

THE ALASKA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

200 West 34th Avenue #1184, Anchorage, Alaska 99503

JANUARY 2000

VOL. 19, ISSUE 1

ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD IN ANCHORAGE ON JANUARY 29th

Come one, come all to our annual meeting! After visiting historical sites in Wasilla and Palmer in recent years, our organization will be holding its annual meeting in Anchorage. The festivities will take place on Saturday, January 29th, beginning at 1:00 p.m.; the meeting will be held at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, located at the corner of 7th and A Streets in downtown Anchorage.

A highlight of this year's meeting will be a specially catered free lunch, served by the Marx Brothers. (So who says there's no free lunch?) Food, however, will be available only to the first thirty AAHP members who show up, so **don't be late** to this event.

In addition to presentations by various board members outlining AAHP's progress during the past year, several outside speakers will be featured. Janet Clemens, a National Park Service historian, will provide highlights of a recently completed history of Katmai National Park, and Andrew Patrick will bring us up to date on the history of a nationally significant naval base located just outside Kodiak. The final program, still in its formative stages, may spotlight other speakers as well.

We're looking forward to seeing you there!

AAHP MARCHES INTO THE FUTURE - AN UPDATE ON THE STATEWIDES INITIATIVE

As we reported to you last April, the National Trust for Historic Preservation accepted our organization's application to the Statewides Initiative program. Since then, our Board of Directors has been hard at work taking steps toward becoming fully involved with the program, and in recent actions, board members have accepted the terms of a "joint expectations agreement" which outlines the actions that both AAHP and NTHP promise to take in pursuit of becoming a larger, more active organization.

AAHP, as many of you know, was formed in 1981, and ever since that time it has been Alaska's only statewide preservation organization. Through most of our organization's history, we have been small, poorly funded, and centered around Anchorage. But in the last three or four years, we have taken great strides toward becoming a better-funded, truly statewide organization. Today, our finances are in better shape than they have ever been; we carry on programs (such as the Ten Endangered Properties Program and the Preservation Grant Program) that were unknown just a few years ago; and we now teleconference our meetings so that members around the state can be just as vitally involved as those in Anchorage and vicinity. But we still have no paid staff or other programs common to preservation programs in many other states. We think that we can do better, and the National Trust's Statewides Initiative program can help by providing both technical and financial assistance.

This program will be a major focus of activity by our organization during the next several months. If YOU would like to share in the excitement and help our organization grow in the future, please attend our annual meeting and consider joining AAHP's board of directors. We look forward to hearing from you!

OLD KNIK TOWNSITE EXCAVATIONS 1998 - 1999

by Fran Seager-Boss

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Cultural Resources Division has received a number of grants to conduct test excavations at the former Gold Rush townsite of Knik, located at Mile 13.5 off Knik-Goose Bay road. (Knik was a gateway to the Susitna Valley and the Alaska Interior between the 1890s and World War I.) Work has been carried out at the site for the last two summers, and it is anticipated that work will continue in the summer of 2000. The excavations have been very productive and in some instances have supplied field crews with more questions than answers. Excavation crews working in and around the old townsite have been comprised of local volunteers, in addition to anthropology instructors and students from the Anchorage and Mat-Su campuses of the University of Anchorage.

In 1998, excavations encompassed a portion of the site identified by Stanley Herring (a former Knik resident) as an area occupied by bachelor miners and by families. Our testing revealed numerous artifacts attributable to single miners. Excavations included the remains of a house that had burned to the ground. In its cellar (or perhaps in its crawl space), a collapsed shelf full of cans and bottles was found. A number of cans had fallen and exploded onto the earthen floor. Among the rusted can goods, several tobacco cans and medicine bottles were recovered. The bottles dated to the gold rush era. A large can with a wire handle still had some of its original label; the can contained cooking fat, a blend of beef fat and cottonseed oil manufactured by "JEWEL." The fat was certified by "Congress June 30, 1900."

A diagram made by the on-site archeologists shows that the collapsed shelf was broken either by the calved-in floor above or from roof timbers. A large crate or kitchen counter was located having at one time supported a group of nesting pans and numerous canned goods. All but the last three or four inches of this crate or counter was burned, located approximately 3 feet below surface (*see photo*).



Archeologists study evidence from the Old Knik site west of Wasilla.

Other areas of the site included several randomly arranged, shallow depressions which may indicate the former locations of small cabins or walled tent sites. Although these depressions yielded little information, the adjacent middens (or garbage dumps) proved rich in information, revealing that the occupants used very utilitarian ware. (Archaeologists generally get most of their information on former occupants of a site from their middens and butchering areas.) No fine china and very little crockery was unearthed. Most of the goods included enamelware pots, pans, bowls and utensils. Liquor and non-alcoholic bottles, tobacco products and medicine bottles were numerous. Medicinal bottles, both whole and in fragments, included five bottles of "Halls Catarrh Cure," "Three in One Oil Cure,"

"Listerine;" "Lambert Pharmacal Company;" "Schloss Export;" "Acivita;" "The German Doctor;" "J. A. Bauchaman MD, Seward Alaska;" and Davis Painkiller." Other health related items and indulgences included six toothbrushes (there were two dentists in town), two Colgate shaving sticks, "Ingrams Milkweed Cream" and "Pompeian Massage Cream." Apart from bottles and jars associated with food products, numerous nails, wire, and barrel hoops were located. Of particular interest was the recovery of parts of seventeen crucibles and several cuplets, equipment that a gold assayer would most appropriately use.

In 1999, excavations encompassed a separate area, one that was probably used by native Dena'ina residents. The 1998 site location was also revisited for further testing. No report has yet emerged from the 1999 test excavations; stay tuned for details of last season's work.

MAJOR INCREASE in Alaska Preservation Funding Possible – IF YOU CAN HELP!!!

We preservationists have a major opportunity—IF WE ACT in the next few weeks—to have Congress provide a huge funding increase for historic preservation activities. All we ask is that you CONTACT SENATORS MURKOWSKI AND STEVENS and urge their support for preservation funding.

Here are the details. For many years, Federal historic preservation funding (along with the land purchases financed through the Land and Water Conservation Fund) were financed by Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) leasing revenues. That funding source, however, recently expired, and preservation funding has thus suffered.

But last November, Alaska Representative Don Young (chair of the House Resources Committee) worked out a landmark agreement with Rep. George Miller (minority head of the same committee) that would, in effect, re-attach historic funding (to the tune of \$150 million annually) to the OCS revenues. That agreement is included House bill H.R. 701, and we offer **many thanks** to Congressman Young for his courageous stand on this issue.

In the Senate, however, the picture is less than rosy. The current bill, S. 25, does not link preservation funding to OCS revenues, and both Sen. Frank Murkowski and Sen. Ted Stevens have frankly stated that getting historic preservation funding in the final Senate bill will be an uphill battle. Support from Alaskan preservationists—small though our numbers may be—is **particularly crucial to the success of the entire bill** because Sen. Murkowski chairs the Senate Resources Committee (where the bill is being considered) and Sen. Stevens chairs the all-important Senate Appropriations Committee. Both of our senators need to hear from ALL Alaska preservationists—via letters, telephone calls, or emails—that **S. 25 should be amended to include \$150 annually in historic preservation funding.**

Our senators can be contacted in the following ways:

Senator Frank Murkowski
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-6665
fax (202) 224-5301
email: Senator_Murkowski@murkowski.senate.gov

Senator Ted Stevens
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3004
fax (202) 224-2354
Senator_Stevens@Stevens.senate.gov

JOIN US AND PRESERVE ALASKA'S HISTORY!

Membership runs from January 1 through December 31. Benefits include...

- * the quarterly AAHP newsletter
- * annual meeting
- * workshops and seminars
- * historic preservation advocacy

___ Student	\$10	___ Contributor	\$50
___ Individual	\$15	___ Friend	\$100
___ Family	\$25	___ Sponsor	\$250
___ Non-Profit.....	\$25	___ Benefactor	\$500

Donations to AAHP are tax deductible as allowed under IRS regulations.

If you have one, what is your **email address**? _____

I/we would also like to make a tax-deductible gift of \$ _____ to the AAHP Top Ten Most Endangered Buildings preservation matching grant account.

Check enclosed for \$ _____. WE THANK YOU!

Please return to: The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation, 645 West Third Ave., Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2124

SPOTLIGHTING ALASKA'S LONGEST BRIDGE

by Matthew Reckard

Alaska's longest bridge span is the Tanana River railroad crossing at Nenana. Built in 1922-23 and now known as the Mears Memorial Bridge, it is surely one of Alaska's most underappreciated historical resources. Like Rodney Dangerfield, it gets no respect. Although it deserves to be a National Historical Landmark, it isn't even listed on the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey list. Happily, it still serves its original purpose well and should be with us for years to come.

The bridge's namesake, Frederick Mears, was chairman and chief engineer of the Alaska Engineering Commission, the railroad's builder and original operator. Construction of a rail line by a federal agency (the AEC) is rare in American history. Public ownership, however, was demanded because private railroad construction efforts had failed; in addition, it was a response to early 20th century Americans' distrust of monopolistic industrial trusts in general, and Alaskans' fear of the Guggenheim-led "Alaska Syndicate" in particular. The railroad played key roles in reviving Interior mining in the 1920s, in Alaska's World War II efforts, and in construction of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline. Today, the overwhelming majority of Alaskans live along the Railbelt.

The Mears Bridge was the final and crowning link in the railroad. The first train rumbled across the bridge in February 1923, a year after the rest of the 470-mile line was finished. The AEC designed and built nearly the entire railroad with its own forces, but not the Tanana River crossing. Instead, they hired the Chicago firm of Modjeski and Angier to design the bridge, and the American Bridge Co. (the world's foremost bridge builders) to construct the span. The 700-foot long Pennsylvania through truss is said to have been the longest truss span in the U.S. when it was completed. It is still the third longest simple truss in North America and the longest span of any kind in Alaska. (The second longest Alaska span, 620 feet long, is the main span of the Gastineau Channel Bridge between Juneau and Douglas.)

President Warren G. Harding came to Alaska in July 1923, and as part of that trip he drove the ceremonial golden spike at the bridge's north end. With him were three members of his cabinet (including Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover) and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. It was one of Harding's last public appearances, because he died just two weeks later on his way back to Washington.

Visit this remarkable bridge when you get the chance. There's a good view of it from the highway bridge at Nenana, but from that vantage point there's little to lend scale to what you see. To really appreciate it, go through town and follow the riverbank upstream. You can easily drive a car up to the bridge's south pier. You won't regret it!

PRESERVATION TIDBITS – BRIEF BUT IMPORTANT!

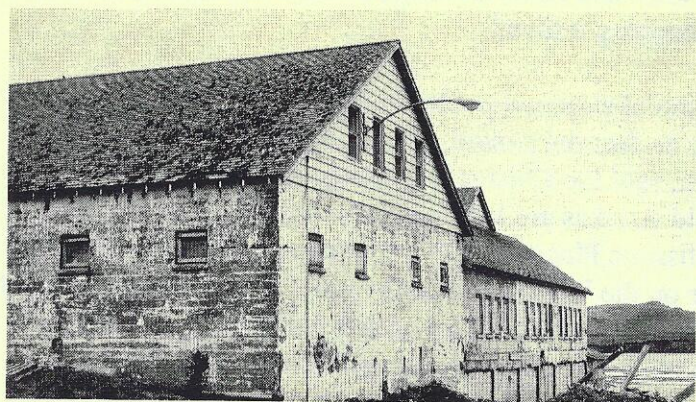
Please note that AAHP's address has CHANGED. The new address is 200 West 34th Avenue #1184, Anchorage, Alaska 99503. Please use this address for membership renewals and for all correspondence.

AAHP president Julie Johnson, who has been employed as the executive director of Anchorage Historic Properties, Inc. since 1993, has resigned her position and is now a historical consultant working for the National Park Service.

Good news! Alaska preservationists gained a major victory in last fall's Congressional funding package when Senate and House bills agreed to fund a full-scale (\$1.5 million) renovation of Sitka's Allen Auditorium, the 1911-era structure that is the centerpiece of the Sheldon Jackson College campus. Many thanks should be extended to Alaska's Congressional delegation and to all of those, both in Sitka and elsewhere in Alaska, who fought to save this important historical structure.

ST. GEORGE SEALING PLANT RESTORATION COMPLETED

The restoration of the St. George Island Sealing Plant, located on the smaller of the two major Pribilof Islands, was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. Restoration of the building began in September 1998 through funding provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the agency that owns the property. The St. George Tanaq Corporation performed the work, and local labor was utilized throughout the restoration process. The restoration consisted of repairing or replacing foundations; reconstructing various window sashes to match the originals; an electrolysis treatment of the concrete floor in order to remove harmful chloride from the concrete; removal of harmful lead paint, followed by repainting the building; drilling out deteriorated reinforcing and patching; installing an all-new electrical system; and installing a new wood shingle roof. Back in 1995, AAHP included the sealing plant on its Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties list. Our September 1998 newsletter contains additional information about the plant.



The St. George Sealing Plant as it looked before restoration commenced (*left*) and after it was completed (*right*).

AAHP BOARD OF DIRECTORS, 2000

Executive Director – Russ Sackett

President – Julie Johnson

Vice-President – Sean Boily

Treasurer – Steve Peterson

Secretary – Fran Seager-Boss

Editor – Frank Norris

Other Board Members: Chuck Hawley, Bill Coghill, Darrel Lewis, Grace Pleasants, Torgeir Robertson, and Matthew Reckard.

Membership News ... A membership renewal letter was mailed to all of you last November, and since then we have been gratified to receive more than 150 responses. THANK YOU! Membership remains our largest single source of revenue. We encourage **all of you** who do not have a “00” after your name on the label to either join or renew for calendar year 2000.

News from Alaska’s Great Interior ... The most recent (November 1999) issue of the Tanana-Yukon Historical Society newsletter notes that the David R. Maddocks House (1904), which has been deeded to the Fairbanks Historic Preservation Commission, is threatened with condemnation by the City of Fairbanks. The society notes that “it is one of the most important remaining samples of early Fairbanks” and is vowing to fight its demolition.

The fate of another early Fairbanks building, unfortunately, has already been decided. In October, a cabin located on 7th Avenue near Cushing Street was lost to the demolition crews. The cabin, built in 1906 and occupied by Edward and Marie Clark for many years, was razed in order to allow additional parking to a nearby church. The society poignantly notes that “quaint cabin structures, our visual reminders of historical Fairbanks, will disappear one by one without concerted effort to find a place for them in the modernization of Fairbanks.” reservationists throughout our state might well pay heed to this same message. As songwriter Joni Mitchell noted so poignantly in 1969, “Don’t it always seem to go that you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone?”

BLAZE PLUNDERS CHISTOCHINA LODGE

by Don Hunter

excerpted from the *Anchorage Daily News*, November 10, 1999

The Chistochina Lodge, one of a fading chain of roadhouses that linked Alaska when prospectors trekked the backcountry by horse and sled dog and on foot, burned to the ground early yesterday morning.

Michael Orazio, the volunteer fire chief in the Copper River community, said smoke alarms went off shortly after lodge owner Holly Clark closed about midnight and retired to her adjoining living quarters. "When she stepped out of her quarters, it was already filled with smoke, so it took off pretty quick," said Orazio, who speculated faulty wiring may have started the blaze. Clark ran to a neighbor's house and called for help. About 10 to 15 firefighters fought the blaze with chemical extinguishers and, for a time, a garden hose hooked to the lodge's water supply. "We thought we had it knocked down," said Ernie Charley, another firefighter, but it got in the ceiling and took off right after that. There was no stopping it then."

The building dated to the early years of the century. The initial structure probably was built sometime between 1903 and 1915, and was added to and moved at least once as decades passed, according to several historical records. Geoff Bleakley, a National Park Service historian, said the Chistochina Lodge and a number of others built to provide lodging for prospectors and travelers in old Alaskas are losing out to winter fires every year. The Chistochina was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. "They were established a day's travel apart, originally on the Valdez-Eagle trail, and later on the Valdez-Fairbanks trail," Bleakley said. "Most of the traffic was on foot, or was with horses pulling sleds. There wasn't a lot of dog traffic early on. So they established these roadhouses, and they became sort of the nuclei around which communities have developed."

Chistochina is on the section of the Glenn Highway known as the Tok Cutoff. About 50 people live there year round. Orazio said most of them turned out to help Tuesday night, with about 10 or 12 people involved in the firefighting. Their efforts were hampered because the Chistochina fire department doesn't have much equipment. "Up here, you're pretty much helpless if you get a fire in the winter," Charley said.

Orazio said the Chistochina firefighters managed to buy a firetruck about a year and a half ago but hasn't been able to raise enough money to build a fire house to keep it in. That means the truck is useless when the temperature drops well below zero, as they do in Chistochina pretty much all winter long. Last night, it was 10 to 15 below. The closest department with a truck in a heated garage is Glennallen, about 50 miles away. "By the time they got here, the truck would have been frozen anyway," he said. Without a firetruck, firefighters used hand-held extinguishers and a couple of large extinguishers mounted on dollies to try to control the lodge fire, Orazio said. "Last night, I had a couple of hoses here at the house and we were able to use water from the lodge as long as we could, but it just wasn't enough," he said. "If we'd had a fire hall and truck, I know we could have saved it."

Alaska State Troopers decided the building was too far gone to save around 2:30 a.m., Orazio said. The roof fell in about 4 a.m. Troopers said a cash box and office files were saved, but little else. Damage was estimated at \$350,000. Clark and her husband, Rick, have owned the lodge for about a year, Orazio said. He was in Anchorage when the fire occurred and returned shortly after the fire.

Orazio said the loss of the lodge will be a blow to the community. "Before we had satellite dishes and what have you, that was the popular place for people to meet and watch movies. It was a place for kids to go. It had a pretty big impact on the community all through the years." The log building had grown over the years to include an upstairs bunkhouse with 15 or 16 beds, as well as six or seven rooms for rent, Orazio said. "When you walked into the lodge, there was a dining area, a kitchen, and then a bar with a pool table and a large screen TV," he said. "There's nothing left. It burned every log."

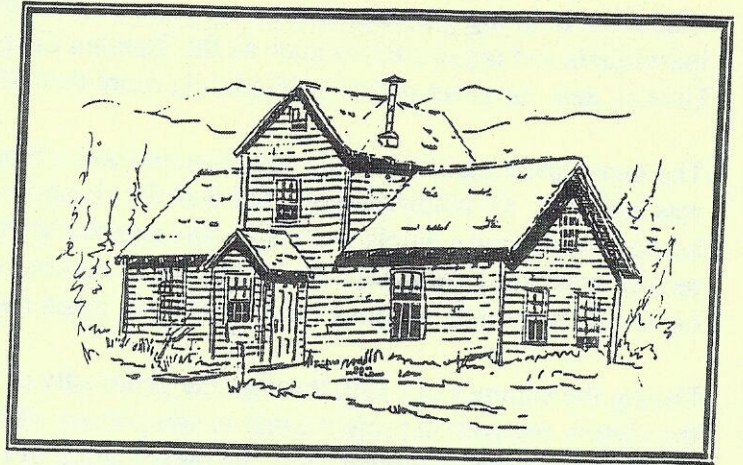
REBIRTH OF A RECTORY

by Dorothy Gray

Several years ago on a visit to the Kenai Peninsula, Father Joseph Kreda, Chancellor of the Alaska Diocese for the Russian Orthodox Church, beheld the priest's house and the "rectory" sign over its door. "That should be spelled W-R-E-C-K-T-O-R-Y," he quipped, noticing the stained, chipped shingles, the homely metal roof, and windows just a foot off the ground due the house's sinking foundation.

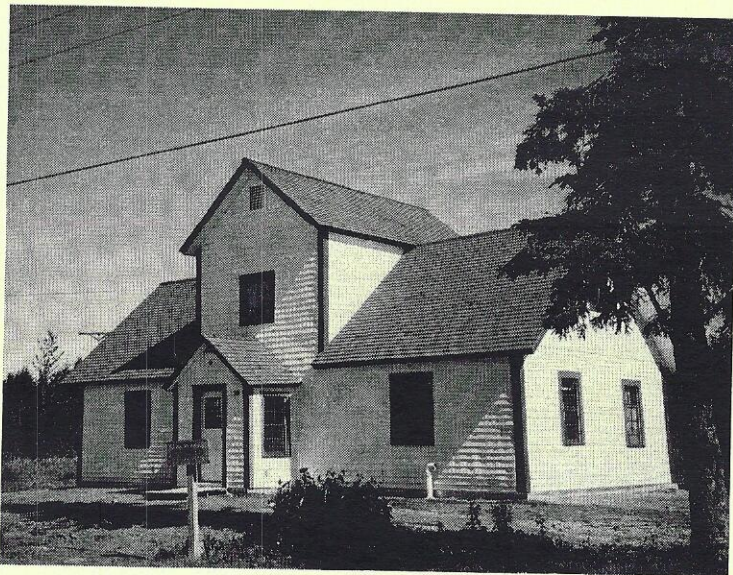
Who would have guessed that in 1996, this building—considered to be the oldest on the Kenai Peninsula—would receive a \$200,000 restoration grant in federal preservation funds? That's exactly what happened as a result of the encouragement the restoration committee received from Alaska's U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, who appealed to the government for help before this historic building would be beyond reclamation.

Constructed in 1881, Kenai's Russian Rectory was one of four new rectories contracted by Bishop Nestor with the Alaska Commercial Company. Architects Mooser and Pissis of San Francisco drew up the plans. Of the four rectories, only the Kenai Rectory and the Bishop's House at Unalaska are still standing today.



A sketch of what the Kenai Rectory looked like prior to its restoration.

The original house consisted of a two-story center section with two one-and-a-half story wings, built like all log cabins in those days on a dirt floor. Even though a cement floor was added several decades later, the years had taken their toll by the early 1990s, and this building—which had been home to all the Russian Orthodox priests of the Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church since that time—was slowly sinking. Hand-hewn redwood logs, joined with square-notch corners, were covered on the exterior by wood shingle siding. Old Russian newspapers and moss chinking were still sticking out in between the exposed logs on both the inside and outside for added insulation.



Another view of the Kenai Rectory, taken in the summer of 1999, shortly after restoration was completed

Thanks to a professional study prepared by National Park Service historical architects Steve Peterson, Katerina Solovjova, and Mary Tidlow in Anchorage, the dream to recapture the historical integrity of this property began with an extremely thorough condition assessment report which provided the details for the contractor in charge, George Nyce of Kenai.

After a careful study by the Alaska Office of History and Archeology, the house was elevated and hydraulically moved so that a new permanent foundation could be laid in place during the summer of 1998. Local log smiths cut and hewed three new logs to replace the rotted ones before the house was replaced on its new foundation. This time, however, rebar pegs replaced the original wooden ones used.

The rectory restoration committee completely stripped the interior, peeling off as many as ten layers of

Rebirth of a Rectory (continued) -

wallpaper to expose the beautiful hand-hewn logs. New painting, six-pane windows, sheetrock, electrical wiring, plumbing, and heating were installed, making the house look much more like a home.

Mary Tidlow stripped the wallpapers down to their original layer and was able to find very similar reproductions of both color and patterns that reflected the 1880s. Carpeting and flooring in neutral tones complemented the wall coverings, and a brand new hardwood floor was laid in the foyer to retain as much of the historical period as possible.

Like most building projects, the rectory restoration needed additional financial assistance. Thanks to many individuals and organizations such as the Tanaina Corporation, CIRI, Salamatoff Native Corporation, Tesoro, Unocal, and our sister parish in Ninilchik, more than \$60,000 was donated to complete this worthy endeavor.

The metal sheeting off the roof was removed and a brand new shake shingle roof painted its original red color was installed. Of historical note: red was the cheapest paint one could buy in the 1800s, thus the reason many houses, barns, and schools were red. The exterior shingles recaptured the original blue trim color, too. The rectory was able to pass into its final phase of completion, and on March 21, 1999, Father Michael Trefon and his family were able to move into their home, again one of the most substantial residences in Old Town Kenai.

During the summer of 1999, through the generosity of many, many individuals over the course of three years, the rectory restoration project came to completion with landscaping and flowerbeds. The rebirth of the rectory has had a significant impact upon the preservation of not only the National Historic Landmark, but also upon the home of Kenai's Russian Orthodox people for more than a hundred years.

Dorothy Gray is an educator and former chair of the Kenai Historic District Board, and she recently served as the project coordinator of the rectory restoration of the National Historic Landmark in Kenai.

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Anchorage, Alaska 99503**

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