

Alaska's Dean Of Publishers Jessen Dies

Ernest F. Jessen, 80, dean of Alaska newspaper publishers and a widely known pioneer died Friday, March 26. Funeral services for the esteemed newspaperman were held Monday in Fairbanks.

Mr. Jessen came to Alaska in 1905 from Seattle. He arrived at Valdez, a 15 year old youth short of funds and walked and worked his way up the long trail to Fairbanks, arriving as a dog team driver.

After leaving Alaska for Seattle and returning in 1912, Jessen mined in Nome without much success and then tried to develop king crab fishing out of Cordova.

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He became a partner in the Seward Gateway and served as editor for 16 years.

Jessen married Catherine Mary Jones 61 years ago in Seattle. Mrs. Jessen worked with him on newspapers in Cordova, Anchorage, Seward and Fairbanks as a linotype operator.

On January 23, 1942, Jessen's Weekly began operations at a time when Alaska was bracing for a Japanese invasion. Despite warnings it would not last the paper continued. A fire on Thanksgiving Day of 1948 destroyed the \$80,000 offices, but did not destroy the weekly newspaper.

After the fire, Jessen's published with the help of the News Miner and later moved into a quonset hut. In 1950, Mr. Jessen was featured in an article in Reader's Digest.

Mrs. Jessen became ill in 1959 and the paper was sold, but Jessen had to repossess the paper two years later. During the first months of Tundra Times operations in 1962, the native bi-weekly published in the Jessen's plant.

During the 1967 flood the newspaper plant was inundated and for the first time Jessen's Weekly missed its schedule. It was sold to other interests and came out as a morning daily in December 1967 - a daily which lasted only a year.

Despite Jessen taking over again and resumed publication, difficulties with Internal Revenue closed the paper in August 27, 1969.

On July 3, 1970, the All-Alaska Weekly began publication, co-published by Ernest Jessen and Thomas Snapp.

Jessen was a member of the Anchorage Igloo of the Pioneers of Alaska and had been honored by being named to the Alaska 49er Hall of Fame.

He is survived by his widow; two daughters, Mrs. Edward (Lois) Sandbeck of Fairbanks and Mrs. Kay Van Cleve of Anchorage, two grandsons and a granddaughter.