

# THE ALASKA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Old City Hall, 524 West Fourth Avenue, Suite 203, Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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## AAHP'S TEN MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PROPERTIES LIST, 1994

by Bonnie S. Houston

Each year during Preservation Week, AAHP publishes a list of what it considers to be Alaska's ten most endangered historic properties. The list is compiled from nominations of endangered properties submitted by concerned citizens, historical societies and other groups from throughout the State. Its main purpose is to increase public awareness of Alaska's heritage and to encourage participation in the preservation of our unique historic resources.

AAHP's "ten most endangered" list changes each year as properties are successfully rehabilitated, cease to have significant historic value, or as other endangered properties are identified. For example, the Eagle Historic District is no longer considered to be in imminent danger. The U. S. Soil Conservation Service is slated to begin construction of a steel sheet pile wall along the Yukon River bank in front of town this summer and hopes to complete the project by October 1994. Although several historic buildings have already had to be moved, the prevention of further erosion will help save the historic landscape and possible archeological resources.

Three other historic properties on AAHP's "ten most endangered" list in 1993 are also not included this year. The future of Old City Hall in Anchorage and the Lacey Street Theater in Fairbanks is still uncertain and work needs to continue at the local level to ensure their preservation. On a brighter note, the City of Dillingham is utilizing a Certified Local Government grant to prepare a National Register nomination for the Carlson Home and Fisherman's Co-Op.

The following properties, described in alphabetical order, were selected for AAHP's 1994 "ten most endangered" list. They represent a diverse range of significant historic structures across the State which are threatened by neglect and/or development.

### Ascension of Our Lord Chapel, Karluk

First featured on the AAHP's "ten most endangered" list in 1993, the future of the Ascension of Our Lord Chapel in Karluk remains in question. The chapel was constructed in 1888 and is the oldest Russian Orthodox church in Alaska still in use. It was built from materials supplied by the Karluk Packing Company, reportedly after a local Alaska Native named Melety requested that a church be built for him rather than a house. The design and construction of the chapel are attributed to Charles Smith Hursh. A stenciled plaque inside the chapel reads: "Melety's Memorial Church, Built in 11 June 1888, by Charlie Smith Hursh, Karluk, Alaska."

Today, the Ascension of Our Lord Chapel is considered one of the most professionally designed Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska. Its architecture illustrates a blend of traditional elements of Russian Orthodox church and Greek Revival design. The chapel has a spectacular site on a bluff overlooking the Karluk River, but it is now

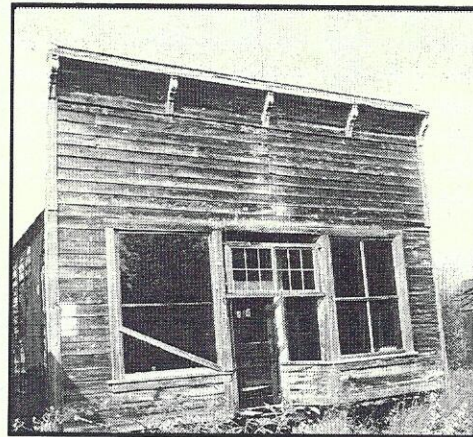


Photo: Rolfe Buzzell

Turner & Wood General Store, Flat, 1993

isolated from the village. The canneries closed in the 1930's and a severe storm in 1978 resulted in relocation of the village upriver about three-quarters of a mile.

Karluk has not had a resident priest for many years, but services are periodically held here by a visiting priest from Kodiak. As reported by AAHP in 1993, the chapel is deteriorating badly through a combination of age and neglect. The roof leaks and the structure is beginning to twist off its pilings. Some water damage has been done to the interior, although the altar and the icons remain unharmed.

Local residents continue to be interested in repairing and renovating the chapel. They would like to replace the present steel roof with wooden shingles and return the structure to its original appearance.

### Building 29, Sitka

Building 29 appears on AAHP's "ten most endangered list for the fourth time. It is one of only four known structures in North America remaining from the Russian colonial period and is the sole Russian-American Company building still standing in Sitka. The three-story log building was constructed in the 1850s to house Russian-American Company employees and was later enlarged twice, once shortly after it was built and again in the 1880s. A storefront window and entrance were installed during the 1960s. Over the years, the building has mainly been used for commercial retail space on the ground floor, with apartments above.

A 1991 Historic American Buildings Survey of Building 29 determined that at least sixty percent of the original structure remains within the walls of the present building. According to "Buildings of Alaska," large brick bake ovens are still in the basement.

Deterioration, age, and a possible change in ownership currently threaten the future of Building 29. Since 1990, it has been listed among the Priority I National Historic Landmarks (those in immediate danger of losing their historic integrity) in the National Park Service's annual report to Congress. In an effort to save the building, the Alaska Regional Director of the Park Service recently signed a memorandum authorizing the creation of a taskforce to explore preservation alternatives and a report outlining those alternatives is due January 1, 1995. However, increased local grass roots support for the preservation of Building 29 is also needed.

**Chief Kashakes House, Saxman**

Chief Kashakes House is featured on AAHP's "ten most endangered" list for the third time. This clan house is located in Saxman, on the Tongass Highway outside Ketchikan. It was constructed in 1895 and illustrates the Tlingit adaptation of balloon framing. Two totem poles and a cannon are also on the property.

Chief Kashakes House has stood empty for a number of years and is now in urgent need of restoration. The interior and the roof were also damaged by a small fire.

The owners of Chief Kashakes House are very interested in preserving this building, but lack the necessary financial resources. Partly as a result of the building's "ten most endangered" status, it was listed on the National Register of Historic places in 1993. This summer, a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) crew may document the clan house. If this work is undertaken, the drawings and photographs will provide a valuable record of the structure and the construction techniques employed. In addition, the Cape Fox Corporation, an ANCSA corporation with Saxman shareholders, has recently expressed interest in the restoration of this structure.

**Chitina Cash Store, Chitina**

The Chitina townsite was laid out in 1906, but the town did not grow until 1910 when it was connected to the Copper River and Northwestern Railway. In its heyday, the community had as many as five hotels and a busy commercial area, but it almost became a ghost town when the Copper River and Northwestern Railway closed down in 1938. The Chitina Cash Store was constructed in 1911-12 and is believed to be the oldest commercial building in Chitina which is still standing. It is included this year for the first time on AAHP's "ten most endangered" list.

The Chitina Cash Store is a two section, two level wood frame structure, approximately 100 feet by 60 feet in dimension. It was a general store which supplied everything from foodstuffs and clothing to medical supplies.

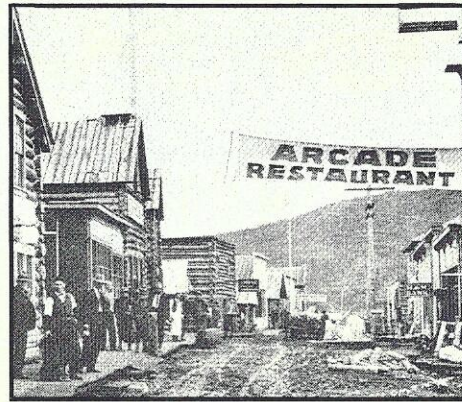
Renovations to the Chitina Cash Store were undertaken in 1963. However, the false front on the main section of the store was removed in 1964 following damage sustained in a severe wind storm. The building is now in dire need of repair. A new foundation is urgently needed as timbers underneath the structure are rotting and a portion of the interior floor has already collapsed. The roof also needs to be repaired. Several sheets of roof metal are missing, exposing portions of the interior to the elements. In addition, vandals have shot holes in the front glass of the store.

Usable portions of the building currently serve as storage for the Lighthouse Mission. If monies are available, the community of Chitina and the present owner are interested in restoring the structure, including replacing its original false front. Possible new uses for the building are a local museum and/or shops.

**Creamer's Dairy, Fairbanks**

Creamer's Dairy is on AAHP's "Ten Most Endangered" list for the first time in 1994. Located on College Road, it was the last pioneer dairy farm in the Interior. The farm was originally established by Charles Hinckley in 1903. It was subsequently sold in 1927 to Hinckley's brother-in-law, Charles Creamer, who operated it until his wife's death in 1965. The farm fields were acquired by the State in 1969 as a waterfowl sanctuary. The entire property was acquired by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 1981.

Several buildings are associated with the Creamer's Dairy property. They include the former Creamer residence, a caretaker's house, a bunkhouse and potato storage shed, a processing building and



*Flat City, 1912*

office and a barn complex. Two of the three barns are considered to be endangered. The oldest of the three barns is the former calf barn, framed with logs in the loft and featuring a wood loft floor, sheet metal gable roof and weathered board siding. The gambrel roofed Louden barn on the west side was built in 1937 and the original multi-lite single sash windows, shiplap siding and three distinctive ventilators remain. A similar but slightly smaller gambrel roofed Louden barn lies to the east.

Creamer's Dairy was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. However, the two Louden barns are currently threatened by structural deterioration. Although the farm house has been remodeled for meeting and office space, no capital funds have been spent on restoring or interpreting the remainder of the site. Record breaking snowfalls in 1990 and 1992 caused roof trusses in the two Louden barns to fail and emergency repairs were needed to stabilize the roof systems. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has completed a master plan which calls for the restoration and interpretation of the dairy buildings. However, until funds are appropriated to implement this plan, the barns are in danger of being lost due to structural problems.

**Flat City Historic District**

The Flat City historic district is featured on AAHP's "ten most endangered" list for the first time. This 90-acre historic district includes 80 commercial, industrial and residential buildings, plus 4 structures and 21 sites, associated with gold mining activities in the

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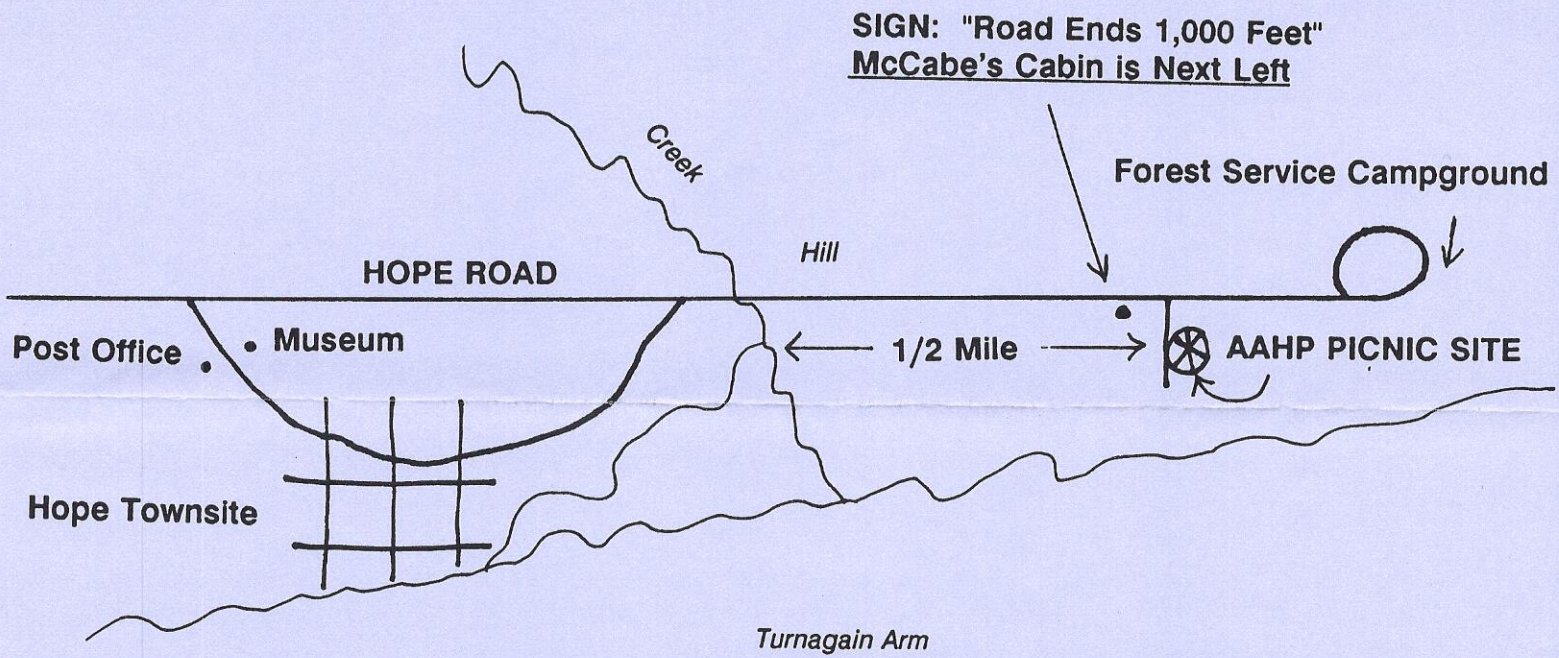
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The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation (AAHP) was founded in 1981 as a private, statewide, non-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation of Alaska's prehistoric and historic resources through education, promotion and advocacy. Preservation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

**DIRECTIONS TO AAHP PICNIC, SATURDAY, JUNE 18**



**DISTANCE FROM ANCHORAGE TO HOPE: ABOUT 75 MILES**



area between 1909 and 1940. It is the largest remaining concentration of extant gold rush era buildings and structures associated with the Iditarod National Historic Trail.

In 1908, gold was discovered on Otter Creek and Flat was founded in the rush that followed. The mining camp soon became the largest population and supply center in the district, surpassing nearby Iditarod by the 1920s. However, the town was never platted and was instead built on active mining claims. Over the years, most buildings and structures have been moved two to three times as miners worked the gold-bearing gravels under town.

Today, the Flat City historic district is threatened by a lack of maintenance and neglect, the elements, vandalism and uncertainties associated with land ownership. Because the town is on unpatented mining claims on federal land, people have been reluctant to expend funds on building maintenance. The future of gold mining in the area is uncertain and difficulties associated with land status are a major obstacle to the development of new economic activities in the area, particularly tourism. Given the very limited available government funds, private sector monies will be needed to stabilize and restore the historic buildings in Flat.

**Holy Ascension Orthodox Church, Unalaska**

This is the fourth year that Unalaska's Holy Ascension Orthodox Church has been included on AAHP's "ten most endangered" list. The wood frame church was built in 1895 and is an excellent example of the cruciform architectural plan frequently used in Russian Orthodox Church design. The church is significant for its architecture and for its association with Ivan Veniaminov (St. Innocent), the first Russian Orthodox bishop of Alaska, who was canonized in 1977.

Funding to restore this National Historic Landmark will come from a number of sources ranging from the private sector to the Aleut Relocation settlement. In the immediate future, assistance will be provided through ISTEAF funds from the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Unalaska has set a precedent for

other communities for follow in the grass roots effort to raise money for restoration. Hopefully by this time next year the structure will be restored and a well funded maintenance program will be in place.

**Jesse Lee Home, Seward**

Listed for the second year as among Alaska's "ten most endangered" structures, the Jesse Lee Home in Seward was opened in 1925 by the Women's Home Missionary Society to replace the original orphanage located in Unalaska and a children's home in Nome. Over the years it housed children from all over the State. Probably the best known ward of the institution was Benny Benson who won the Alaska flag design competition when he was only 13. The buildings were severely damaged in the 1964 earthquake and one, Goode Hall, had to be demolished. Largely as a result, the orphanage was subsequently moved to Anchorage.

The Jesse Lee Home has been vacant for a number of years and is now threatened by a combination of neglect and structural deterioration. All of the windows have been removed, exposing the building to the elements. The City of Seward received a Certified Local Government grant to have a National Register nomination written for the property, but no significant change in the Jesse Lee Home's status has occurred during the past year.

**MEMBERSHIP REMINDER  
DID YOU FORGET TO RENEW?**

Please check your mailing label. If there is not a "94" after your name, it means that you have not yet paid your 1994 dues. Prompt payment would be appreciated. AAHP relies heavily on membership dues to carry out its functions, including publication of this newsletter. Thank you.

**MEMBERSHIP**

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

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

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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:

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

### Old Main School, Fairbanks

The Old Main School in Fairbanks was first included on AAHP's "ten most endangered" list in 1992. After a hiatus of one year, it is again listed among Alaska's most endangered properties. The two-story concrete art deco structure was constructed in 1933-34, with later additions in 1939 and 1948. It consists of a central section plus north and south wings and has an operable basement. Each window bay is divided by concrete piers which rise above the roofline. At the time the building was constructed, it was considered the most modern school in the Territory and it is still an imposing structure. It was used as a school until 1976.

Today, the future of Old Main School remains uncertain. The structure does not meet current building code requirements and major roof repairs, estimated to cost in the vicinity of \$250,000, are needed. The building was left unheated during the winter of 1993/94, resulting in the heaving of a non-structural portion of the concrete basement floor and in water damage which caused some buckling of the gymnasium floor.

The City of Fairbanks is the owner of Old Main School and is considering a proposal by a local realtor to lease the building and turn it into a medical clinic. The realtor is currently undertaking a study of the economic feasibility of this project.

### St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Nome

Included on AAHP's "ten most endangered" list for the fourth successive year, St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Nome may soon be a preservation success story. Constructed in 1901, the building is important both for its Gothic style architecture and its association with Bellarmine Lafortune.

St. Joseph's remained in use until a new structure was constructed

in 1945. The old church building was sold to U.S. Smelting, Refining and Mining Company, now the Alaska Gold Company, and moved to its current location in 1946. The steeple was removed and the building has been used as a warehouse.

During the past year, the Alaska Gold Company has agreed to donate St. Joseph's Church to the City of Nome. A rehabilitation feasibility study funded by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and an economic feasibility study funded by the University of Alaska's Center for Economic Development determined that the church's relocation and rehabilitation were feasible, both from a structural and an economic standpoint. The City of Nome plans to move the building to the end of Seppala Street, where the steeple will be reconstructed and the structure rehabilitated. When the structure has been restored, it may be used as a visitor center and performing arts center.

### AAHP ANNUAL PICNIC UPDATE

PLEASE NOTE: The date of AAHP's 1994 picnic at Hope has been changed to Saturday, June 18. The picnic is scheduled to get underway at 12:30 pm with a barbecue at the McCabe's cabin. AAHP will provide hamburgers, hot dogs, all the "fixings" and soft drinks. Visitors are asked to bring salads, desserts or cookies. At 3 pm, an historic tour of Hope is scheduled to get underway, beginning at the new museum. A short AAHP board meeting will also be held. It promises to be an interesting and enjoyable day. All AAHP members, their friends and families are welcome. The enclosed sketch map gives directions to the McCabe's cabin. See you there.

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