Newspaper, Baranov Museum Publish Book About '64 Quake

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

It was a day that forever changed Kodiak. On March 27, 1964, a 9.2 magnitude earthquake shook Alaska and generated a tsunami that washed away coastal communities, forcing towns like Kodiak to rebuild in the years that followed. It’s been almost 50 years since that Good Friday earthquake, and The Kodiak Daily Mirror and Baranov Museum wanted to do something to commemorate those events.

Enter “9.2: Kodiak and the World’s Second Largest Earthquake,” a new book published by the newspaper with the help of the museum. Mirror Editor James Brooks said the collaborative project was about a year in the making, and seemed like a good way to honor the 50th anniversary.

“Fifty years ago the newspaper published a book of photographs from the disaster and proceeds from that were donated to reconstruction efforts. So as this came up we realized that we wanted to do a book for the ’64 earthquake for the 50th anniversary for it. And this covers basically photos from the archives in the Baranov museum that we tried to reach in and find photos that hadn’t been published before. There’s been a lot of photos that keep coming up again and again, but we wanted to reach into the archives and find things that really haven’t been seen before, and I think we’ve done that.”

Brooks said they also used the newspaper’s archives to revisit some of the stories from the disaster.

“We did. We went back for the textual side of things, into the newspaper accounts, into the reports that were written after the fact, into the interviews that were done in the years immediately following to say this is what happened and this is what these pictures show. It’s primarily pictures but we do have a lot of text and some interviews and that.”

Brooks said the project would not have been possible without the partnership with the museum and use of its archives.

“We went to them and said we’d like to use your archives for this book. And they weren’t our only source; we also used the University of Alaska digital archives as well. And they have a wide collection of photographs, many of which are online for anyone to see. And so we looked at those, we looked at the Baranov Museum. We worked with the archivist at the Baranov Museum who digitized the photos for us so we could use them in design. And then everything came together with our work with the newspaper after their work with the photos.”

Brooks said he’s definitely pleased with the result, but the true test will be the community’s reaction to it. He said it is an evolving story, especially as more people come forward with their accounts of the events. The Mirror plans to run a special section closer to the 50th

anniversary in March, and Brooks said that will be an opportunity to share stories not included in the book – perhaps ones that emerge after its published.

“I think because it is the 50th anniversary, this is a great time to remember. And if you were in Kodiak at that time, you have an earthquake, you have a tsunami memory. And it’s important that those memories get spread around. Even if you don’t share them with the museum or with us, share them with your friends and family so those stories can be passed on. Because once they’re gone they’re gone.”

The book is expected to be in Kodiak in December, but folks can pre order their copies through the Kodiak Daily Mirror. The books cost $39.95 each. Once they arrive, Brooks said it will be sold at the Baranov Museum and a handful of other places around town.