

# THE ALASKA ASSOCIATION

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## HISTORIC TALKEETNA

By Gillian Smythe

Next time you're driving between Anchorage and Fairbanks or on a day trip out of Anchorage, consider taking a 13 mile detour off the Parks Highway via the Talkeetna Spur Road to Talkeetna.

Talkeetna was reportedly once the site of a Tanaina Indian seasonal camp but the community's modern origins date from the early years of the twentieth century when gold strikes on the Kenai Peninsula and elsewhere encouraged exploration further inland. The trading post of Talkeetna Station was established in 1909 or 1910 by the Alaska Commercial Company following gold discoveries at Cache Creek and other locations in the foothills of the Alaska Range and the Talkeetna Mountains. For several years thereafter, steamboat traffic stopped at Talkeetna to off-load supplies destined for mining camps in the area.

Talkeetna's survival was ensured in 1915 when the Susitna River and Broad Pass route was selected for the Alaska Railroad line between Anchorage and Fairbanks. The community became a district headquarters for the Alaska Engineering Commission during construction of the route. As a result, the village grew to include several stores and small cabins, while a post office was established here in 1916. Shortly thereafter, the community was surveyed and a federal townsite was established in 1918. Lots were sold in 1919 and the present form of the community soon took shape.

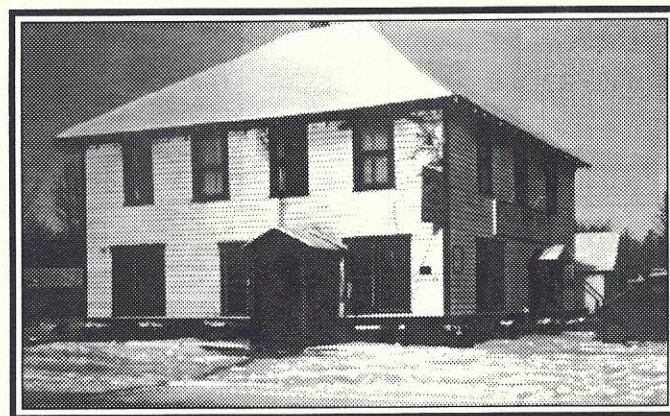
After completion of construction of the railroad in 1919 and opening of the local railroad station in 1920, Talkeetna continued to serve as a major supply center for area miners and trappers. Many of the town's early residents were bachelors who lived here during the winter months and worked their mining claims during the summer. Others remained in the area after they had retired.

During the 1915 to 1925 period, the oldest structures still standing in Talkeetna, including the Fairview Inn and the Talkeetna Roadhouse, were built while the B & K Trading Post was moved here from Susitna Station. All three buildings are located on Main Street in "downtown" Talkeetna.

The Fairview Inn is probably the best known structure in Talkeetna. It was built in the early 1920s and was originally designed to serve as an overnight stop for railroad travelers. However, it soon became a favorite meeting place for area miners and it remains a focus of community activity to this day.

The Fairview is a rectangular two-story wood frame structure with a medium hipped roof. Originally a 36-foot square building, a 12 foot by 20 foot addition to the north side was constructed in 1939. Its handsome "utilitarian" design is considered typical of early hotels built along the railroad route. The building is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Originally built as a two-story log home in 1917, the Talkeetna Roadhouse was later expanded by several frame additions. Its first owner, Frank Lee, was a teamster who kept a stable of horses to haul supplies to the miners. The structure was converted for use as a roadhouse in 1944.



*Fairview Inn*

The original two-story log portion of the Talkeetna Roadhouse is 16 feet by 40 feet in area. Two wings have been added over the years. A 60 by 18 foot former FAA building is attached to the rear and primarily serves as sleeping quarters for guests. A 21 by 40 foot framed east wing was added to provide additional cooking area at the time the building became a roadhouse. More recently, this addition has been further extended to accommodate the Roadhouse's increased need for storage space.

The B & K Trading Post was initially built at Susitna Landing in 1917 by Horace W. Nagley Sr., a well-known mercantile agent in the area. However, after the railroad was extended to Talkeetna, Nagley decided that prospects might be better there. As a result, he disassembled his trading post and reconstructed it at Talkeetna. The reassembled log section measured 35 feet by 19 feet, with an additional 20 by 29 foot frame wing attached as Nagley's Store. Another frame wing was added subsequently. The store was sold in 1945 and its name was changed to the B & K, the first letter of the last names of the two new owners. It remains the oldest mercantile business in Talkeetna today.

Another early building of interest in Talkeetna is the museum. Built in 1936 according to the specifications of the territorial schools, it was a classic one-room schoolhouse with living quarters on the second floor. This 37 by 30 foot two story frame structure with a tin roof served as Talkeetna's school for many years but was acquired by the Talkeetna Historical Society in 1974 and restored for use as a museum. Today, the museum houses an extensive collection of local exhibits. Two other buildings of historic interest in Talkeetna which would otherwise have been demolished, the former Talkeetna Section House and the former Railroad Depot, have been moved adjacent to the museum and restored by the Talkeetna Historical Society. The Ole Dahl cabin #1, a small one-room log cabin believed to date from 1916, is located nearby and has also been restored by the Talkeetna Historical Society.

As well as these buildings, there are a number of other old log cabins and early frame structures in Talkeetna. The community and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough are currently investigating the possibility of nominating an historic district made up of portions of the downtown and adjacent areas to the National Register of Historic Places as a means of preserving elements of Talkeetna's colorful past.

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# FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

# THOUGHTS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CHAIR

By Rolfe Buzzell

The New Year promises new opportunities and challenges for historic preservation in Alaska in 1991. This past winter also saw a great deal of activity. The following is a summary of major developments at AAHP during the past three months.

## ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

AAHP held its annual meeting in Anchorage on December 2 in conjunction with the annual meetings of the Alaska Historical Society, Museums Alaska and the Cook Inlet Historical Society. The symposium involving the four organizations provided new opportunities for networking and an increased level of exposure for AAHP.

Three speakers were featured as part of AAHP's annual meeting activities. Photographer Gib Whitehead gave a fascinating multi-media presentation on "Memories of McCarthy and Kennecott" during the morning brunch session. More than 70 people attended. During the afternoon session, two professional engineers with strong interests in historic preservation made presentations relating the conference theme of "Science and Technology in Alaska's Past" to the built environment. Lyle Perrigo spoke on the need to acquire scientific and technological information as part of the preservation process. Ted Trueblood spoke on cost-effective methods of rehabilitating historic structures in Alaska.

During AAHP's annual business meeting, a slate of new board members was elected by the membership. The number of board members was reduced from 24 to 13 to facilitate establishing a quorum at board meetings. Board members elected for one year terms were Greg Curney, Frank Norris, Gillian Smythe and Jerry Strang. Members elected for two year terms were Janet McCabe, Russ Sackett, Jack Sinclair and Peg Stout, while those elected to three year terms were Donna Lane, Rolfe Buzzell, Bill Coghill, Kate Lidfors and Mike Jungreis.

## NEW OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR 1991

Immediately after the December 2nd annual meeting, the new board of directors met to elect officers and committee chairs for the coming year. The new officers elected for 1991 are President Rolfe Buzzell, Vice President Donna Lane, Executive Director Bill Coghill, Secretary Kate Lidfors and Treasurer Frank Norris.

Committee chairs for 1991 are Peg Stout (Education), Jack Sinclair (Membership), Russ Sackett (Projects and Issues), Michael Jungreis (Fund Raising), Janet McCabe (Legislation), Greg Curney (Public Relations), Gillian Smythe (Newsletter Coordinator) and Donna Lane (Nominating). Committee chairs are actively recruiting AAHP members who are interested in serving as committee members. Serving on a committee is one of the best opportunities to become actively involved in your Statewide historic preservation organization. Join us!!

## ANNUAL BOARD TRAINING SESSION

On January 19, 1991, the AAHP's board of directors held its annual training and goal setting meeting in Anchorage. Lisbeth Henning of the Western Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation served as facilitator. After reviewing the previous year's goals and accomplishments, board members set about the task of establishing objectives for 1991.

AAHP's objectives for 1991 include: 1) securing funds from the Legislature for matching grants for the restoration of historic structures; 2) obtaining adequate funding from the Legislature for the State Office of History and Archeology; 3) identifying and

publicizing a list of the most endangered historic sites and structures in Alaska; 4) supporting efforts to stabilize and preserve Kennecott; 5) assisting the Icon Preservation Project in its ongoing efforts to record Russian Orthodox churches and their icons; and 6) providing assistance to Alaska communities in addressing historic preservation issues.

Objectives for AAHP's organizational development in 1991 include: 1) design and production of a brochure; 2) establishment of a board of advisors; 3) doubling the size of AAHP's paid membership; and 4) laying the groundwork for an endowment campaign which would begin in 1992. AAHP committees will be further refining specific objectives and time lines for the completion of these and other objectives during the coming months.

1991 will be an exciting and challenging year for historic preservation in Alaska. I invite each of you to roll up your sleeves and become actively involved in the preservation of Alaska's heritage resources, whether that be in your local community or at the Statewide level. Only through commitment, networking and cooperative efforts will we be able to preserve the most significant sites and structures from Alaska's past. Preservation of the built environment provides a vital link and visible reminder of the past, emphasizing the continuity and diversity of Alaska.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION WEEK, MAY 12-18**

The week of May 12-18 is observed as "Historic Preservation Week" throughout the country. This year's theme is "Celebrate your Heritage", a challenge to proudly display each community's history. This year's celebration promotes the 25th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 which initiated the National Register of Historic Places. It also promotes the 75th anniversary of the U.S. National Park Service.

Now is the time to begin organizing and planning your community's observance of National Historic Preservation Week. For additional information and ideas, contact AAHP. Posters are available for \$9.50 each from the National Trust, Office of Communications, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036 or you can call (202) 673-4141. You should order the posters now in order to receive them in time for Preservation Week.

## **AAHP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1991**

### **OFFICERS:**

Executive Director: ..... Bill Coghill  
President: ..... Rolfe Buzzell  
Vice President: ..... Donna Lane  
Secretary: ..... Kate Lidfors  
Treasurer: ..... Frank Norris

### **COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:**

Education: ..... Peg Stout  
Fund Raising: ..... Mike Jungreis  
Legislation: ..... Janet McCabe  
Membership: ..... Jack Sinclair  
Nominating: ..... Donna Lane  
Projects & Issues: ..... Russ Sackett  
Public Relations: ..... Greg Curney

*The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation ( AAHP ) was founded in 1981 as a private, statewide, non-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation of Alaska's prehistoric and historic resources through education, promotion and advocacy. Preservation of the built environment provides a vital link and a visible reminder of the past, emphasizing the continuity and diversity of Alaska.*

# BIRTH OF THE PALMER COLONY IN THE MATANUSKA VALLEY

by Fran Seager-Boss

During the Depression, a combination of events and ideas resulted in the establishment of a farming colony at Palmer in the Matanuska Valley. At that time, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was active in establishing new communities for financially depressed farmers in the South and Midwest. As a result of interest expressed by the Alaska Railroad, the Agricultural Experiment Station and individuals in Oregon, the idea for a new agricultural community in Alaska was born. The project was endorsed by President Roosevelt in February 1935.

The designer of the Palmer colony was David R. Williams, a well known Texas architect who specialized in the adaptation of local materials to suit regional environments. Williams had also been responsible for designing a large number of FERA new communities. After intensive press coverage and a great deal of fanfare, over 200 families were relocated from the Great Lakes states to the Matanuska Valley in May of 1935.

Williams' concept for the Palmer colony called for a central complex and plaza made up of a school anchoring the north end of the plaza, flanked to the east by an industrial complex and to the west by living quarters. However, when the project was actually built, there were several deflections from the original design. The school was built at the east end of the plaza, with the dormitory to the south and the administration buildings to the north, leaving the west end open. In addition, colonists were not interested in sharing a common church, so an area for churches was set aside adjacent to the living quarters.

All of the central community buildings were of frame construction with lap siding. Each building used the same six over six double hung, multi-framed windows; doors with vertical planks and a fixed, two over two framed window; ship lapped or dropped siding; and most bore the same roof lines. Together, these elements contributed a sense of beauty and continuity to the structures.

Five different styles of farm houses, all using native spruce logs, were designed for selection by the colonists. Some colonists chose to

change the design of their homes. Also, as the first construction season wore on, logs became scarce, forcing the architects to re-detail the log homes for frame construction.

Most of the first farm houses were one to one and one-half stories high. They were of log, frame, or a combination of both, with rectangular or L-shaped floor plans and an area of 900 to 1,500 square feet. Frame houses had drop siding and corner boards. Doors and multi-paned windows were the same type as those used in the community center buildings. Duplication of similar construction elements gave an appearance of uniformity. (Unfortunately, many of the log houses have since been stuccoed to improve their insulating quality). While some colonists put foundations under their houses initially or added them later, many houses remained without foundations, a major factor in their subsequent demise.

Farm structures generally included a barn, a chicken brooder, chicken house, a shed, outhouse and well house. Not all farms had all of the outbuildings. However, all had an outhouse and well house as indoor plumbing was not incorporated into the home designs.

Time limitations allowed only one barn plan to be designed for the Palmer colony. Typical of barns in the upper Great Lakes states, it was 32 feet square with a high gambrel roof and a hooded loft. An open cupola provided venting through the center of the roof ridge. All barns were one and one-half stores high, with the lower floor made of logs. The mid-section or "pony wall" was usually made of board and batten or of vertical planks, while the upper floor was frame, allowing for a pleasant contrast of materials. A large square door provided entry to the hay loft, while double doors provided a ground floor entrance. Fixed glass multi-paned windows were used throughout.

Construction of the Palmer colony was undertaken within a very short time frame, beginning in May of 1935 and completed by December of the same year. All colonists were housed by the end of that period, although not all the home interiors or the outbuildings were finished.

The Cultural Resources Division of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has nominated the central complex of the Palmer colony as an historic district within a larger multiple property listing to the National Register of Historic Places. The associated historic context is the New Deal colony settlement of the Matanuska Valley in Alaska, 1935-1940.

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership runs from January 1 through December 31. Dues are payable by December 31 of preceeding year.

Benefits include subscription to the quarterly AAHP newsletter \* workshops & seminars \* annual meeting \* historic preservation advocacy.

<input type="checkbox"/> Student .....	\$ 10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributor .....	\$ 50.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual .....	\$ 15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend .....	\$ 100.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family .....	\$ 25.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor .....	\$ 250.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit .....	\$ 25.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor .....	\$ 500.00 & above

*(federal, state, and municipal agencies included)*

Donations to AAHP are tax deductible, as allowable under IRS regulations.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed. Also, I would be glad to participate in AAHP activities in the following areas:

- |                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership       | <input type="checkbox"/> Legislation       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education    | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Projects & Issues |

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE w. \_\_\_\_\_ h. \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Please Return To: The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation  
Old City Hall, 524 West fourth Ave., Suite 203  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
Attention: Treasurer

# COMMITTEE UPDATES

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**Education:** The Education Committee has an objective of increasing awareness of preservation on the part of teachers and students. Donna Lane conducted an in-service presentation on preservation issues. Chairman Peg Stout is working to have an exhibit developed by students for display during Preservation Week in May.

**Fund Raising:** The overall goal of the Fund Raising Committee is to raise funds, apart from dues, which are sufficient to support AAHP activities. Committee objectives are to ensure the flow of funds through pull-tab revenues, private sector contributions and grants, public sector grants and fund raising events. The Committee will be actively working on furthering its goals and objectives during the month of March.

**Legislation:** The primary goal of the Legislation Committee is to support the State matching grants for historic preservation program. The Committee has written to Governor Hickel, Commissioner Harold Heinze and several legislators on this subject.

**Membership:** The Membership Committee is currently working to expand membership in AAHP by contacting members of affinity groups. This newsletter will be mailed to National Trust for Historic Preservation members as part of an AAHP membership solicitation.

**Nominating:** The Nominating Committee has been actively working on formation of an AAHP board of advisors. It has solicited input from Board members on the composition of that group and is in the process of contacting potential members.

**Projects and Issues:** The two main goals of the Projects and Issues Committee are to develop a list of "endangered" Alaska historic structures and to identify specific projects where AAHP may be able to lend assistance. The committee plans to list Alaska's ten most endangered structures in the May AAHP newsletter.

**Public Relations:** The Public Relations Committee is making progress on its 1991 objectives. These are publication of a brochure, at least four press releases and two feature newspaper articles. Commercial artist Bill Devine has agreed to donate his time toward developing a logo for AAHP.

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## AAHP'S STANDING GOALS

1. To promote communication between the general public and AAHP in support of historic preservation in Alaska, and develop a network of preservation supporters.
2. To educate and inform the public about historic preservation through a quarterly newsletter, workshops and other means.
3. To initiate, monitor and support legislation to promote historic preservation in Alaska.
4. To provide assistance to local and Statewide historic preservation projects.
5. To serve as liaison between local, Statewide and national historic preservation groups.
6. To establish an endowment to support historic preservation in Alaska.

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Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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