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EADIE RANDALL, Prop.

NOVEMBER 10, 1961

WELL KNOWN CLUB OWNER MARRIED FRIDAY AT KENAI

Eadie Randall, lodge owner and operator of the Last Frontier club near Kenai, was married to Bill Kummert at 1 p.m. Friday, Nov. 3. The civil ceremony was performed by Jess Nicholas, deputy magistrate, in his office at Kenai.

The bridegroom, a Kenai area resident for the past year and a half, is a heavy equipment operator employed by Harry Riding, in land clearing operations.

The couple's only attendants were Dave and Daisy Bell, who live on Island Lake road.

The bride, resident of Kenai area since 1952, wore a pale blue nylon dress with matching hat of nylon, beaver coat, rhinestone earrings and corsage. Her shoes, and other accessories were light blue.

Mr. and Mrs. Kummert entertained their friends at 8 p. m. Friday at a wedding reception in the Last Frontier Club.

A smorgasbord supper and a five-tiered wedding cake baked by Jack Turner, were served to more than 100 persons who called to wish the couple happiness. Ole Helle served as bartender for the evening.

The Kummerts plan to move to a homestead off the North Kenai road, 14 miles from town.

Chum Salmon Tagging Program Started on Yukon

A Federal Government agency salmon research project initiated to obtain needed information about size and composition of the chum salmon in the Yukon River is being conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Walter Kirchner, commissioner, has announced.

The project, which is located at Mountain Village, is under general supervision of Arctic biologist Steven Pennoyer of the Commercial Fisheries Division directly under Assistant Arctic biologist Ron Reggart.

The project will be terminated in December, 1962.

Information resulting from investigation is being prepared for use at the International Pacific Fisheries Conference in 1963 when North Pacific fisheries problems involving treaty negotiators will be discussed by a mission comprised of representatives of Japan, Canada and the United States.

Through the cooperation of the U. S. Airforce, project personnel

he was emphatic, firm in his thoughts and expressions; he left no doubt in his listener's mind, only his strong convictions. He neither drank nor smoked; his was a good life although rugged.

His life of over a half century in Alaska, each year, each season and miles on the trail, trips on Cook Inlet with the Turnagain blows and tides, all had etched deep lines in his kindly face. The softer lines came from the happy times and the joy of talking with family and friends. His magnetic steel blue eyes were deep with insight and understanding. His experiences and stories were many and unique.

In Autumn of 1950 he made his last trip down the Inlet; his arrival at Kenai was established, but all ended there. He was never seen again, or any part of his boat and belongings.

John Hedberg, prospector, miner, homesteader, hunter, provider, trapper, fisherman, and Alaskan old-timer will always be remembered as — "Moose Meat John."

-Nola Campbell

NOTE: In 1976 the Kenai Chamber of Commerce acquired the log homestead cabin of MooseMeat John from Standard Oil Co. (Chevron USA) and transferred it to the City of Kenai as a chamber of commerce office and visitor center. The chamber has "immortalized" John at his cabin as the special old-timer image. Visitors from all over the world now enjoy this colorful character when visiting Kenai.

-Peggy Arness

Henderson, Eadie Sutton (stage name)

(Eadie came to Alaska in 1947 by way of Miami, Florida, and Youngstown, Ohio. She had a dancing job at the South Seas in Anchorage.)

In 1951 she came to Kenai to build a bar, hotel liquor store and pawn shop on the North Road. The 30th anniversary of her enterprise was May 15, 1983.

In 1957, Eadie Henderson homesteaded 160 acres in North Kenai. She is still a prominent business woman. She has one son, Zane L. Kummert.)

I was Eadie Sutton, a dancer. I came from the concrete jungle of Youngstown, Ohio, to the vast wilderness, the wonderful land of the Midnight Sun and opportunities, the Territory of Alaska.

I arrived in Anchorage in 1936. I moved to Kenai in 1951, and in May of 1952, I opened Eadie's Frontier Club.

I named my place after the frontier spirit of the people who came here. This was a place where freedom for all prevailed, regardless of race, color, or religion. Alaska's doors were open to those less fortunate, if they were willing to work and build a future for themselves and their posterity. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were mine in those days. It was happiness to indulge in the activities suitable to the seasons. Winters I would hunt, ice fish, and trap. My trapline furnished pelts (lynx, beaver, and rabbit) to trade for other supplies. I stored moose meat, furs, fish, wild berries, and food of all kinds in my cache.

Alaska's gifts of life were here for the taking. The gold was in the sun that made our hearts loving. The land was rich in natural resources and there was potential for greatness in this land of opportunities. Food from land and sea, gold, oil, wood, trapping, hunting, fishing — all to make men rich.

In 1957 Charlie Gagnon and Mac McCarthy began urging me to take a homestead. Other friends and customers, such as Art Lee and Lou Masik, were also considering homesteading north of Kenai (in the area now called Nikishka). Based on a dare made by Lou Masik, and because I thought it would be quite a challenge for a city girl, I decided to have a go at it. I had very little money to help me achieve my dream; but I was gifted with youth, spirit, ambition, and hope for the future.

To homestead was exciting and full of many new experiences. I felt I had the courage to cope with any situation that might arise. I applied for the 160 acres of land located 2½ miles behind what is now the airstrip just north of the Nikishka Mall. Lou Masik's homestead bordered my land on the south side, and Art Lee's homestead was on the north. The road that is now called Masik Drive led into my homestead at a distance of about 1½ miles from the main highway. Later I had another access road built through the land that is now the airstrip. It was a distance of 3 miles from the main road. I would drive in 2 miles to Art Lee's, park the vehicle there, and walk on to my place.

A bit of an on-going feud developed between Lou and myself. He became determined that I would not have easy access to my homestead. From then on, he would frequently erect barriers to prevent my using the road.

My dream was to carve a home out of the wilderness, to ride the wind while mushing dogs, and to snowshoe across a moon-lit frozen lake. I brought in a 12-by 30-foot quonset hut with 20 feet of windows to use as a cabin, setting it up to overlook a lake, I named "Eadie's Lake." Later, to increase the living space, I brought in a 30-foot trailer and attached it to the quonset hut.

I did most of my homesteading during the winter when I could walk in on snowshoes. I would close up the club, drive north and park my vehicle at Charlie and Clara Gagnon's place, then snowshoe home. I had 2 small dogs which I called my "protectors" (a chihuahua and a

pomeranian) and they would hitch a ride on the tips of my snowshoes during part of the hike.

Spring was a welcome season with its sunshine. But it also melted the snow, created mud, and made it impossible to get to the homestead until the middle of May. During the summer, when things dried out, I would bring my supplies in. I had my own garden, and the produce was important to me in the winter months. Electricity was not available, so I had battery or kerosene lights and oil heat. The lake served as a refrigerator for fresh food. In later years, when I no longer lived on the place, and until it burned in the 1969 forest fire, I used it as an "R and R" spot for the recuperation of employees and friends when they needed to sober up. I also let people stay there when they were down on their luck and had no place to live. Though I no longer live on that homestead, I still visit it in my mini-motorhome. And, I marvel at how much easier it is to drive on the paved and graveled roads to its entrance. It is nice to go there to relax and enjoy the peace and quiet.

"Ornery Lou Masik," as I came to call him, continued to harass my homesteading efforts. In addition to felling trees across the road, he spread nails along the road, turned off the oil to my house, and tried everything else he could think of. Once, when I had been ill and had not visited the place for awhile, Lou dropped still another tree across the road. When I visited the homestead and found the barrier, I borrowed a chainsaw to cut up the tree. What I didn't know was that Lou had laid a cable under the tree, so when the saw reached it, the cable destroyed the saw. This rivalry between us was semi-friendly, but occasionally his actions would infuriate me, and I was not without retaliatory ideas of my own.

Once, when Lou was inside his house, I put an iron rod across his door, preventing him from opening it from the inside. Another time, I gave his brand new car a "little breakfast" by putting a dose of eggs mixed with sawdust in the gas tank. Lou didn't learn about my trick, and couldn't understand why the car quit running so often. He had to keep cleaning out the sediment bulb, but the amounts of debris coming through from the tank were so small that they were not identifiable. Eventually, he sold the car to Charlie Gagnon, so I had to confess to Charlie what I had done to Lou.

My club, in addition to being the social center of north Kenai, was also a place to leave messages, fill water jugs, and because I had the only freezer around, a place to keep frozen goods. Mail packages and other items were left at "Eadie's" to be picked up by their owners. Often, I would deliver these items when I drove to my homestead. I devised an ingenious and popular method of proving that I spent the required amount of time living on the homestead. When I would drive out to the place after work, I would stop at the mailboxes of my fellow homesteaders along the route and leave a *surprise package* and

a note of greeting. The surprises were often small bottles of booze or a beer. The recipients were quite willing to attest to the times I visited the homestead and "proved up" on it.

One of the homestead requirements was clearing a certain amount of land and planting crops. Many of the homesteaders planted rye timothy clover because it would come up year after year and not have to be replanted. They called this crop the "homestead special." I cleared 10 acres of the requirement one year by throwing a party for other homesteaders — with the catch that those attending would have to help sow the crop. Fresh air was beneficial in helping put them in the spirit for the large party of food and drink that I offered. There were lots of parties in those days, many of them "home-brew" parties. A certain member of the McGahan family used to stop by the club to ask for any empty dark green bottles. I would tell him he could have them as long as I was invited to the party.

The barter system was well used in those days and was the reason I started a pawn shop in my club. Times were hard and people didn't often have much cash, so there was lots of trading. I would trade liquor for other things, and people frequently paid off bar tabs with what they had that I could use. I remember one fisherman/homesteader who had a tab and no cash, so he paid with a huge load of fresh salmon, delivered to the club and dumped. I had to do some fast work to take care of it all. People cared for each other and looked out for their welfare. I did a lot to help my neighbors and was, in turn, accepted and treated as one of them. Many of us are still close friends today.

Thanks to a lot of help from my neighbors, despite "Ornery Lou's" games and because of sheer determination for 5 years, I completed my homesteading requirements in 1964. The motto I adopted, which helped me get through those years was, "If men can do it, I can too, and I can do it better." I may have been a city girl, but I also had self-reliance, a spirit of adventure, and enough sense to cope with the hard times. It was a lifestyle which appealed to me — being part of an adventure with people who could be counted on. The spirit of give and take made it work for all of us.

I've been happy here, and proved I could be a pioneer and a homesteader in Alaska. My memories of the past are enjoyable and I hold dear to my heart all the wonderful, trusting, soul-loving people with compassion. I wish to express my appreciation to my many friends who helped me in the past. A tribute should be extended to all the men and women who created homes out of the wilderness. To those homesteaders we owe a debt of gratitude that can only be repaid by loyalty to Alaska and the ideals upon which it was founded. Our children now and in the future should be proud of the homesteaders who had the *courage, fortitude, and spirit to carry on, and leave for fu-*

ture generations a new easier lifestyle in this beautiful
"Land of the Midnight Sun."

-Eadie Henderson

From *Once Upon the Kenai: Stories from the People*

By Mary W. Ford Kenai Historical Society - 1984



“She doesn’t have to dance burlesque for a living any more. But her admirers in Kenai look forward to her act, and after 30 years, how could she disappoint them? Eadie Sutton gives an anniversary performance on the mirrored stage at her Frontier Club – known throughout the area not only for its bar and dancers, but for the hospitality, help and community spirit that Eadie has dispensed along with the rooms and the liquor over the years”

From *Eadie, Queen of the Kenai* by Ronnie Chappell.

We Alaskans magazine of the *Anchorage Daily News* – June 5, 1982



Entertaining lonely, appreciative soldiers has long been Eadie's specialty; at left, Eadie in 1946 in the South Seas, above, entertaining near Fairbanks.

Eadie, Queen of the Kenai by Ronnie Chappell. From *We Alaskans* magazine of the *Anchorage Daily News* – June 5, 1982



Entertaining lonely, appreciative soldiers has long been Eadie's specialty; at left, Eadie in 1946 in the South Seas.

Same photo cleaned-up with Photoshop by Doug Vandegraft



Scanned from *Mr. Whitekeys Alaska Bizarre* by Mr. Whitekeys

Eadie, queen of the Kenai

Article by Ronnie Chappell

Printed in *We Alaskans* – *The Anchorage Daily News* magazine: June 5, 1982

Soft lights, a tiny G-string and a veil of white translucent nylon are all that cover Vicki's long lean body. The crowd is appreciative. This is more than a stripper, this is an entertainer. She cares about whether they're having a good time. She draws energy from the audience, from the pounding music, from the spotlight. She shares the stage with no one. For an instant she is a star.

But the moment dies when the music ends. Vicki is not the one this crowd – this unusual crowd – has turned out to see.

The crowds at most strip joints are male, boisterously male, obnoxiously male, almost exclusively male. Not this crowd. It's made up of middle-class, middle-aged homesteaders, of

men and their wives, guys and their girlfriends; of church goers and community leaders. It's the kind of crowd you find in a dinner theatre.

This packed house has turned out to see a local legend: a woman known, at least by reputation, throughout the Kenai Peninsula. A woman whose name is sometimes whispered in polite conversations. Some are here to see her for the first time, others to honor an old friend. Some want to say thank you to a woman who shared hard times and worked to make them better; who delivered mail, groceries and an occasional snort to her neighbors; whose private well became community property. Tonight is the 30th anniversary of Eadie's Frontier Club in Kenai.

There's a free buffet that boasts beef, turkey, moose, salmon, sausage and a dozen other treats. There's free, 100 proof, Alaska punch. There's music, there's dancing and, of course, there's Eadie.

She's not a young woman any more. She built a business in the wilderness and worked it until it prospered. She homesteaded 160 acres at the end of the North Road. She's acquired wealth and property. She's battled cancer and won. She doesn't have to dance burlesque for a living any more. But tonight the house is packed and she will dance once again.

"Everyone expects me to do it," Eadie had explained earlier in the week before her performance, "and as long as I'm here, I'll keep doing it."

The crowd stirs as the short, buxom blonde makes her way to the mirrored stage. A drum roll is followed by the wail of a lonesome trumpet. Huge speakers beside the stage vibrate as the disc jockey begins to play "The Stripper." Ladies and Gentleman, please welcome the unforgettable Eadie.

She struts. She bumps. She grinds. She winks. She smiles. The lights flicker and a dozen diamond rings sparkle on her fingers. She teases and flirts with the crowd. Although a single garment has yet to hit the floor, people in the back of the room are standing on chairs to get a better look. A gray-bearded sourdough leaps onto the stage and for an instant the two old homesteaders share the limelight. Smiles jump from face to face and energy fills the room.

This is more than a performance, it's a full-blown rite of spring. The crowd enjoys Eadie's rollicking, risqué performance. But Eadie is equally admired for the spirit, for the life force that drives her – despite age, sickness and success – to perform. The old girl has more than looks, she has spunk.

"It was Hoover time," she says of her childhood in Youngstown, Ohio. The Great Depression had settled over the land and the tall stacks of local steel mills no longer darkened the afternoon sky with black smoke that settled on the town as soot and grit.

It was a tough place to grow up; a town filled with hungry, unemployed immigrants. Eitha Chenlikas' parents were no exception. "My mother was a Jew and my father was Greek. Isn't

that a hell of a combination?” Her father was also an illegal alien who lived in constant fear of U.S. immigration officials. Family members were warned not to mention his secret to anyone.

Even as a youngster Eitha worked, pulling her “little red wagon around town” gathering old newspapers, scrap metal and steel to sell to the local junkyard. Work, she says, made her independent. She quit school in the fifth grade.

In the meantime, unemployment compounded her father’s problems and soon Eitha became one of the victims of his violent temper. “If I didn’t get three whippings a day, I thought he was sick,” she says. To escape him, she began running away from home. Each time, authorities would find her and return her, and each time, she would run away. Finally she was placed in state custody and bounced from foster home to foster home. She ran away again, at 13, and started living on the streets. At 14 she got her first job, dancing striptease, in a Youngstown burlesque theatre under the name Eadie Sutton.

“I looked like I was older than I was,” she says, “and I told ‘em I could do anything the other girls did. I’d go to the theatres and watch them dance, and then I’d go home and practice.” Eadie’s childhood had prepared her for the tough life of a dance hall girl. “It taught me how to take care of myself.”

Although free of her domineering father and the meddling of well-meaning social workers, Eadie was still trapped in the grimy mill town she’d grown up in. Her heart harbored a gypsy spirit and a determination to have all the things she’d never had before. She had to get out of Youngstown and at 15 she married a man who promised to take her to Florida.

It was not a match made in heaven. Almost as soon as the newlyweds arrived in the Sunshine State, Eadie took steps to get the marriage annulled. After a brief spell as a dancer in a Miami nightclub she headed for Panama where she earned a living entertaining American servicemen stationed in the Canal Zone.

Her act must have been a memorable one – years later when she moved to Kenai, the town’s chief of police at the time, who was stationed in Panama briefly during World War II, remembered her. By 1945 Eadie had made her way to Los Angeles where she continued to contribute to the war effort – by day she worked as a welder in the shipyards while at night she danced for the troops at the Hollywood Theatre.

A year later she arrived in Alaska. Even in 1946 there were still lots of lonely servicemen stationed in the Territory and work was not hard to come by for a girl with Eadie’s looks and Eadie’s talent.

“The first day I hit Anchorage” she says, “I got myself a job at the South Seas.” She also worked at the Bel Air and the Green Lantern before moving on to Fairbanks, where she performed at the Hills Bar and Casablanca.

In the years that followed she worked clubs, flew to remote fish camps and danced for lonely, appreciative soldiers at outposts all over Alaska. She was a regular one-woman USO show.

Life was good, but on occasion it was complicated by men – men she worked for – who decided they were going to run her life. She had been through that once with her father, and it didn't take her long to set them straight. "I didn't need any man to tell me you're going to this and you're going to do that," she says. "I'm going to dance" she told them, "and I'm going to work for me."

After a brief stint in the restaurant business (she operated a place called The Box Lunch in Anchorage) Eadie found the opportunity she'd been looking for. Construction of Wildwood Air Force Base, a communications outpost near the small fishing village of Kenai, had just begun. There were sure to be plenty of lonely soldiers, and if Eadie had learned anything in the past 10 years, it was how to please lonely soldiers.

Mud, mud, mud. The road north of town was a series of deep mud holes connected by well-traveled ruts. Transportation over it, even in a Jeep or a big Army six-wheeler, was a dubious venture. But Eadie knew location was important to the success of any business, and if being close to the base – close enough so that the soldiers could walk to her club – meant living at the end of that muddy thoroughfare, so be it.

She found the spot she wanted, not far from the base gate, and paid a dear price for it. At the time, 1951, it was probably the most expensive little piece of unimproved real estate in all of Kenai. Her 300 by 400-foot lot cost \$8,500.

Building the club was a struggle. Materials were expensive and hard to come by, as well as difficult to transport through the mud. And electricity, well, you could forget about it if you didn't make your own. Even more discouraging, people said her business would never make it, that it would fold within a month of opening. It was tough, but not too tough for a girl who'd grown up in the streets of Youngstown, Ohio. A year later, in May of 1952, she was ready for business.

Fishermen from Portland and Seattle were starting to filter back into town, and the base was fully manned. It was time for a party. Eadie walked into town and invited her neighbors to the grand opening. "That first night, the soldiers were packed in here," she recalls. "They didn't have any recreation on the base and I had a piano. The major came over and played. The homesteaders turned out too. There was plenty of food, plenty of beer, and plenty of entertainment.

"I danced and everything was as smooth as it could be. It was something new for the homesteaders."

Thanks to the soldiers, the business boomed. She couldn't get rid of them, so she hired hostesses and dancers and stayed open 24 hours a day. Still, there were headaches and electricity was one of the biggest.

“What do you do when its 12 o’clock at night, its cold outside, you’ve got a club full of people and the lights go off?” she asks. For Eadie, the answer was simple. She quit depending on her hired help to run the light plant and learned to operate her own 10kw Shepherd Generator.

North Road homesteaders started frequenting the club for different reasons. Wells were expensive then, and many settlers lived on property with no water. Eadie, who had a 170-foot well, had water to spare and water to share. Folks started stopping in.

Other services were available, too. The club boasted one of the few phones around and Eadie relayed messages and mail to homesteaders who stopped in for both.

One day a pregnant woman whose husband was working out of town stumbled into the club on her way to catch a plane to take her to an Anchorage hospital. The woman wanted to use the phone. She was in labor. Eadie decided the woman had traveled far enough.

She settled the woman into a back room and called the base infirmary. The military doctor wasn’t in and in those days there wasn’t a private physician in Kenai. So the rest was up to Eadie. A few hours later she midwifed her first baby. That little girl is now 30 years old, and she’s named after the proprietor of the Frontier Club.

By 1956 Eadie was ready for her next challenge. She understood the value of owning land, having once paid \$8,500 for a small piece of it, and was eager to acquire some more. At that time in Kenai, most folks – meaning most men – got their property by homesteading it. That meant building a road, clearing land, putting up a cabin and living in it.

It was a tough job for the best of hands, let alone a single woman with a nightclub to run. For Eadie, a couple of uncooperative neighbors made the job even more difficult – they refused to give her an easement to the 160-acre tract she had staked just north of the village of Nikiski.

Things didn’t change even when she was finally able to buy a right of way. Sometimes she’d return home after a long night at the club to find that a tree had been felled across her road. During the winter, deep snow made the trail impassable, so she donned her snowshoes and hiked the three miles from the highway to her cabin on the lake.

Eadie did have some help, though, with the building of her cabin and clearing the required 20 acres. “If I had clearing to do, I’d give a party and get all the guys drunk the night before and ask them to help me. Before we started work, I’d make them a big breakfast.” In 1961 she received title to the land from the Federal Government.

On the Kenai, boom followed boom. In ’57 the Richfield Oil Company discovered oil in the Kenai Moose Range, and development of the Swanson River Field – the first in Alaska to produce large quantities of oil – followed. There were new finds in the Cook Inlet and south of Kenai drillers found huge stores of natural gas. Standard Oil of California built a small refinery in North Kenai and next door, work began on a world class ammonia plant.

Every find meant new development, and each new development meant an influx of workers: construction workers who lived in camps near their jobs, workers who wanted a friendly place to go when it was quitting time.

Eadie prospered. Her 300-foot by 400-foot lot along the Spur Highway became an 11.5 acre tract. She added an extra 40 feet to her night club and new rooms to the hotel upstairs.

Eadie's girls played a big role in making her place a success. They're friendly, and offer more than a glimpse of distant, untouchable skin. Unlike some clubs that hire dancers for just a few weeks and then send them packing, Eadie prefers to keep hers around. That way her customers don't have to get reacquainted with someone new every month. "It's easy for them to come in and talk."

Most of her girls have been with her for years. Patrice, a tall, striking black woman, first worked for Eadie 20 years ago. Darcy – the "Mona Lisa of Kenai" – and Sugar have both been there for seven. Eadie is particular about who works for her. "I know who they are and where they come from," she says. "I can't have any girls that steal. Drugs are also taboo. When you work here," she emphasizes "you're a lady. When the guys come to visit they don't want the girl they're with to be cussin' this and cussin' that. I have a good understanding with my girls. They're like my daughters and sometimes I get on them when I have to."

"She's an excellent person to work for," Sugar says of her long time boss. "Besides, I enjoy watching her dance. I've learned from her."

Eadie's dancers go topless only. "We don't show the bottom," the grand dame of Kenai explains, "because that's a secret. There's a little mystery if you don't see everything. The bust is enough. From then on it's a G-string."

Ellie, who's older than the dancers, has tended bar at the Frontier Club for seven years. Pat has been pouring drinks and popping pop tops for four.

"The people who work for her are her family," Ellie says. "That's what I like about her."

All but one of Eadie's employees are women. The lone man does heavy maintenance work.

Over the years, Eadie has had a host of admirers. She likes men. ("I've never met a bad man") and men like her. Some have gone absolutely crazy over her. The diamond rings that encircle each of her fingers testify to that. So does her large collection of gold nugget jewelry.

But not every man can afford gold or diamonds, so some have demonstrated their affection in other ways. At one time or another she's been given land, a fishing site ("I gave that back because the fellow needed it for his family"), goats, a dog team, traps, guns, boat loads of salmon and a bulldozer.

The Frontier Club is said to be the oldest continuously operated business in Kenai. It's also been rumored that the business has thrived and survived through the practice of the world's oldest profession.

The rumors are understandable. Put a bar and a strip joint on the ground floor of any hotel, and folks will automatically come to that conclusion. People from Kenai are no different from people anywhere else. They've been talking and wondering about Eadie and her club since the day she opened for business 30 years ago. Stories about \$100 bottles of champagne, beautiful women, and hard drinking sailors, fishermen and roughnecks have become part of popular Kenai folklore.

When townsfolk returned home from a local production of the award-winning musical "The Ballad of Kenai," all the old-timers knew the character of Kitty – the frontier madam – had been modeled after Eadie.

And a few times, her reputation has been bolstered by events at the club that later became the subject of court action. But not all of these involved Eadie or her employees.

For example, years ago an old boy from Texas had the misfortune of standing before a local judge on charges of assault with a deadly weapon. It seems this particular redneck had had a little too much to drink one night at the Frontier Club and had decided to impress everyone by un-holstering his .44, waving it around the room, and firing two shots into the ceiling.

Before sentencing, the judge made a few remarks that were intended to show the defendant the seriousness of his offense: "Obviously you haven't lived here long," the judge said sternly, "because if you had, you'd have known better than to fire your gun through the ceiling of that establishment. Sir, you could have easily killed two people with a single shot," admonished the judge, smiling wryly.

There are those in Kenai who are quick to condemn a place with a reputation like the Frontier Club's. There are also those who believe that even if the rumors are true, the club has provided a community service by serving as a buffer between the citizens and the hard living men who inhabited nearby construction camps during the town's many booms.

In 1973 Eadie's health began to fail. The nights got longer and it got harder and harder to smile at the strangers downstairs. Doctors determined she was dying of cancer. Major surgery followed. So did radiation treatment and chemotherapy. She was in and out of hospitals for more than five years.

But the girl who worked herself up and out of an Ohio steel town survived. Thoughts of her son – the product of an unsuccessful second marriage, kept her going. "He gave me the extra energy, the extra spirit I needed to survive." Her recent check-ups have been good ones. "They haven't

found any sign of any more cancer," she says. "I'm all right now. I can dance as much as I used to."

THE CITIZEN, AUBURN, N. Y., WEDNESDAY, JULY 9, 1986 — 9

'Lust frontier' gallops off into eternal sunset

By PAUL JENKINS
The Associated Press

KENAI, Alaska — The wild, down-in-the-dirt days at Eadie's Frontier Club are over. The dusty parking lot is vacant, and the church-quiet bar serves only coffee, water and \$3 soft drinks. A sign offers taxi dances, but the women are long gone.

The 14-room hotel, upstairs from the cavernous bar and dance hall, is almost empty.

State officials, who say the topless dancing club sold sex along with its booze, have suspended the bar's liquor license. They gave owner Ethel "Eadie" Henderson until Nov. 8 to sell the license or have it revoked.

"I'm dead without any booze to sell. They're ruining me," said the 60-year-old woman known by some as the Queen of the Kenai.

But more than 5,000 people, including a Russian Orthodox priest and the mayor, have signed petitions supporting her.

"It's a crazy deal," she said. "If there were so many problems, why aren't the people here complaining?"

Complaints about the Kenai Peninsula landmark are rare in this sprawling community of 6,000 people 150 miles down the road from Anchorage.

"When you have a community that more or less permitted an establishment to operate for 34 years, you have to wonder why" the state stepped in, said Archbishop Macarius Targonsky, pastor of the Russian Orthodox church in Kenai. "The whole thing came to a point when outsiders came to Kenai and used what you could call 'entrapment.'"

Targonsky signed a petition urging that Henderson be given more

time to sell her license. He said many in the community now worry that whatever went on at the club will go on in the street. "She's the lesser of two evils," he said.

Kenai Mayor Tom Wagoner also signed the petition.

"A lot of people say she's a madam — cut and dried. Others say she's a business person. She's very charitable. She's well-respected. I've had nobody come to me as mayor and say, 'We want Eadie's closed down and we want her run out of the community.'"

The state's decision to press the case also drew fire from the Peninsula Clarion. Eadie's Frontier Club "is not our kind of place — but that doesn't mean that Eadie Henderson or her establishment should have been singled out by the state for persecution," the newspaper said in an editorial.

Despite the protests and petitions, state liquor officials hold out little hope of a reprieve.

"In this case, if there's not a solidified contract for sale within six months, the license is revoked," said Patrick Sharrock, executive director of Alaska's Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. "It's already said and done. Any further review or testimonial is not part of the procedure any more."

The Frontier Club, ringed by weeds and junk cars, hunkers beside a busy road outside Kenai. Sagging strings of Christmas tree lights outline the building.

Even in its heyday, when Henderson says she would take 15 guns away from customers on an average night, the club maintained a rough decorum.

"I didn't ever let the girls go bottomless," she explained. "And there was no drugs or pills allowed."

The life and times of Eadie Henderson

Posted: Sunday, February 06, 2000

By JD Jefferson

For the *Peninsula Clarion*

There is a story about the Frontier Club that goes like this:

A roughneck finds himself before a local court apologizing for a night of misbehavior. It seems that while at the club, he pulled a .44 and shot through the ceiling for some reason he could not explain but did not deny.

At the sentencing, the judge addresses the defendant with a stern lecture, "Young fellow, obviously you haven't lived here long, because if you had, you would know better than to shoot through the ceiling of that establishment. Sir, you easily could have killed two people with a single shot."

The young man is sent home to Texas with little more than a lecture.

That account, included in almost every newspaper story published in the last 20 years concerning the Frontier Club or its proprietor Eadie Henderson, may or may not be true. What follows represents best efforts to separate fact from fiction about the club and its owner and to note the passing on Jan. 27 of this most remarkable lady, who's life has become central to the lore and history of the North Road's last 50 years.

Little is known with certainty of Eadie's early life. Eitha Chenlikas, born on April 18, 1926, to a Russian Jewish mother and a Greek father, learned to keep a secret at a young age. Her father was an illegal alien living in fear of immigration officials, and she was warned not to mention this family secret to anyone. Throughout her life, she was known for her ability to keep a confidence.

In later years, she spoke of her early life growing up in Youngstown, Ohio, during the Great Depression. She referred to it as "Hoover Time." She would pull her "little red wagon" around town gathering old newspapers and scrap metal to sell at the junkyard. She quit school in the fifth grade. Life at home was hard and complicated by well-meaning social workers, so at age 13 she ran away. At 14 she got her first job, dancing striptease, in a Youngstown burlesque club under the name of Eadie Sutton.

She was married briefly at age 15 and moved to Florida. The marriage was annulled, and she danced for a short time in Miami nightclubs.

With World War II under way, she traveled to the Panama Canal to entertain American servicemen. By 1945, she found her way to Los Angeles, where she continued to contribute to the war effort by working as a welder in the shipyards by day and dancing for the troops by night at the Hollywood Theater. While in Los Angeles, she met an Alaska fisher who encouraged her to go north.

She arrived in Anchorage in 1946. On her first day in town, she got a job dancing at The South Seas. Jobs at other legendary Alaska clubs, now long gone, followed. There was the Bel Air and Green Lantern in Anchorage and the Hills Bar and Casablanca in Fairbanks. It was said she was a one-woman USO show.

She returned from Fairbanks to Anchorage briefly and opened a small restaurant called the Box Lunch. But then word came that an air base was to be built in a small fishing community called Kenai.

In a later newspaper interview, she said she decided to relocate to Kenai in 1951 to start her own business, because it offered a perfect spot with its military base, seasonal fishers and oil field workers.

When asked to describe -- in a word -- Kenai during that time period, she chose "mud." Roads were narrow ruts and transportation, even in a military 4-by-4, was dubious. But as an astute business woman, she knew location was everything. So when she bought her 300-foot-by-400-foot lot, not far from the gates of the new air base for \$8,500, it was probably the most expensive piece of unimproved real estate sold to that date in Kenai -- a shocking price of more than 7 cents a square foot.

In telling her own story in *Once Upon the Kenai*, she said of those times that in order to get by, she adopted the motto, "If men can do it, I can, too, and I can do it better."

Cost of materials and transportation made construction of the Last Frontier Dine and Dance Club a struggle. But, by May of 1952, she was ready for business. And there, in its doorway, she first stood, at the far distant end of the long Alaska Highway, with outstretched arms, ready to provide comfort to the weary traveler.

Her business boomed, and she hired hostesses and dancers, many of whom were said to be inexperienced, although this fact could not be verified.

Her business stayed open 24 hours a day. Electricity was provided by a 10 kilowatt generator, and the club's water well, freezer and telephone, provided free to the community, became central to the lives of many homesteaders. She went on to stake her own homestead in North Kenai, and there raise her only child, Zane.

The club became the unofficial post office during this time. At the time of her death, the club was the longest single-owner business on the Kenai Peninsula -- nearly 48 years.

Her generosity to the needy, her discretion as a businesswoman and the public service she performed in keeping rowdy boomtown workers corralled in one location in years past, all contributed to a public persona that became larger than the person herself. However, the genuine affection felt for her was nothing short of remarkable.

Her epic struggles with the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board lasted for decades, but even those struggles came to represent examples of her beloved old-timer status. In the mid-1980s when the ABC Board recommended license suspension of the grounds that investigators were solicited for prostitution, "each and every time they went on the premises," the community responded with a petition signed by more than 4,000 area residents asking the board to allow Eadie to keep her license. The Kenai City Council even asked the board to reconsider.

The rumors the Frontier Club engaged in the world's oldest profession were understandable, given the fact that the bottom floor was a strip joint and bar, and the second floor was a hotel.

When asked to comment in 1986, she said, "They still haven't proven anything when it comes down to it."

On the prostitution charges, she said, "I'm not admitting it, all I'm saying is that people have had a good time here and enjoyed themselves immensely. People may have come in as strangers, but they always left as friends."

In that same interview, Eadie said, "I'll never leave Kenai. I'll be here when those people who put me out of business are gone. I can hold my head up high. I think I've done a wonderful job. I feel like I brought a lot of people a lot of happiness here."

Her concern for those in need and her contribution in reaching out to help are acknowledged even by her critics.

Eadie's sense of independence, adventure, humor, honesty and determination will be missed. At a time when the peninsula's economy remains hopelessly depressed, with little to suggest the immediate future will improve, the loss of her voice will be felt.

To reflect on those economic forces that brought Eadie to Kenai, oil, fishing and the military only deepen one's sense of despair. In the short time she was with here, commercial fishing in Cook Inlet has by and large evolved into a summer hobby.

The military has been gone so long it is hard to find someone who even remembers its presence. And the proud tradition of the oil field, once home for colorful wildcats, is now a system of "preferred-partners," an arrangement that has all but eliminated area independents from the industry.

The yards of the Columbia Ward Cannery and countless area oil field contractors remain as empty now as the parking lot of the Frontier Club.

For the record, Eadie's last performance was at the Vagabond Inn on Dec. 11 at the age of 73. She lost her battle with cancer after a 26-year struggle. She said it was the thoughts of her son and many friends that gave her the energy for the fight.

Eadie lived her life on her own terms -- with no apologies.

For her countless contributions to the community she received little acknowledgment. But she was never bitter, for she understood full well the delicate nature of social norms. At a time when we need more neighbors of Eadie's character, she is suddenly gone. It's hard to believe our luck has gotten this bad.



Photo by Doug Vandegraft - 2003

Personal recollection from Doug Vandegraft: I never visited the Last Frontier when it was in business. However, I was at Millie's Moose River Inn in Sterling at an outdoor Sunday brunch on a beautiful summer day in 1988. I had just participated in a team event, a team which won first place, in a raft race down the Moose River. I was approached by an attractive blonde woman who was about my age and was very congenial and flirtatious. We talked for several

minutes, and before she left, she very deliberately put a wooden token in my jeans pocket. The token was good for one drink at the Last Frontier in Kenai. At the time, I had never heard of the bar. I was still feeling the effect of the ego massage when I told my friends of my encounter. My buddy Eric Havelock told me to get my ego in check, because the lady I was talking to was a “hooker from Eadie’s.”
