Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties

Alaska Association for Historic Preservation, Inc.

2020
Ascension Church of Our Lord Chapel
at Karluk on Kodiak Island
RossiAlaska.org
The church is located on the far side of Kodiak Island and is the oldest existing Russian Orthodox church in Alaska. It is also one of the most professionally designed. The elaborate nature of this church may be attributed to the successful salmon cannery that had been located on the Karluk River below. The Karluk Packing Company began building homes for its native workers in the late 1800s and one of the workers asked to build a church instead of a house. The church was finished on June 11, 1888, and although the cannery closed in the 1930s, the church remained.

Today, the church is in danger of falling into the Karluk River if nothing is done soon because of the erosion of the cliff. A group is working with the Diocese of Alaska to move the church inland a safe distance to save it. The church will be moved and then mothballed until a final location is found for the church and then a full restoration will take place.
Wolf Creek Boatworks
Near Hollis on
Prince of Wales Island
www.SaveWolfCreek.com
Located on this site for about 80 years, 25 years of restoration, maintenance, improvements, and preservation have been invested in Wolf Creek Boatworks. Currently, the battle to exclude the land from the USFS and Alaska Mental Health Land Trust (AMHLT) land swap of 1544 acres has hit a dead end. An eviction notice was issued to the boatworks by the USFS which requires all privately-owned property to be removed by December 17, 2020 or it becomes property of the USFS. The buildings and equipment will be removed with no compensation or recourse, and the land will be transferred to the AMHLT. The boatworks is situated on a 7-acre site with very little of the land allowed by law to be logged. AMHLT intends to log the entire 1544 acres to fund its programs. AAHP is involved in support of saving the boatworks as are others. Senator Lisa Murkowski’s office is reviewing the situation.
United States Commissioner’s Cabin at McCarthy

Kennicott Historical Museum photo, presumably U.S. Commissioner E.E. Chamberlin standing outside the U.S. Commissioner's Cabin (note that sign indicates his post/home), snapped by "Hilda" with her box camera, circa 1927-1932
The U.S. Commissioner’s Cabin is a historic, privately-owned structure located within the heart of Wrangell–St. Elias National Park & Preserve, in downtown McCarthy. The cabin was circa 1908. Oral history indicates it was constructed before most of the other buildings in town. It is the last of its kind in McCarthy.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the area was home to one of the largest copper operations in the world. A former McCarthy railroad station master said this cabin had originally been the office for the Mother Lode Mining Co., which started operations about 1908 before the Copper River & Northwestern Railway reached Kennicott (just over four miles away) in 1911.

The McCarthy Creek floodplain has changed over time and threatens the U.S. Commissioner’s Cabin as well as other nearby structures. Immediate threats to this property include catastrophic structural damage caused by flooding. Changing weather patterns may also be a factor increasing the risk of flooding events, both in terms of their frequency and magnitude. This historic property has already incurred minor flooding and groundwater intrusion. When McCarthy Creek rose in the past, so did the water table, flooding the cabin’s root cellar; consequently, support beams for the root cellar collapsed, necessitating replacement of floor beam. The property now faces escalating risk, as water reaches higher levels than ever before.
Steamer Nenana
AKA SS Nenana
Fairbanks
FriendsofSSNenana.com
The Steamer Nenana is a five-deck, wooden-hulled western rivers style steamer sternwheeler packet built from clear, vertical grain, kiln-dried fir. The ship is a blend of steam, wood, and paddlewheel technology that is 237 feet long and weighs a total of 1128 tons.

The steamer was commissioned and built in 1932, by the Alaska Railroad. She was prefabricated in Seattle, assembled in Nenana, launched into service in 1933, and run by the ARR. The original design contained 24 berths, a dining salon, a smoking room, an observation room, a kitchen, a bakery, and men's and women's bathrooms along with passengers’ and officers' rooms with porcelain sinks and electric lights.

She is located in Pioneer Park in Fairbanks. Years of neglect and deferred maintenance have brought the SS Nenana – a beautiful piece of Alaskan history – to deplorable conditions. In April 2018, the Fairbanks Northstar Borough blocked all entrances to the sternwheeler and closed off this beloved historic landmark to the public due to safety concerns.

Dedicated community members have since organized into the non-profit Friends of SS Nenana and had the vessel inspected by the Principal Naval Architect of Columbia-Sentinel Engineers Inc. from Seattle, WA during June of 2019. A report of needed repairs was generated for the group.

The National Park Service, Alaska Interior Region, is offering technical assistance for the repairs and restoration of the vessel. Without substantial fundraising, advocacy, and a close partnership agreement with the borough, we will lose the SS Nenana, a historic sternwheeler that is the last of its kind.
Amakdedori
Northern Alaska Peninsula

and

Qiyhi Qelahi
Northern Alaska Peninsula
Amakdedori or *Amaktatuli* in the Yup’ik language means “the place to carry things over.”

The Pebble Mine is a proposed project to extract copper-gold molybdenum porphyry ore (Pebble Deposit) from an open pit mine about 56 miles northwest of the mouth of Amakdedori Creek. The project is currently under federal environmental review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

This site is in danger due to the Pebble Limited Partnership’s (PLP) proposed port site for their mine at Amakdedori. If built, the port site will destroy parts of Amakdedori and forever change this traditional place of education. Development of the proposed port could cause irreparable harm to the graves whose locations have yet to be identified.

The Igiugig Village Council is working towards documenting the cultural significance of the site by participating in the ongoing Section 106 process for the Pebble Project.
The Qiyhi Qelahi (Groundhog Mountain) Cultural Landscape is a place of traditional use for the people of Nondalton.

The site is also endangered due to the Pebble Limited Partnership’s (PLP) proposed mine that is directly in the middle of the area. If built, the mine will destroy the cultural landscape. As it is, PLP’s current exploratory drilling program is already impacting the cultural landscape because Nondalton residents are avoiding this area their ancestors have used for countless generations.

The Nondalton Tribal Council is working towards documenting the cultural landscape and is participating in the ongoing Section 106 process for the Pebble Project.
Bonfoey Family Homestead Cabin at North Pole
The Bonfoey Family Homestead, built in 1958, is one of the the earliest homesteads established in North Pole, Alaska. It is one of the first 3 log cabins ever built in North Pole and long ago served as a church to the North Pole community. It also served as one of the first, if not the first, homeless shelters in the North Pole area.

Almost everything in and about the homestead is original to 1958. Both the log cabin home and log garage with workshop are intact but in need of major repairs and upgrades. The cabin is becoming increasingly unsafe and hazardous. It is in need of all new wiring and plumbing, windows and exterior doors, kitchen and bathroom fixtures, and flooring on both levels.

Original Electrical Wiring uses Fuses and is not up to code and is especially dangerous in bathrooms and kitchens. Space heaters cannot be used because of the wiring situation. Most of the windows are single-pane glass and the enclosed porch is in need of a new roof or repairs.

The family would like to continue living in the home and preserve it for current and future family members and are now seeking funding in order to do so. If funding is not secured, the house will continue to deteriorate and it will not be healthy or safe for anyone to be living here. The homestead would probably have to be sold "as is" and would more than likely be torn down by the new owner.
Eldred Rock Lighthouse near Haines
EldredRockLighthouse.org
Eldred Rock Lighthouse sits on a very small island located approximately 17 miles south of the town of Haines, Alaska. The island is the last (southernmost) in a string of islands extending south from the Haines peninsula. Built in 1905, Eldred Rock Lighthouse is the oldest original lighthouse in Alaska and the only remaining octagonal frame lighthouse of those built between 1902-1905. It is the only station not rebuilt. It was established because of the many shipwrecks nearby especially during the 1898 Gold Rush, when Lynn Canal was in heavy use.

Eldred Rock Lighthouse has now been unmanned for over 45 years, and as a result the buildings have fallen into disrepair and are considered endangered. The primary reasons for this state of disrepair are due to environmental and logistical challenges and no agency funding to maintain the lighthouse. The extreme weather and environmental conditions greatly contribute to the rate of deterioration. Logistically, the island is very difficult and expensive to access. This makes getting resources—humans, building supplies, etc.—to the island very difficult. The concrete base of the lighthouse is spalling and needs quite a bit of attention.

The roofs of the various structures (four buildings on the island) are all in need of some level of repair to prevent water intrusion. Most wood and windows need to be repaired and repainted. Outside, the landscape needs attention to prevent the natural environment from “taking over.” Furthermore, there are environmental factors in and around the lighthouse that need to be cleaned up in order for the property to be safely used by the public.
Leonhard Seppala House
Nome
LeonhardSeppalaHouseProject.com
This is the house that Leonhard Seppala lived in while he was in Nome during the 1925 Diphtheria Epidemic that threatened the population of Nome. It was also the house that Leonhard lived in while he owned Balto, Togo, and Fritz; the dogs that ran the famed Serum Race to Nome.

The house has been vacant for a decade and not well kept. It was set for demolition by the City of Nome due to it becoming a fire hazard and a place for homeless to hang out.

In July of 2018, the owner of the building; Urtha Lenharr set up a nonprofit, raised some funds thru donations and Nome City Share funds to have the building moved to a safe location keeping it from demolition. It is now being assessed for the materials needed to rebuild the structure and bring it up to Nome City Codes for a small museum in honor of Seppala and his accomplishments. The building will first need to be relocated and then fully restored.

Leonhard Seppala is known for his infamous leaders: TOGO, BALTO, and FRITZ.
The theatre was built by Cap Lathrop as his legacy to Alaska. It is the only art deco building of its kind in Alaska. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. Built beginning in 1941, and completed in 1947, after a halt during World War II, somewhat after the heyday of these styles, it was a large 960-seat first-run theater until the 1980s. There are four sets of murals including a huge, floor-to-ceiling pair, which depicts the commercial and industrial growth of Alaska.

The theatre has been closed for some time and is in need of restoration. There is no word from the owners exactly what their intentions are for the future of the theatre. AAHP first listed the theatre on this annual list in 1991 and continues to list this property because the organization feels it is vitally important that the entire building be restored and once again welcomes the local community.
Jesse Lee Home for Children at Seward
The school was built in 1925. In March of 1964, a massive earthquake rocked south-central Alaska causing widespread damage. Goode Hall, the largest Jesse Lee building was heavily damaged and later condemned and demolished. In 1966, the Methodist church deeded the property to the city of Seward, who eventually sold it to private owners. Today, after being abandoned for nearly 40 years, the property is again owned by the City of Seward.

The future of what remains of the Jesse Lee Home for Children is in limbo. The Friends of Jesse Lee Home hope to restore the building but have struggled to fully fund the project.
You can support this important AAHP Program by donating to the Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties Grant Program linked on our website.