

Seward Walking History Tour of Registered National Historic Landmarks

Pick Up and Recycle your maps at The Van Gilder Hotel

1. The Van Gilder Hotel was originally built in the year 1916 by E.L. Van Gilder to house executive office space. The quality construction cost more than had been budgeted and caused Mr. Van Gilder substantial financial burden. He sold the building, shortly after completion to Charles Brown of Brown & Hawkins. It was converted into a hotel in 1921; through the years many important visitors to Seward have stayed at The Van Gilder and the hotel has been a center for many social activities. The hotel has had several owners, and cultivated a variety of uses including serving as a women's dormitory from 1972 to 1987. The hotel has undergone a substantial restoration process and to this day remains one of the nicest hotels in town, and offers the finest historic lodging experience in all of Alaska.

Open to the public for interior tours, including a photo history of Seward.

2. St. Peter's Episcopal Church is the oldest surviving Protestant church building on the Kenai Peninsula. The basement was built in 1904 and the first religious service was held in February 1905. The main chamber and roof with original belfry were built in 1916. The interior painting of the Ascension of Christ was painted in 1925 by Jan Van Emple and should not be missed.

Open to the public, pick up key @ Seward Museum corner of 3rd & Jefferson.

3. The Diversion Tunnel was constructed in 1939-40 to solve a flood problem dating from the town's beginning that threatened the original town site. The project consists of three parts; diversion dam, the tunnel, and the outlet. The diversion dam is 400' long, with a maximum height of 25' and is located at the top of Jefferson St. The 2068' tunnel is lined with concrete and 401b. Steel railroad rails armor its floor. The outlet is an open flume 10' wide and just over 109' long, which discharges into Resurrection Bay.

This is the outlet; follow Jefferson St, to view the dam.

4. The Seward Depot of the Alaskan Railroad was constructed in 1917 at what is now known as Adams and Ballaine. It was moved to its present location in 1928 after a damaging flood down Jefferson St. This is a prime example of the Hip-Roofed, Craftsman bungalow style depot.

Not open to the public.

5. Brown & Hawkins is the oldest continually operated business in Seward and the oldest store under the same ownership in all of Alaska. Charles E. Brown and W. T. Hawkins came to Seward in 1903 and started the Brown & Hawkins Company to serve as bankers and merchants for the building of the Alaska Central Railroad.

Open to the public.

6. The Government Cable Office was constructed in 1905 as part of the Alaska Military Cable & Telegraph System. A telegraph system was installed in Valdez first, and then in the summer of 1905 a sub-marine cable was laid between Valdez and Seward to connect the new town with Seattle and the rest of the United States. Prior to the cable, news arrived via mail on the steamer.

Not open to the public.

7. The Swetmann House was originally built in 1916 on the steeply graded site against Mount Marathon, near Dairy Hill. It was later sold to Elwn Swetmann and moved to its present location on 5th Ave. Mr. Swetmann arrived in Seward in 1919 and purchased the Seward Drug company in 1920. He and his wife, Violet were very active in civic affairs; especially the Seward Public Library. When Violet passed away in 1976 the building was left to the library. It was later sold and is a private residence.

Not open to the public.

8. The Ballaine House was built in 1905 by Frank Ballaine, brother of John Ballaine - the founding father of Seward. The Ballaine family organized Alaska Central Railway to build a railroad from Resurrection Bay to Fairbanks. In 1902 the route was surveyed and the following year the company landed a group of settlers at the town site, which would later become known as Seward.

Open to guests of the B & B

9. The Jesse Lee Home was originally founded in Unalaska in 1890 and move to Seward in 1926. Being run by the Methodist Church, this home was a combination orphanage, school, clinic, welfare post and working farm. Benny Benson, as a young boy designed the Alaskan State flag there during a competition and it was there that the flag was officially flown for the first time on July 9th 1927. The facility closed its doors permanently in 1966 for many reasons; including the Good Friday earthquake, however the organization still exists and is now known as The Alaska Children's Services of Anchorage.

Not open to the public.

Research courtesy of The Seward Historic Preservation Commission.