PORT

(Continued from page 3)

"Unfortunately, nine out of ten of those container vans go back empty," Mr. Brown replied. "But that's a problem all over Alaska." (See page 7.)

What other kinds of ships stop at the Port of Anchorage? Everything from Japanese freighters delivering steel and automobiles, to barge lines with building materials, to tankers with jet fuel for foreign airlines using the Anchorage International Airport, to naval vessels, cruise ships and fishing boats.

The oil port of Valdez and the Kenai oil terminals at Nikiski and Drift River are much larger, of course. But with its network of highways, railroad and airlines and a population of about half the people in the state, Anchorage is the biggest general cargo port in Alaska.

But Why Here?

Did the port make Anchorage grow? Or did the people of Anchorage make the port grow?

Both. Plus a little luck.

Anchorage has been a transportation and supply center from the very beginning. It is one of the few cities in Alaska not founded because of mining, fishing, fur trade or some other natural resource.

It started as a tent town in 1914 during construction of the Alaska Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks. Its first dock was a make-shift structure at the mouth of Ship Creek where boats could unload supplies and take on coal from the Matanuska mines for fuel. A new dock was built in 1927 at a bargain cost of $1,000, but for the next 30 years that was it.

The modern port of Anchorage didn't begin to take shape until the mid-1950s. Port Director William D. McKinney, who was born and raised in Anchorage, told *Tidelines* how it happened.

"The city was growing fast, but all our freight still had to come through the railroad ports of Seward and Whittier. And this was a problem when you figure 99 percent of what we use comes from Outside.

"So the taxpayers of Anchorage voted to spend $8.2 million for the construction of a port facility. It took three years to complete and the first ship docked there in 1961. But we didn't get much business, since the other ports were well established and some captains were uneasy about the ice and tidal currents in the Upper Cook Inlet."

Then came the terrible 1964 earthquake and tidal wave. The docks at Seward, Whittier, Valdez and Kodiak were destroyed. And the only deep-water port left standing in all of Southcentral Alaska was the Port of Anchorage.

"Our port was badly damaged, but we were able to make it usable, and the vessels underway to Alaska came to Anchorage," he said. Soon the port was also receiving much needed supplies for the disaster areas.

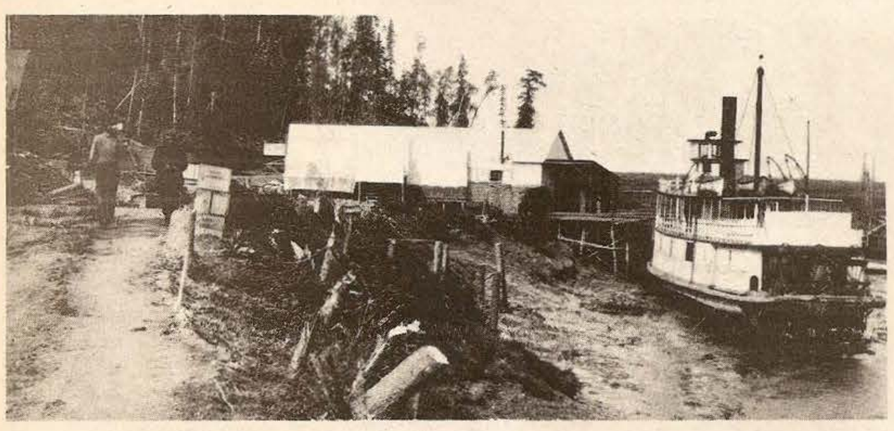
The tidal wave had also washed out the petroleum tanks at the other ports, and oil companies decided to rebuild them near the biggest market. So Anchorage became a petroleum storage and supply center as well.

Anchorage's role as an oil port was greatly reduced several years ago with the completion of the Kenai terminals and construction of a pipeline from Nikiski to Anchorage. But there are kinds of possibilities for the future.

Just recently, for example, the first shipment of coal from the Usibelli mines at Healy was sent out of the Port of Anchorage for test marketing in Korea. There was talk last summer about building Anchorage into a world salmon market. And some day there might even be grain elevators on the docks for the Delta barley project.

"We're not equipped for these things yet," said Mr. McKinney, "but we're getting ready."

So never underestimate the "can-do" spirit of Alaskans. They can put something almost anywhere—and make it work. Even when they put it in the wrong place.



The old "Army Coal Dock," where the Port of Anchorage began. Courtesy of Alaska Magazine

ALASKA SHIPPING: Ins & Outs

The sea is the major shipping highway to and from Alaska. But the natural resources we ship out—like oil and forest products, are totally different from the kinds of things we ship in—like food and manufactured goods. And you can't ship crude oil in a container van, and you aren't likely to pack groceries in a tanker.

This means that most of the vessels serving Alaska have a payload one way and go back empty. While marine shipping is the cheapest way in the world to move freight and materials, transportation costs are based on the full round trip. This pushes up the price of things we import from Outside, of course. But the dollars Alaska gets for its exports boost the economy of the whole state.

These maps show the flow of commodities (products bought and sold) in and out of Alaska during 1977. What do they tell us?

COMING IN

1. Locate your town or village on the map. (*Sorry Adak and Atka!*) If it isn't on the list write it here:
26. _____
What is your nearest supply center from the sea, railroad or highway? _____.

2. Which Alaska city handled the most commodities in 1977?_____. How many tons?_____. (*To change the figure on the arrow into thousands of tons, add a comma and 3 zeros: ,000.*)

3. What was the total commodity flow into Alaska from the Far East, West Coast, Seattle and Vancouver (*add them up*)?_____.

Figure 1

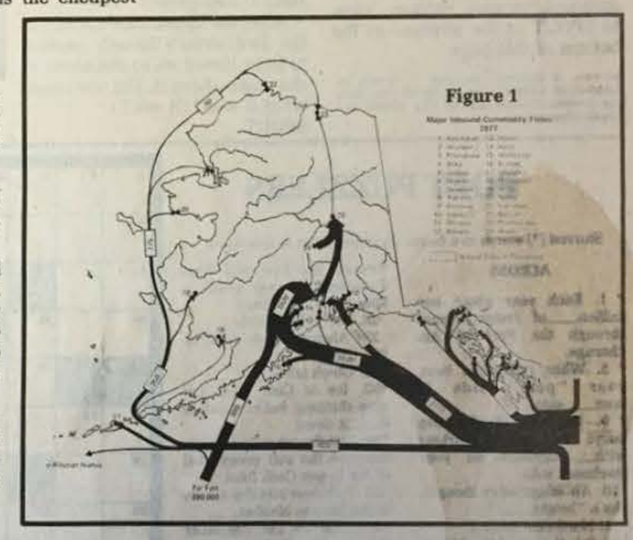
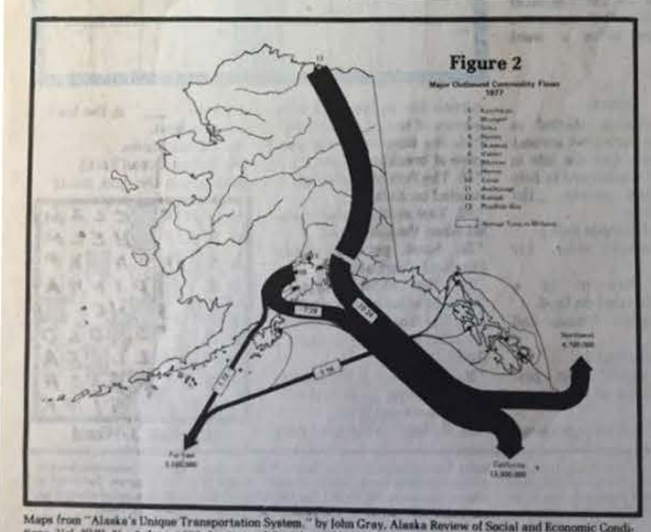


Figure 2



Maps from "Alaska's Unique Transportation System," by John Gray, Alaska Review of Social and Economic Conditions, Vol. XVII, No. 2, June 1980. Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska.

GOING OUT

1. Which city shipped out the most in 1977?_____. Where did this commodity come from?_____. What do you think it was?_____.

2. What was the total commodity flow out of Alaska to the Far East, Northwest and California (*add them up*)?_____.

3. How did the size of outbound commodities compare with the size of inbound commodities in 1977?
____ About the same.
____ Three times as much.
____ Seven times as much.

(Answers on page 8)