportsman* (two of which are quoted in this chapter) and her book, *Happy Alaskans, We*, Ruth for about a quarter century wrote a column, “The Gustavus News,” for the newspaper that, after several name changes, is now known as the *Juneau Empire*. She kept a scrapbook of her columns. As well, I was able to view the journal that she occasionally kept as well as some correspondence.

**IX. Hank Johnson.** Hank Johnson was fond of reminiscing about his early years. He was an astute observer, and I conversed with him at length regarding all aspects of Gustavus’s history. His wife, Marge, also provided information.

**X. The Chase Family.** Interviews with Archie Chase, Marvin Chase, and Gene and Anne Chase were the main sources of information presented here. Additionally, Ed Griffin, who worked at Gustavus during construction of the airfield, is quoted from a letter to Ruth Matson (courtesy Ken Youmans). Ken Youmans also showed me National Park Service correspondence regarding the homestead attempt by James, Mora, and Marvin Chase.

**XI. John Peterson.** Information regarding John Peterson was provided by his son Angle, whom I interviewed in Juneau in 1986 aboard the *Emma B*, the boat that his father had used to haul supplies to Gustavus. Ruth and Fred Matson also provided information, as did Gene and Anne Chase, Henrietta (White) House, and Gloria (White) Milsap.