

Haycox to discuss Native land rights, '47 timber act

Dr. Steven Haycox, history professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage, will discuss economic development, Native land rights and the 1947 Tongass Timber Act Thursday at 8 p.m. at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

The talk is sponsored by the Cook Inlet Historical Society.

In the mid-1940s lawyers in the U.S. Department of the Interior advanced a new theory of Indian land rights, that the abandonment by Indians of once occupied land did not constitute abandonment of title to that land, according to Haycox.

Under this theory, Tlingit and Haida Indians asserted their ownership of all of the Tongass National Forest. At the same time, the U.S. Forest Service and territorial leaders made plans to establish pulp mills in the Tongass Forest, which they hoped would develop a new Alaska industry and provide a tax base for Alaska statehood.

Siding with economic development, Congress passed the Tongass Timber Act of 1947, over the Indians' objections, guaranteeing 50-year leases to timber for the pulp mills. But, against the possibility that the courts might ultimately rule in the Indians' favor, all receipts from timber sales were put into escrow.

Two pulp mills were established, but in 1959, the U.S. Court of Claims ruled that the Indians had in fact owned all the forest. Subsequently, the Indians were awarded \$7.5 million, an amount considered inadequate.

Haycox noted that in the struggle over the Tongass Timber Act, Indian leaders gained invaluable political experience which helped in the debate over land rights in the rest of Alaska after statehood and in the settlement

of the Alaska Native land claims in 1971.

Haycox has taught history in Anchorage since 1970 and became a full professor in 1984. In addition to his teaching, he is engaged in scholarly research and publication on Alaska history, especially the application of federal policy toward Alaska Natives.