

# Alaska Facts and History

Do you know the history of the town of Portage, Alaska? Do you know how it became a ghost town? Discover Portage, Alaska in this edition.



MICHAEL R DOUGHERTY  
AUG 13, 2023



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The photo above is credited to: BL79-2-7831, Anchorage Museum of History and Art

The year of the above photo is unknown. But it shows the train depot at the town of Portage, Alaska.

## The History of the Town

**The tiny coastal town of Portage**, was located about 47 miles southeast of Anchorage, on the Seward Highway. It used to sit on the shore of Cook Inlet. More about that later in this edition.

The town was an early transportation hub connecting the coastal areas with the interior of Alaska.

**The port at Portage** was busy with both cargo and passengers. There were also very active railroad facilities as seen above.

Although it's hard to imagine now, as a transportation hub, the town of Portage was a busy, community.

## The Town of Portage, Circa 1960s



The photo above was taken by Bob Pendleton and appears here, courtesy of Alaskan Artist, Cindy Pendleton.

**Before the 1964 earthquake**, anyone traveling from Anchorage on the Seward Highway, toward the Kenai Peninsula, or traveling from the peninsula, were happy to stop in the town of Portage. You could gas up your car, have lunch or visit the bar.

**Mike of Anchorage Memories**, recalls when he was about 11 years old, there was a sign in the restaurant that read something like this:

“You can ask to have 1,000 year old ice in your drink”

Apparently, once in a while, the owner of the restaurant and bar was sending someone to nearby Portage glacier to chip off a block of glacier ice. The ice was then broken into smaller chunks and customers could enjoy having an actual miniature iceberg in their drink. Something to tell the folks about back home.

**Like the Anchorage Suburb of Spenard,  
the Town of Portage had a sense of Humor**





In the photo above is a hand painted sign that welcomed all to Portage.

### **Do You Want to Amaze Your Friends and Family?**

Just share this edition of Alaska Facts and History with them. They'll discover an Alaska "Ghost Forest", a Ghost Town, and enjoy a good laugh about the sign above.

**Just click on the following link:**

Thank you for reading Anchorage Memories VIP Club. This post is public so feel free to share it.

### **What Happened to the Town of Portage, Alaska?**

On Good Friday, March 27, 1964, a 9.2 earthquake struck Alaska. It was the biggest earthquake in U.S. history.



The powerful and horrifying quake shoved some sections of land up and caused others to suddenly sink. Incredible damage followed.

**Portage**, located on the shore of Cook Inlet was hit hard.

Here's a documented account:

**"An eyewitness who was in a service station** on the west side of the highway said he and a companion ran out the east door of the building as the concrete floor began to crack.

**They got about three feet out** of the building when a crack about three feet wide opened between them. He said that cracks formed about each of them, leaving each man on a small island about three feet wide that moved up and down. He said it was like riding an open elevator.

**As he went down**, the other man went up. And then they'd pass each other going in opposite directions. He said that the earth all around them broke into similar pieces and that as the blocks of frozen earth moved up and down, the cracks also opened and closed causing muddy water to spout as high as 50 feet.

**He said after the shaking stopped**, water filled the open cracks. He estimated the duration of the quake at about four to five minutes."

Source: *Chronology of Physical Events of the Alaskan Earthquake, 1966*, Genie Chance papers, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.



In the photo above, the town is flooded

**During the 1964 Alaska earthquake**, the ground in the town of Portage sank about 6 feet. That put the town below the level of high tide in Cook Inlet.

The town became flooded with salt water and all the residents had to leave.





In the photo above are the remains of a cabin.

**The sign in the picture reads:**

"This cabin is part of the original townsite of Portage that was destroyed by the 1964 earthquake."

Salt water also killed all the trees around Portage, creating a "Ghost Forest".

**A Fitting Memory of all that Remains**





In the watercolor above, by Alaskan Artist Cindy Pendleton, her vision beautifully captures the memory of a once thriving community.

**There is no word about what happened** to the “11 friendly people and 1 old sorehead” that once lived in this truly Alaskan town.

But rest assured, that in the days, months, and years that followed, they had plenty of stories to tell about a unique place called Portage, Alaska.

**From our North Stars (that’s you)**



From our look at the Beatles short stay in Anchorage

"Great story. Thanks for sharing. This was before we moved to Alaska in 1968! I bought my first Beatles album in 1967 (Beatles 65) and I still have it. I remain a Beatlemaniac to this day!"

Michael

"Yes, I was there when the Beatles came to town. I grew up in Anchorage and was a college student in Utah but home to work a temp summer job maintaining downtown city properties. While watering the roof of the tourist log cabin I noticed people heading toward the Westward, so I followed and watched the Beatles yelling at and with the crowd from their window high up on the hotel. Lots of fun, good times and memories."

Wandal

"Yes, I do remember! A student journalist from East High was invited up to their Westward Hotel room to interview them. Also, that day, my best friend's young adult sister, who happened to be unusually attractive, worked downtown and walked by on the sidewalk across the street from the hotel. She reported they (the Beatles) worked very hard from their hotel window to get her attention."

Barbara

"I remember later that summer there was a street dance on 5th Avenue, and they were auctioning off things that came from the Beatles hotel room. Like cigarettes the Beatles used, pieces of bedsheets, etc. I remember Gene Shedlock being one of the DJ's hosting the event. I still have all their albums."

Rick

"I remember hearing about them (the Beatles) getting stuck in Anchorage. But by then I was living back in Valdez (after having lived in Fairbanks for a year, after the quake). There was no way I could have gotten there, though I sure wanted to!

Linda

**What Are Your Memories of the Double Musky Inn?**





**In the photo above** is the now world-famous Double Musky Inn, located not far from the remains of the town of Portage. What are your memories of dining in this Alaskan restaurant?

**Connect with Us**



Yes, that's us, Mike and Mary of Anchorage Memories enjoying a favorite restaurant.

**Did you know any of the 11 friendly people in Portage?** How about the 1 old sorehead? We'd love to hear about him.

You can easily tell us about your memories of the town of Portage. Just reply to this email. Or you can write and say, "I think the old sorehead was my grandfather!"

You can also [Contact Us](#) directly.

Until Next Time

Mike and Mary

Anchorage Memories.com

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14 Likes · 1 Restack

## 6 Comments



Write a comment...



Charlene Arneson Aug 13 Liked by Michael R Dougherty

Yes, I do because we are part of the history. Being former owners and residents of Portage Alaska.

LIKE (4) REPLY ...

3 replies by Michael R Dougherty and others



Randall Montbriand Writes Randall's Substack Aug 13

common "joke" in Anchorage as answer to "What were you doing during the Quake".....Standing on the corner watching all the stores go by.... And now I'm reliving that moment of my life.

LIKE (4) REPLY ...

4 more comments...