Steamer Nenana
AKA SS Nenana
Fairbanks
FriendsofSSNenana.com

Property Description:

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.

She is located in Pioneer Park in Fairbanks, Alaska, which opened in 1967 as Alaska 67 Centennial Exposition Park, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the purchase of Alaska from Russia.

Property history:

The Steamer Nenana 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. Passengers' and officers' rooms , with porcelain sinks and electric lights.

She ran seasonally from Nenana to Marshal every two weeks with selected trips to St Michael and Whitehorsebuilt-in, bringing passengers and supplies to the towns, villages, mining sites, and military installations along the Tanana and Yukon Rivers.

The Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce purchased the Steamer Nenana in 1956 and sold her to Greater Fairbanks Opportunities Incan, who then brought her to Fairbanks in 1957. The Greater Fairbanks Opportunities Inc. operated her as a boatel on the Chena River until 1960 as a tourist attraction to bring money into the Fairbanks community. In 1965, the SS Nenana stockholders transferred the title of the ship to the Alaska 67 Centennial Organization, which moved her into Alaska 67 Centennial Park in 1965, now known as Pioneer Park.

The Fairbanks Historical Preservation Foundation moved the boat in 1987 from its original location by the Pioneer Museum in the park, set her on a concrete docking structure, then restored and refurbished her to reflect the construction and layout. She was reopened as a museum to the public with tours in 1992 in her new location as the centerpiece of the park.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough closed the vessel to all visitors in the Fall of 2018, citing safety issues.

Why is property endangered?   The last structural repair work done by the Fairbanks North Star Borough on the Steamer Nenana was completed in 2011. Due to a shrinking economy, funds have not been available for the borough to do the extensive repair needed to prevent further deterioration. Time and weather continue to wear away at the ship. If work isn't done soon, this national treasure will be lost.

Activities under way to save property:

Concerned citizens formed the Friends of SS Nenana in March of 2018, which is now incorporated with the State of Alaska as a non-profit and working closely with Fairbanks North Star Borough leadership and staff. The Friends of SS Nenana is currently sponsored by the North Star Community Foundation to receive donations under the Foundation's 501(c)(3) status, as well as guidance needed to conform to IRS rules and regulations as a non-profit.

The SS NENANA was inspected by Principal Naval Architect of Columbia-Sentinel Engineers Inc. in Seattle, WA. June of 2019. A report of needed repairs has been generated.

The Friends of SS Nenana Board was contacted by Grant Crosby, Senior Historical Architect, and John Wachtel Historical Architect, Heritage Assistance Program, both with the National Park Service, Interior Region 11, in Anchorage, Alaska. The National Park Service, Alaska Interior Region, is offering technical assistance to Friends of SS Nenana for the repairs and restoration of the SS NENANA.

2021: The Fairbanks North Star Borough, in response to strong community support, has committed maintenance funds for work on the SS Nenana. They have hired a design firm with a historic preservation consultant to prepare bid documents for repairs to the vessel. Work will start with the cargo deck. They will be seeking further funds for interior and exterior restoration work.