

The David Hawkins Cemetery and the First Woman Elder and Other Members of the South Haven Presbyterian Church

On Friday, April, 11, The Fire Place History Club held an event at the David Hawkins cemetery in Brookhaven (formerly South Haven, formerly Fire Place).

The Fire Place History Club and the Brookhaven Village Association held the event to honor an illustrious past member of the South Haven congregation, Erastus Corning Hawkins. He was of such renown that a 10,247-foot peak east of the Copper River in the Chugach Mountains of Alaska was named for him, Mount Hawkins.

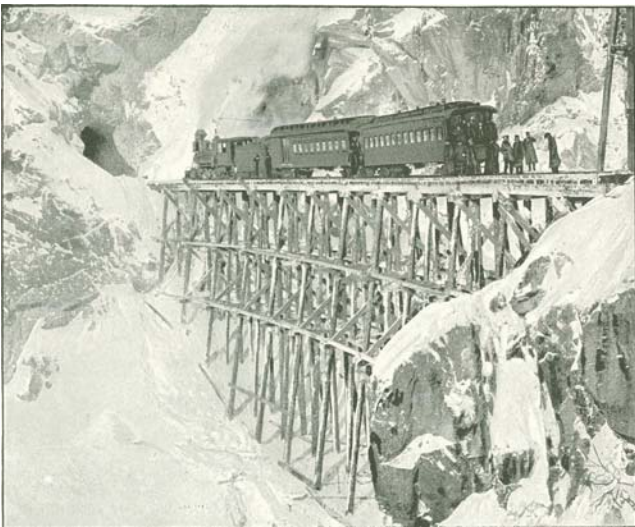
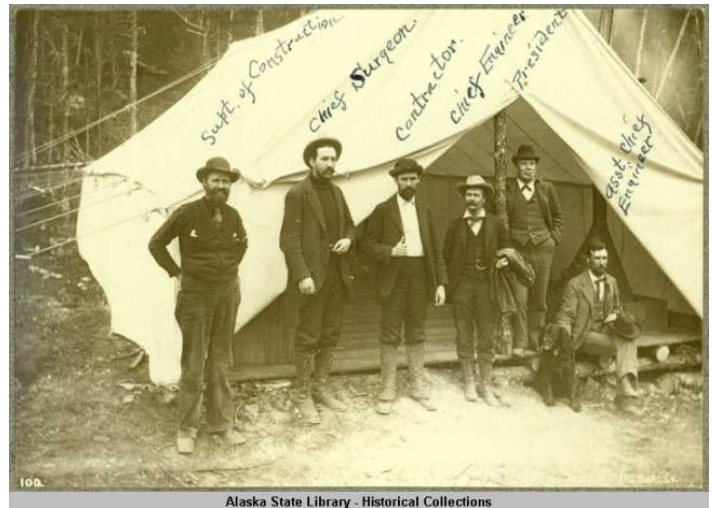


Figure 2 White Pass & Yukon Route Railway, 1st Passenger Train, 1899.

In 1994, the White Pass and Yukon Route Railway was designated an International Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers as the 175th such landmark which also includes the Erie Canal, the Mormon Tabernacle, and Hoover Dam.

The completion of the Copper River & Northwestern Railroad was marked by driving a copper spike on March 29, 1911. One year and eleven days later, Erastus Corning Hawkins died.

He died unexpectedly at age 51. He and his family, wife Emma (Sullivan) and children Gilberta Dallas, Mason Irving, Clarissa, Rufus Bartlett, and Howard Haviland, lived in Seattle, Washington, but each year he made a trip back to New York. While in New York in April 1912, he suddenly became ill and was taken to the New York Hospital. His family was summoned from Seattle and an operation was attempted on April 9, but he died from post-operative shock.



It was in the mountains of Alaska and the Yukon that E. C. Hawkins achieved his fame as Chief Engineer for the White Pass & Yukon Railway (1898-1899) and of the Copper River & Northwestern Railway (1908-1911). For the latter project there was funding from the Guggenheim family and J. P. Morgan. Erastus Hawkins developed new arctic construction techniques to build the “Million Dollar Bridge” (it actually cost \$1.4 million) across the Copper River, less than 2,000 feet from two merging glaciers—the Miles and Childs glaciers.



Figure 3 Million Dollar Bridge with Glaciers Behind (3 of 4 spans).

His funeral took place at the South Haven Presbyterian Church on Thursday afternoon, April 11, 1912. He was interred in the family burying grounds on his ancestors farm on Little Neck (between Little Neck Run and Yaphank Creek) in South Haven (now Brookhaven hamlet).

For reasons unknown, a headstone was never provided, and Erastus Corning Hawkins has lain in an unmarked grave between his brothers Irving and Emmett ever since. In 2010, the Fireplace History Club received some grant money from the Caithness fund to restore eight local cemeteries, and those monies have been supplemented by generous contributions from community members to the Brookhaven Village Association for the purpose of maintaining and preserving the cemeteries.

The Fireplace History Club decided to purchase a headstone for Erastus Hawkins. Two great-grandchildren of E. C. Hawkins, Dr. William Wisbeck and Nina Wisbeck Patera, have been invited and will be attending from Seattle.

Erastus Hawkins was born 8 Sep 1860 in South Haven and baptized on 24 Apr 1862. He and his sister Clara were examined in their home by the Session (Rev. W. H. Cooper, Timothy Ketcham, and Samuel Glover) "as to their knowledge of experimental piety and their motives for entering the Christian Church" and accepted as members by profession of faith on 20 Feb 1877.

A brother of Erastus Hawkins, Emmett, is also buried in the cemetery, as is Emmett's wife, Mattie (Whitson) Hawkins. Emmett Hawkins was elected Ruling Elder of the South Haven congregation on 04 Mar 1900 and ordained and installed on 11 Mar 1900. Then, at the Annual Parish Meeting in 1909, he was elected to fill the remaining two years of the term of Sylvester Corwin, deceased, as Trustee, and afterward held both offices. He was elected to a full three-year term as trustee of the Parish of South Haven in 1911. He was re-elected in 1914, 1917, and 1920.

Emmett's wife, Mattie, was elected by the South Haven congregation as its *first woman elder* at a specially called congregational meeting at the close of service on Oct. 8, 1933, and was ordained on Oct. 22. At the time, there were two other elders, Wallace Swezey and Chauncey Swezey, but Wallace Swezey had been recorded as ill and never attended any Session meetings after Sep 03, 1931.

The office of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church had been reserved for men until a change in the *Form of Government* that was approved and took effect in May 1930. (Ordination of women to the office of deacon had been approved in 1923, but it wasn't until 1956 that a woman could become an ordained Teaching Elder, that is, a minister of the Word and Sacrament.)

Her first term was set to expire with the annual meeting of 1936, but the South Haven congregation forgot to re-elect her at the 1936 Annual Meeting held in July, so they held a special congregational meeting on 06 Sep 1936 and re-elected her.

Mattie Hawkins last term expired at the time of the Annual Congregational Meeting on 09 Apr 1946. By this time (she was age 78) her health was failing. In June 1946, she sold her home in South Haven. She died in Brooklyn, probably at the home of her niece, Mrs. Mattie McCarthy, on 20 Dec 1950. The Sunday evening service of 31 Dec 1950 was designated as a memorial service for the members of the church who died in 1950, including Mrs. Wallace Swezey, Mr. And Mrs. Chauncey Swezey, and Mrs. Mattie Hawkins.

Mattie and Emmett had no children. Her name and birth year had been carved into the headstone when it was prepared for her husband's grave, but her death date was never inscribed upon it.