



*August Martin by his snowplow, 1930. Determined to improve transportation he improvised this sled using a Model A Ford engine adapted for aviation use. The new book includes 258 photographs from as early as 1884.*

Photo copy by James H. Barker

## New book details early years of Bethel

In 1915 when Anchorage was still a cluster of tents, Bethel had regular mail service, a school and an Alaska Commercial Co. store that had been operating more for than 35 years.

In 1885 when Bethel was established it was at the center of a delta inhabited by a fourth of the world's total population of Eskimos.

A new book titled, *Bethel: the First 100 Years* has been released to celebrate the city's centennial. The project, sponsored by the municipality, was financed for the enjoyment of local residents, but also to help other Alaskans understand a little known but important part of the state, according to city officials.

The project was directed by James Barker, a student of visual history and a well known Alaska photographer whose work has appeared in many publications.

The text was written by Mary Lenz, a veteran journalist whose experience includes United Press International reporting from Anchorage. For six years she has been associated with the "Tundra Drums," Bethel's weekly newspaper.

Founded in 1885 in the heart of Yup'ik country by Moravian mis-

sionaries from Pennsylvania, Bethel has grown into the largest town in western Alaska. Yet it remains isolated, 400 miles from Anchorage and the nearest highway.

Bethel is the hub of the large Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, a region that sustains more than 20,000 Yup'iks in 56 villages, the highest number of Native Alaskans living on their traditional lands.

Lenz and Barker let the people of Bethel tell their story with their own words and pictures. The book contains more than 250 photographs dating back to 1884.

The text draws from first-person accounts taken from early diaries and reports. But it comes to life in the memories and whimsical stories taken from more than 100 interviews with residents.

Extensive quotes from hunters, trappers, traders, missionaries, gold miners, teachers, fishermen, storytellers, bush pilots and dog mushers tell the story of life on the "invisible border between two very different worlds," the worlds of "the people who believed the world was created by God in six days and the

people who believed the earth was created when Raven carved the Kuskokwim River out of the tundra with his claws."

It's a story about two young missionary couples struggling against time and cold to build a first shelter as they grieved for their drowned leader and carpenter.

It reveals that an old shaman warned a century ago that the river would wash the settlement away. Had the warning been heeded, several million dollars spent on Bethel's seawall might have been saved.

It tells the story of "Dr. Mike" who lost her job because she defied regulations in her method of fighting TB, a

method that turned the tide in the war against that disease.

It tells about the first woman magistrate in the state. She deputized the entire City Council when they refused to find a trooper. The results were disastrous, but she got her trooper.

It reveals that the city's first fuel truck was purchased with Las Vegas winnings, and it describes what happened when the town's power plant burned to the ground one winter in 1975.

The large soft-cover volume can be mail ordered for \$20 from the Yugtark Museum, P.O. Box 388, Bethel 99559. The phone is 543-2098.