Colony Village-

A taste of Alaska's historical past

By JIM SPRINGER

After months of preparation, including the moving of an original colony house, Colony Village, on the Alaska State Fairgrounds, had its grand opening last week.

Two buildings, the Hesse-Smith House and the Winek Barn, are open to the public and have displays of original colony-era artifacts.

In what used to be the living room of the Hesse-Smith House, the walls are hung with historic colony photographs, and a glass display holds cartons and containers once used for colony farm products.

An antique postal counter, which is actually a branch office of the U.S. Postal Service, is behind the living room. During the Alaska State Fair, the post office cancels letters using a special cancellation mark.

What was once a bedroom in the original house is being used to display typical colony-era living-room furniture, including an organ.

The house itself is an artifact as well as a museum building. The house was built for the Claude Hesse family in 1935, using plans number three colony house plans were based on five different options. The Hesse's modified their house after it was built, adding a large enclosed back porch, with several windows.

The south-side addition is probably the only one of its kind, said Colony Village historical director Jim Fox, and it worked well for starting projects early in the spring.

The house was originally located on tract 101 just north of Palmer. It was later bought by the Smith family and moved to Wasilla until acquired for the Colony Village display in 1977.

Winek Barn, was built for the Ed Winek farm near Bodenburg Butte in 1935, and was also acquired in 1977. It follows the plan for all of the colony barns and is essentially a cube, 32 feet on a side, said Fox.

Inside the barn is a life-size canvas tent of the type used in the first summer of colonization. The tent is furnished with authentic beds, chairs, tables and a large coal-burning stove.

On one wall of the barn is a photo display of settlement and farming in the Valley before the arrival of the colonists.

Colony Village is a project of the Alaska State Fair, Historical, Educational and Arts Association. It is open to the public Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fox or Lucille McSorley are usually on hand to guide tours of the village, located next to the Transportation Museum on the south end of the Fairgrounds.