

# Haines History



## History of the Local Government

In 1910 Haines had approximately 400 residents, 19 stores, and four canneries. In its first special election, residents voted that year to incorporate as a 1st class city for the purposes of maintaining order and improving the school system. As Haines and Fort Seward continued to grow through the years, Fort Seward was renamed "Chilkoot Barracks" to honor the gold seekers who struggled over the Chilkoot Trail. The name changed again at the end of World War II when the Barracks were decommissioned and sold to a group of veterans who incorporated it as the City of Port Chilkoot in 1956. In 1970, Port Chilkoot merged with Haines to become a single municipality, the City of Haines.

In the 1940's and 1950's Haines became an important transportation link with the completion of the Haines Highway and the initiation of the Alaska Marine Highway System. The first ferry in the Upper Lynn Canal was operated by Steve Homer and Ray Gelotte, two of the veterans who purchased Fort Seward and docked in Portage Cove. In the early 1950's a military fuel storage pumping facility was constructed at Tanani Point, and an eight-inch pipeline ran over 600 miles to Fort Wainwright near Fairbanks. This pipeline operated for 20 years before becoming obsolete.

After statehood in 1959, the Alaska Legislature began urging various occupied areas of the state to become more organized. They passed the Mandatory Borough Act in 1963 that required certain sections of the state to form boroughs. The intent was to provide a degree of tax equity between those residents living within the incorporated communities and those residing without where both groups shared the same school system. Though the Haines area was not specifically cited in the law, it was evident that some governmental system would have to be adopted to make the school system legal. In 1968, the Haines Borough became the only third class borough in the state, and its only mandated power was taxation for education. The original boundaries encompassed approximately 2,200 square miles. In 1975, the Borough annexed an additional 420 square miles with the inclusion of the commercial fish processing facility at Excursion Inlet, thereby increasing the Borough's income base.

After narrowly rejecting the idea in 1998, 56% of area citizens voted in 2002 to consolidate the City of Haines and Haines Borough to form the home rule Haines Borough. A charter written by residents sets the basic municipal rules and is available to read on the Haines Borough website. Haines Borough possesses all powers and privileges of a home rule borough under the laws of

the State of Alaska and the Haines Borough Charter.

## **2020 Weather-Related Event**

In December 2020, a record-breaking rain-on-snow event caused flooding and dozens of landslides in the Haines, Alaska area. Damage in the community was widespread, including washed-out roads, disrupted utilities, and damage or destruction of property. One of the landslides caused two fatalities.

[This story](#) is based on results from an NSF-funded project , on a journal article analyzing the Beach Road landslide , and on the generous contributions of photographs and insights of Haines residents.

## **Supporting Documents**

Brief History of Third Class Haines Borough - 1-31-80 431.74 KB

Rough Sketch of the Spooner Map of Projected Haines Townsite - prior to 1903 285.89 KB

Undated Map of Old Town Plans 630.35 KB

Chilkat (Klukwan-Haines) Territory - 1946 483.83 KB

The Dalton Trail 9.14 MB