

started the Petersburg Cold Storage Company in 1926. Nelson helped organize the corporation and was on the board of directors and was secretary from the beginning until 1951. He became director in the Bank of Petersburg in 1922 and served as vice president 25 years. In July 1950, Nelson became president of the bank and held that position until the National Bank of Alaska acquired the Bank of Petersburg in 1972. Fred Nelson retired from Standard Oil and the bank in 1955 and even though he moved to the warmer and drier climate of Southern California, he always kept abreast of the activities in Petersburg and retained his pride and affection for the town. Fred Nelson passed away on December 19, 1987.



James Brennan
Photo courtesy of the
Clausen Memorial Museum,
Petersburg, Alaska.

JAMES BRENNAN

James Brennan came to Petersburg in October 1910 from the gold fields of the Yukon and Alaska. He had gone to the Klondike for the first time in 1896. Brennan did not engage in any mining but was in the freighting business between the different gold camps. In addition to hauling freight he chopped wood and was earning between \$30 and \$40 a day. In 1898, he went to Dawson City on the first stampede and in 1899 went to Nome. Brennan was back in Fairbanks for the 1904 stampede. In 1906, he returned to Nome for the third gold strike there. Brennan became secretary of all the labor unions in Nome. In 1908, he went outside where he stayed only a short time, coming back to spend the rest of his life in Petersburg. He returned with a wife and two boys, Richard and LeRoy. Dick Brennan was later to become postmaster for the town for over 20 years. The Brennans lived in a house on Hogue Alley in the location where the GSA building sits now.

After the town was incorporated in 1910 and there was a city marshal and magistrate, the federal government allowed saloons to return to Petersburg. Within three years there were five bars in town. Jim rented a shack that was the Stewart and Holmes Drug Store. Before he could get started in business the big fire that destroyed the S. L. Hogue store also took this building. Thirty days after the fire, Brennan built a new building on the same site which was located on the corner of present day Nordic Drive and Gjoa Street which is currently part of the GSA building grounds. Here he had a full service bar.

On January 1, 1918, when the country went dry, Brennan had to close the bar but then started a card room and pool hall. When prohibition ended in 1934 he started up the bar again. This bar remained in operation until it was destroyed by fire in 1950. The bar was known all along the coast and was called the Bucket of Blood. In the old days all saloons had large windows to let in as much light as possible as electric lighting then was pretty primitive. In time, in order to have privacy for their patrons (and to keep the wives from peering in the window), the bar owners put curtains on the windows. A city ordinance then was passed to

— he spent two years on the Copper River, near

Bucket of Blood was where the post office is now.



Andrew Heimdahl
Photo courtesy of the
Clausen Memorial Museum,
Petersburg, Alaska.

keep the windows clear, so the curtains had to come down. Many a wild night occurred in Brennan's Bar.

Jim Brennan served on the city council in 1913 and 1914 and in 1918 was again elected to serve but declined. In 1923, he built a building alongside his bar that he rented to the U. S. Cable Service which was the forerunner to the U. S. Signal Corps of the U. S. Army. This building had an apartment upstairs where Brennan lived in later years. Before telephone and radio this was the town's link to the outside world with its telegrams. This service was originally housed up on the hill on Excel Street and is currently the Lutheran Church parsonage at 401 Excel Street. Honey Archibald was the first manager of the cable office and he was succeeded by Ralph Reeser and Johnny Johanassen. The telegraph office later became AT & T Alascom and is currently located on the corner of Dolphin and First Streets.

Brennan was a large and burly Irishman and every St. Patrick's Day he would lead the parade down Main Street along with the rest of the Irish population of Petersburg which included only two or three others. Of course many Norwegians and Tlingits would become Irishmen for a day, as it might mean a free drink on the house at Brennan's Bar afterward, so it was usually quite a procession. Brennan was active in the Moose Lodge and the Arctic Brotherhood Lodge and helped to get these clubs organized after he first arrived here. Jim Brennan died in Petersburg in the 1950's and is buried here.

From *Little Norway: The Story of Petersburg* by Donald R. Nelson