After Extension was founded in Fairbanks, the two Extension agents almost immediately left on a road trip around Alaska to organize 4-H clubs, and teach home economics and agriculture.

Extension’s first field office opened in Palmer in 1936 to work with the 200 Matanuska Colony farm families and 100 other families that had homesteaded in the area.

Extension now has nine district offices with 34 agents in Fairbanks, Delta Junction, Palmer, Anchorage, Nome, Soldotna, Juneau, Bethel and Sitka. 4-H offices are also located in Dillingham, Kodiak and at Eielson Air Force Base.

EXTENSION CELEBRATES

100 Years

THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE marked its centennial in 2014.

The Smith-Lever Act established Extension to “aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information,” particularly in the areas of agriculture, home economics and rural energy.

A national network of educators affiliated with land-grant universities extends research-based information on these subjects and a lot more to the people.

Extension came to Alaska in 1930, after Congress amended the Smith-Lever legislation to include the territory. In its early days, Extension helped Matanuska colonists, homesteaders and others thrive in Alaska’s challenging environment. It continues to work with Alaskans today — whether it’s helping them garden, can salmon, use a GPS or season firewood.

Extension provides the “service” in its name in a variety of ways, whether it’s providing advice on food preservation, or, as a Bethel agent did this year, walking through a house with a flashlight looking for bedbugs.

Alaska Extension celebrated the centennial with weeklong information fests in several communities — teaching practical classes on everything from keeping moose out of your gardens to baking bread.

Pioneering Extension agent Lydia John-Hansen, center, worked out of a tent and taught canning to the newly arrived Matanuska colonists in 1935.