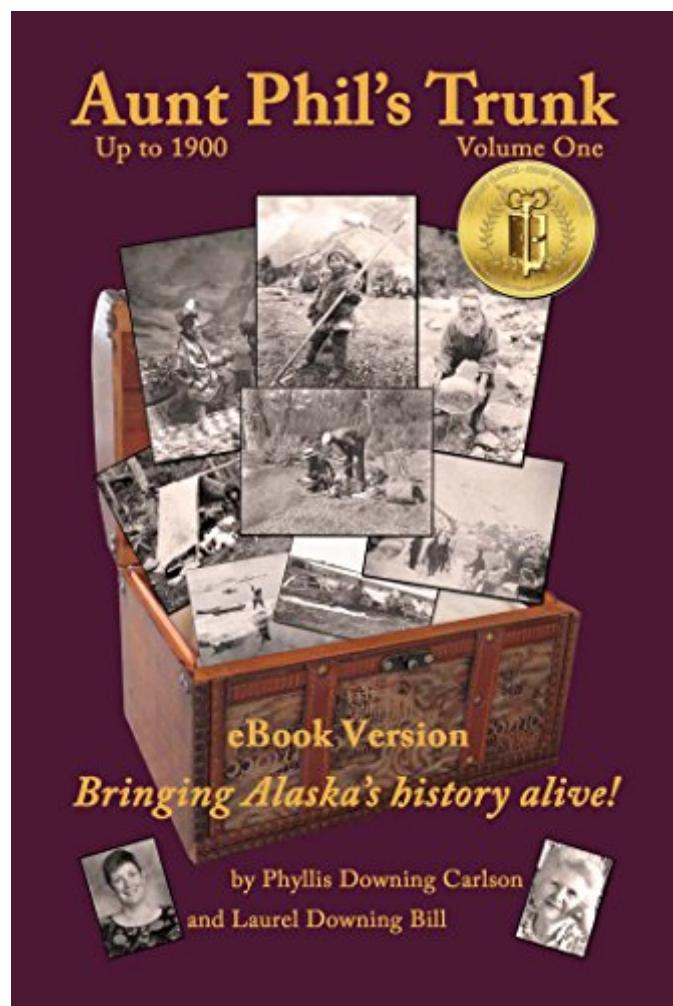


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# Aunt Phil's Trunk: Bringing Alaska's History Alive!



## **Synopsis**

The critically acclaimed Aunt Phil's Trunk Alaska history series by Laurel Downing Bill is noted for its easy-to-read short stories and hundreds of historical photographs that complement the entertaining nonfiction writing. Suitable for ages 9 to 99, the first book in the series shares stories from early Alaska up to about 1900.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

As posted on my blog, Victoria's Reading Alcovelt is, of course, rather nice to breathe the fine air of history once again. Through a chain of friends I was asked to take a look at the first two volumes of what is growing into a series called, Aunt Phil's Trunk. Even the making of these books has a historical tang to it. Aunt Phil, Phyllis Downing Carlson, was a historian and a meticulous collector of Alaskan Lore. She bequeathed this body of knowledge to her niece, Laurel Downing Bill. Laurel, fascinated with the treasure trove she had found, took herself off to university to learn journalism and history. Upon graduation she began further researching the history of her home state, Alaska. Then she began the process of weaving her own tales with those of her aunt's to create a really fascinating read. You never get lost because she always makes sure that while you are reading

Alaskan history, you also know what was happening in the burgeoning country to the south. I found myself quite delighted wandering through the pages of this collection of stories. Bill provides some background on habitation in Alaska as early as 850 BCE. In the early chapters of volume one, Bill gives a brief history of the violent geological nature of the land. She describes how volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis and Arctic winters shaped the land and the islands that are near its shore. Of great interest to me was her research of the Russian possession of the country, and the dream of Secretary of State Seward to own the northern frontier. The purchase price of Alaska was somewhere around 2 cents an acre; \$7.2 million dollars. There's a photograph of the check!

Alaska! What happened to the 49th state before the gold rush? Before Russia sold her to Seward for \$7.2 million? Before the Russian fur traders and mission establishments? Before written history? If you're interested, listen to Aunt Phil tell the story. Or more correctly, let Laurel Downing Bill tell Aunt Phil's story. In four "oops, five volumes. When I first read the Aunt Phil's Trunk Series just a couple years ago, there were only four volumes. I promised to write a review back then, but like all authors, like all workers of any ilk, I got busy. So when Laurel asked me where the review was, I decided to refresh this leaky old memory bone by skimming the story again. And adding the fifth volume this time. Folks, you don't "eskim" something as interesting as Laurel's editing of those treasures from Aunt Phil's Trunk. And adding her own new original research. You just sit back, read, and enjoy. Yes, what a pleasure to travel familiar waters. I suggest you try it sometime. And I recommend that you read this series. That should be evident by now. Don't just take my word for it. She has awards tucked up her sleeve. How about two awards from the Literary Classics international book contest: one for Best Historical Nonfiction and the other for Best Nonfiction Series. Not to mention 30 reviews averaging 5 perfect stars, including reviews from reviewers among the top 500 reviewers. This review does not cover the entire series. I will review each volume in turn, but I do need to mention a few things with regard to the question, "What do the volumes cover?" Each book shares the history of Alaska in a different era.

Aunt Phil's Trunk Volume One " up to 1900 This richly rewarding book makes the history of Alaska come alive. Volume One is the first book of a 5-book series sharing the historical treasures of the great Alaska and the people, the adventurers, the Russian fur traders, and those that came north when the "Great Land" became part of the United States. Stories and information and photographs in this book take readers up to the Klondike Gold Rush. I loved that there is so many photographs that help to make it come alive. I was enthralled with the depth of the book " this one

starts with some "Unanswered Questions" • "things that make you think and then the answers to those questions. Phyllis found that some of the questions during her 50-plus writing career and yet she didn't find the answers to some "Throughout the book there is a sprinkling of stories and deep information and many, many photographs. She shares with us the way earthquakes help to form the landscape, and relates some little-known stories about when natives attacked the Russian forts. There is a photo of the pile of bones and skulls from some of those killed in the Nulato massacre in February 1851- both Natives and Russians. You will enjoy the information about how Alaska becomes a US possession, and read about the first gold rush, and the 2nd gold rush, and then the rush to the Klondike. Enjoy chapter 25 "Gold Rush Trails Photo Essay" • with a section about the All-water route, the Stikine Trail, the White Pass Train, the Chilkoot Pass Trail, - I really enjoyed the photographs especially the one of an interesting dwelling built along their route to riches- such as a house built of bottles at the White Pass summit. Several chapters are about sea captains, scoundrels and nuns!

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