

Alaska State Library  
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

**Bart Thane Letter, 1899**

**MS 004-13-16**

1 Letter and envelope  
2<sup>nd</sup> Physical Description  
1 photocopy of letter and envelope

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Bartlett Lee Thane (1877-1927) was born in California. He attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he was the quarterback for the football team, graduating with a degree in mining engineering in 1898. Thane first came to Alaska in 1897 to work for Herman Tripp running and maintaining the shaft pumps at the Sumdum Chief Mine south of Juneau. He then served as superintendent of the Eagle River Mining Company (1903-1910), before moving on to head the Alaska-Gastineau Mining Company. By 1911, Thane had gained controlling interest in six different gold mines in the Juneau area. At the Preservation Mine, Thane and his associates excavated a tunnel to provide tide water access from the Sheep Creek Valley, constructed the Salmon Creek Dam supplying hydroelectric power, and built a rotating mill that processed gold ore at the rate of 10,000 tons per day. Thane then added additional hydroelectric power by constructing a second dam at Annex Creek. These and other efforts made the Alaska-Gastineau Mine the largest gold mine in the world for a short period just prior to World War I. The Alaska-Gastineau Mine shut down in 1921 when it became unprofitable. Thane then attempted to develop his hydroelectric plants, mill town, and support facilities for a new pulp mill, but a deal with Japanese investors failed in 1923. Bart Thane died in New York City in 1927. Thane, Alaska, a small town south of Juneau, and Thane Road, running south of Juneau on Gastineau Channel, were named for Bart Thane. –Archives and Special Collections Department, UAA-APU Consortium.

Thane was a brilliant promoter and mining engineer who had profound effect on the mining industry. One of a new breed of college trained engineers he graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1898. He was the star quarterback on Berkeley's football team. Many of his teammates were majoring in mining engineering and would play key supporting roles in Thane's most ambitious endeavor. At just shy of 20 years of age, the young Thane came to Juneau, Alaska to begin his mining career. Long time mining man Herman Tripp hired Thane in his first job running and maintaining the shaft pumps in the Sumdum Chief mine 60 miles south of Juneau. Tripp, who had reservations about college boys, quickly became a fan of the young Californian resulting in a lifelong friendship. In three years Thane gained controlling interest in the mine.

By 1911, Thane controlled six gold mines in the Juneau Gold Belt and had a mountain name after him.

Through a rather bazaar course of events, Thane would gain control of the Perseverance mine near Juneau. The President of the company, Col. William Sutherland had been accused by stock and bondholders of mismanagement of the company and was sued. Sutherland dropped dead of a heart attack; two wives claimed his estate, neither of which knew about the other. The company seemed to be hopelessly caught up in litigation

when with the backing of D.C. Jackling and W.P. Hammon, Thane raised \$8,000,000 in 1912 to take over and develop the Perseverance mine into the world's largest.

Thane had a three part plan for the Perseverance mine:

1. Provide for tide water access via a two mile tunnel
2. Develop an year round hydroelectric power plant, and
3. Construct a revolutionary new mill that would handle up to 6000 tons per day of ore.

The Sheep Creek Adit, as the tunnel was known, was started in November 1912 and completed in February 1914. It is 10,497 feet long and was driven at the fastest rate any tunnel had been excavated in the world. This tunnel gave Thane tide water access via Sheep Creek valley.

With the assistance of some of his former football teammates, Thane constructed the Salmon Creek Dam which is the first thin arch dam ever constructed. The dam is 172 feet high, 648 feet across at the crest, 47.5 feet thick at the base tapering to 6.5 feet at the top. Today there are literally over one hundred of these dams throughout the world designed after the one at Sheep Creek.

The new mill designed to crush, grind, and recover gold from 6,000 tons per day relied on a new rotating mill that was being used in the large copper mines of Nevada and Arizona. Completed in 1915, the mill which many in the mining industry were skeptical as to its success, did not handle 6,000 tons per day, but rather handled 10,000 tons per day at less than the cost projected.

With the success of the new mill, it became clear that more electrical power would be needed. Annex Creek on Taku Inlet was optioned from Herman Tripp in April 1915, the power project was producing power by December of that year. It is the first time a lake had been tapped via tunneling under and punching hole through the bottom of the lake. Amazingly water was turning the water wheels 2 miles away within 42 minutes after blasting the hole through the lake. Annex Creek and Salmon Creek still produce 20% of Juneau's power today, and are the lowest cost power producers in the state of Alaska.

The Alaska Gastineau for a short period prior to World War I was the largest gold mine in the world. It produced more than 500,000 ounces of gold.

The loss of labor during the war and post war inflation made the mine unprofitable. On June 3, 1921 the mine shut down. Thane promoted the hydroelectric plants, mill town, and

support facilities for a new pulp mill site. In 1923, an apparent deal was made with Japanese investors. However, the Tokyo earthquake of the same year killed the investors and the proposed pulp mill died with them. Even though he had positively changed the course of the mining industry, Thane died in New York City in 1927, a broken and embittered man. Fred Bradley, the genius behind the Treadwell and AJ mines, said of Thane upon hearing of his death, "He built great monuments to man, but forgot what he was here for." –Alaska Mining Hall of Fame. <http://alaskamininghalloffame.org/inductees/thane.php>. ©2006 Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation.

### SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

This folder contains a letter by Bart Thane. In it he describes some of his experiences at the Sumdum Chief Mine at Sumdum, Alaska in July of 1898.

### SUBJECTS

Bart Thane, Sumdum Chief Mine, Alaska

### INVENTORY

**Folder 1 of 1**

1 letter