

# THE ALASKA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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

FALL 2003

VOL. 22 ISSUE 2

## Hunting Quonsets on the Alaska Highway

By Chris Chiei

*Ed. Note: Chris Chiei wrote this article in August for the Summer 2003 issue of the AAHP newsletter. Articles that were intended for that issue have been incorporated into this expanded Fall 2003 issue.*

This summer I've been conducting the bulk of the traveling research for **QUONSET: The Hut that Shaped Alaska and Sheltered a Nation** — a publication/exhibition project led by the Alaska Design Forum and sponsored in part by the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation. Between July 1 and July 15, I teamed up with a local photographer for a research trip along the entire length of the Alaska Highway. Our goals were to collect contemporary photos and oral histories and to conduct research at the Yukon Archives in Whitehorse.

This was a very different trip for me. In my wandering years, I considered gear to be a small backpack, a sleeping bag, and a change of clothes. On this venture we had two laptop computers, a scanner, a DVD player, professional recording equipment, digital photographic equipment, lighting equipment, two cell phones, and.....yes, a small backpack, a sleeping bag, and a change of clothes.

We loaded up the photographer's van and headed east to Tok. From there we had planned to head south as far as Whitehorse, and then back north — continuing on to Delta Junction and then to Fairbanks for other Quonset research.

On my lap was a brand new *Milepost* — the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. We also had an Alaska Highway audio CD and numerous historic photos from the National Archives. Essentially, we had all the great Alaska Highway facts at our fingertips and in our ears:

- 1,422 miles of highway constructed between Dawson Creek, BC, and Delta Junction, AK (official Alaska Highway terminus).
- An effort that moved ahead at an average rate of 6 miles per day, fording more than 200 waterways and a horizon of mud and mosquitoes.

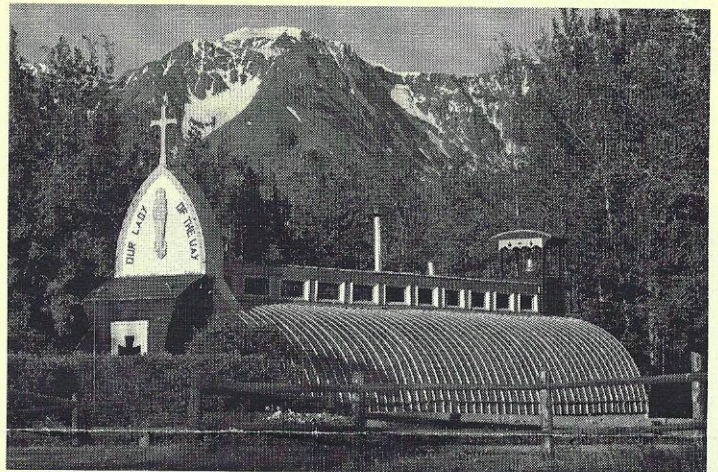


Photo by Clark Mishler

*Our Lady of the Way, Haines Junction, Yukon Territory  
(Modified Butler Hut)*

- Built in 8 months and 12 days in 1942 by more than 15,000 Army troops and civilians.
- A project with a total price tag of more than \$115,000,000 for a supply line deemed critical if Japanese forces stormed the Alaskan mainland.

Since the Alaska Highway was an Army project, I did not anticipate finding many “official” Quonset huts along the way. The Quonset hut was a U.S. Navy building. It was designed for the Navy at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, and was perfected by the Navy and its contractors in four design evolutions. The Army, on the other hand, did not display the same foresight regarding prototypical buildings. Early in the war, they relied on canvas tents with wooden platforms. They later went on to purchase Quonsets from the Navy, but also purchased many related Quonset versions from private manufacturers. We refer to these versions as the Quonset’s “related cousins.”

Along the Alaska Highway, we noted the following “related cousins” still in existence:

	USA	Canada
Butler huts	0	21
Jamesway huts	5	0
Cowin huts	0	4
Portaseal huts	0	3
Pacific huts	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>

We also located the following “official” Quonset huts:

	USA	Canada
T-rib Quonset hut (Type I) 16' x 36'	0	0
Quonset Redesigned (Type II) 16' x 36'	24	2
Stran Steel Quonset (Type III) 20' x 48'	0	0
Quonset Northern/Tropical (Type IV) 20' x 56'	0	0
Quonset Utility hut 40' x 100'	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>3</b>

(The publication and exhibition will comprehensively explain each hut type.)

The most interesting discovery regarding “related cousins” was the adamant perception of these buildings as “Quonsets.” We interviewed numerous owners of “related cousins” along the way. We consistently asked the same questions and consistently got the same answers:

“Have you ever heard of a Quonset hut referred to by another name?”

“No.”

“Have you ever heard of a Butler hut, Portaseal hut, Pacific hut, Jamesway hut, or Cowin hut?”

“No. What do they look like?”

As a researcher, it’s a tenuous moment when you have to decide whether or not to bust any bubbles. In some cases, I sensed such “Quonset” pride that I feared the truth could be grounds for gunfire—so I chose my revelations carefully.

Another interesting discovery was the difference between the U.S. and Canada in regard to hut remnants. In planning this trip, I had anticipated traveling no farther south than Whitehorse—assuming that we would be overwhelmed with huts along the way. Historic photos showed endless rows of these structures at numerous construction camps. I assumed that rural Canadians would share the Alaskan mantra: “Might need it someday – don’t throw it out.” I was very wrong. Either due to the dissolution process of construction camps or some overarching societal perception, Canada has been more or less wiped clean of this sub-chapter of Alaska Highway history. We continued all the way to Dawson Creek to confirm this absence. In 1,221 miles of the Canadian Alaska Highway, we found a total of 31 “Quonsets” and “related cousins” combined—an average of .02 huts per mile. Compare that to the remaining 201 miles of Alaskan Alaska Highway where we found 31 huts—an average of .15 per mile.

All in all, between thunderstorms and mosquito bites, I believe that we documented priceless contemporary photos and oral histories. I am proud of this effort and energized for the final research trips at Dutch Harbor, Barrow and Nome. I look forward to reporting back to you on my progress. I sincerely appreciate AAHP’s support of this project.

Chris Chiei  
Director, Alaska Design Forum

*Ed. Note: Watch for more on Chris Chiei’s “adventures in Quonset hunting” in future issues of the AAHP newsletter.*

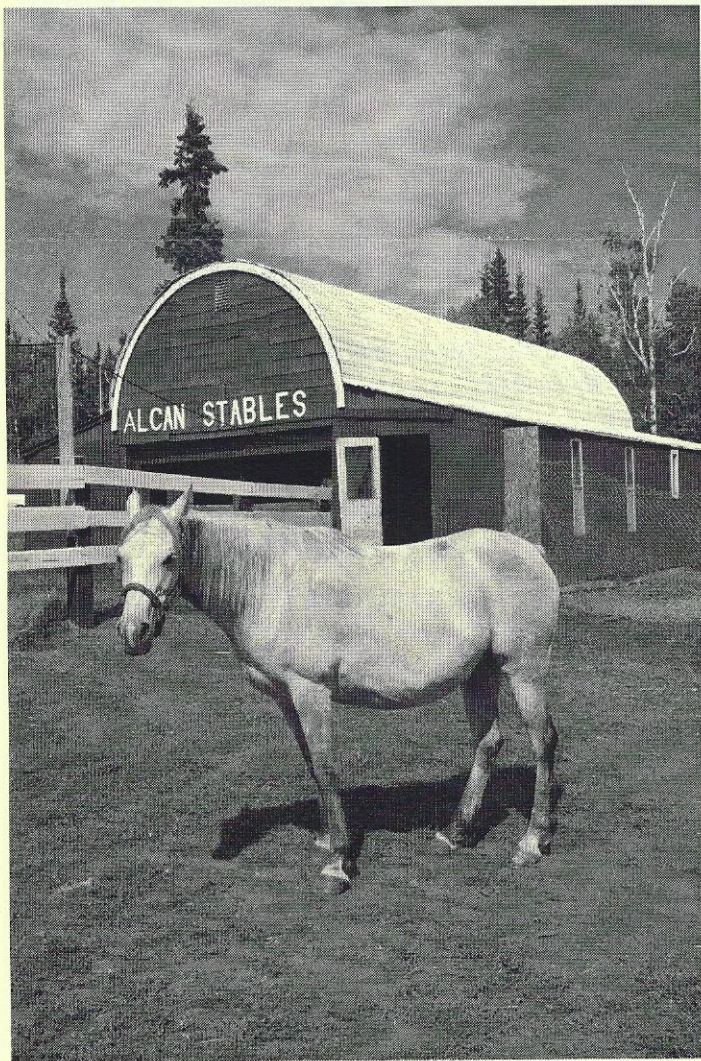


Photo by Clark Mishler

Alcan Stable, Delta Junction  
(Jamesway Hut frame used for barn roof)

# AAHP News

## 2004 Preservation Matching-Grant applications to be mailed soon

The Ten Endangered Properties Preservation Grants program is one of AAHP's key programs in support of historic preservation in Alaska. 2004 is the tenth year for AAHP's Preservation Matching Grants.

Individuals or organizations whose historic properties are on AAHP's 2003 list of Alaska's Ten-Most-Endangered Historic Properties will be eligible to apply for matching grants for preservation projects planned for 2004. Grant application packets will be mailed in January. Completed applications must be returned by March 31, 2004.

No Preservation Matching Grants were awarded in 2003 since no applications were received by the 2003 deadline. It is anticipated that additional funds will be available for the 2004 grant cycle.

If you have questions about the grant program, please call the AAHP office: (907) 929-9870 or email us at: [preservation@gci.net](mailto:preservation@gci.net)

## — Renewal Notice —

This is the last AAHP newsletter for 2003.

Please **RENEW NOW** for 2004!

(There is a membership-renewal form inside back cover.)

Please continue to help AAHP support historic preservation in Alaska.

## Coming soon from AAHP —

### Nomination forms for

### 2004 Endangered Historic Properties

Each year during National Historic Preservation Week, AAHP identifies Alaska's ten most endangered historic properties. The properties on this list are nominated by individuals and historic preservation organizations throughout the state.

AAHP requests your assistance in identifying historic properties that are endangered. Forms for nominating endangered historic properties will be mailed early in 2004.

## Alaska Association for Historic Preservation

Executive Director: Janine D. Dorsey

Mailing Address: 200 W. 34<sup>th</sup> Ave. #1184  
Anchorage, AK 99503

Office Location: 1689 C Street #207  
(Kaloa Building)  
Anchorage

Phone: (907) 929-9870

Fax: (907) 929-9872

E-mail: [preservation@gci.net](mailto:preservation@gci.net)

Website: [www.AlaskaAHP.org](http://www.AlaskaAHP.org)

### Board of Directors

#### Officers:

President..... Fran Seager-Boss

Vice President ..... Yvonne Meyer

Treasurer ..... Rogan C. Faith

Secretary ..... Torgeir Robertson

#### Other Members:

Judith E. Bittner, *Ex Officio*      Sean M. Boily

Sam Combs                              Bruce Noble

Amanda Welsh

## Visit our Web site

AAHP's Web site is now up and running.

[www.AlaskaAHP.org](http://www.AlaskaAHP.org)

Watch for future expansion of the site.

## Apply now for AAHP Board openings

Have you considered serving on AAHP's Board of Directors? Interested individuals are encouraged to apply. A background in accounting would be an asset. Elections will take place at the 2004 Annual Meeting.

Contact the AAHP office:

Phone: (907) 929-9870

Email: [preservation@gci.net](mailto:preservation@gci.net)

# 2003 — The Year in Review

The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation enjoyed an exciting and eventful year in 2003.

## February — AAHP opens new office

In February, AAHP opened a new office and hired Janine Dorsey as part-time executive director. The Annual Meeting took place on February 16 in Anchorage.



The AAHP office is in the Kaloa Building (above), which is located at 1689 C Street in Anchorage.

## May — AAHP announces Ten-Most-Endangered

In May, during National Historic Preservation Week, AAHP announced Alaska's Ten-Most-Endangered Historic Properties for 2003. Photographs of the endangered properties were displayed at Cook Inlet Book Company in Anchorage. The Ten-Most-Endangered list appeared in the spring issue of the AAHP newsletter and in several newspapers around the state.

## June — AAHP's executive director attends PLT

In June, Janine Dorsey took part in Preservation Leadership Training (PLT) in York, PA. PLT is sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



Photo courtesy of the National Trust

AAHP's executive director, Janine Dorsey, (third from left) is pictured with the 2003 Preservation Leadership Training class.

PLT is an intensive, week-long program that trains local preservation leaders, empowers local preservation organizations, creates a national network of local preservation leaders, and—in the host community—heightens understanding and awareness of preservation and presents new ideas for approaching local preservation issues.

PLT participants heard about “best practices” from many nationally recognized experts and worked in groups to create feasible plans for the rehabilitation and reuse of the historic Old York County Prison, which they then presented to the York community.

At PLT Janine learned a great deal from preservation professionals and acquired a wealth of knowledge, experience, resources, and strategies to use in Alaska.

## July — AAHP's executive director attends orientation at National Trust

In July, Janine Dorsey attended an orientation for new executive directors of statewide historic preservation organizations at the National Trust.



Janine Dorsey, second from left, stands in the foyer of the National Trust in Washington, DC, with, from left, Ron Emrich, executive director of Preservation New Jersey; Elisa Cavalier, associate director of Statewide and Local Partnerships at the National Trust; and Allan Lenhardt, executive director of the Louisiana Preservation Alliance.

At the orientation, Janine gathered information about the National Trust's programs and the resources that it provides to statewides, such as AAHP. She also learned about the programs and successes of other statewide historic preservation organizations around the country.

## August — AAHP holds Annual Picnic

(See photographs on next page.)

## November — AAHP establishes Web site

[www.AlaskaAHP.org](http://www.AlaskaAHP.org)

# AAHP's Annual Picnic — 2003

## Brown's Point Park on Government Hill in Anchorage

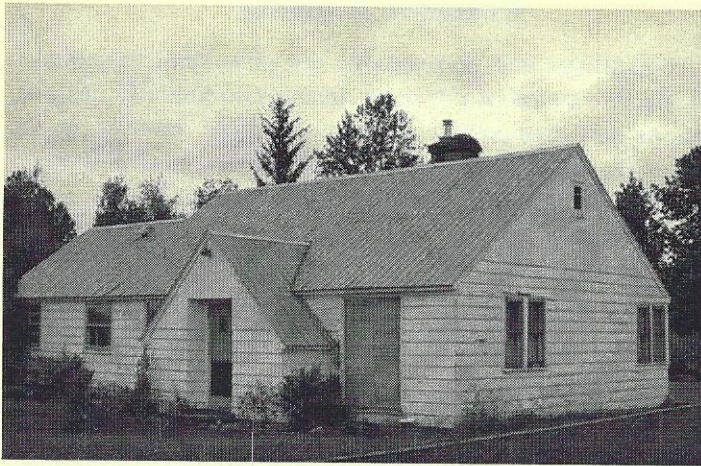


Photo by Rogan Faith

Adjacent to Brown's Point Park are the two historic Brown's Point Cottages. One of the cottages is pictured above. The Brown's Point Cottages are on AAHP's list of Alaska's Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties for 2003. They were on the 2002 list, as well. They were built in 1941 for the Corps of Engineers by Major (later Brigadier General) B. B. Talley.



Photo by Rogan Faith

Pictured above are some of the AAHP members and residents of Government Hill who attended AAHP's Annual Picnic on Saturday, August 16. Everyone enjoyed hamburgers and hot dogs that were grilled to perfection, as well as delicious salads, chips with homemade salsa, and a variety of desserts. The tent at left offered protection from the rain.



Bobbie Bianchi, left, talks with Judith Bittner about the Alaska Engineering Commission (A.E.C.) cottages. In 1915, fourteen cottages like this one were built on Government Hill to house Alaska Railroad employees. The A.E.C. cottages that remain are among Anchorage's oldest homes. Bobbie's informative walking tour of historic Government Hill was the highlight of the Annual Picnic and a special treat for all who attended.



Gordon and Aud Severson, left, were among the nearly two dozen people who enjoyed the picnic despite the rain.



Walking-tour participants stand with guide, Bobbie Bianchi, at the flower-bedecked entrance of her beautiful home—A.E.C. Cottage No. 12. From left, Bobbie Bianchi, Judith Bittner, Fran Seager-Boss, Janine Dorsey, Frank Norris, Mark Ivy, and Rogan Faith. Many thanks, Bobbie, for a fascinating tour of your historic neighborhood!

# Announcements

## New National Register Properties in Alaska

The following Alaska properties have been entered in the National Register of Historic Places since May 2002\*:

- BIA School, Unalakleet
- Old City Hall, Fairbanks
- Chief Son-I-Hat's Whale House & Totems, Kasaan
- Talkeetna Airstrip
- Copper River & Northwestern Railway Bunkhouse and Messhouse, Chitina
- Sentinel Island Light Station, Juneau Vicinity
- Kukak Cannery Archaeological Historic District, Katmai National Park
- Point Retreat Light Station, Juneau Vicinity
- Mt. Alyeska Roundhouse, Girdwood

\*List courtesy of Office of History & Archaeology

## National Trust awards Preservation Services Fund Grants for Alaska projects

In 2003 the National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded Preservation Services Fund (PSF) grants for two historic preservation projects in Alaska:

### February, 2003

**Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska** — \$3,982 to hire consultants to perform a condition assessment of St. Sergius Chapel in Chuathbaluk and cost estimates for the restoration of St. Sergius Chapel and the St. Nicholas Orthodox Church Rectory in Juneau.

### June, 2003

**Sitka Maritime Heritage Society** — \$2,750 to hire a consultant to develop a conceptual plan and drawings for the renovation of the Japonski Island Boathouse for use as a maritime museum and interpretive center.

The National Trust awards PSF grants three times each year. The deadline for submitting applications for the next round of grants is **February 1, 2004**. For more information, contact Anne Gailliot, at the Western Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation: [anne\\_gailliot@nthp.org](mailto:anne_gailliot@nthp.org)

## Preserve America

Applications and nominations are now being accepted for the first round of *Preserve America* community designations and Presidential Awards. *Preserve America* is a White House initiative to promote preservation. For the Presidential Awards, completed nomination forms and accompanying material must be received no later than **January 15, 2004**.

*Preserve America* community designations will be granted on a continuing basis.

Information can be found at [www.PreserveAmerica.gov](http://www.PreserveAmerica.gov) or by calling (202) 606-8503.

## National Trust for Historic Preservation's 11-Most-Endangered Historic Places

Applications for America's 11-Most-Endangered Historic Places must be postmarked no later than Tuesday, **January 20, 2004**. For information contact: [www.nationaltrust.org/11most](http://www.nationaltrust.org/11most)

## Preservation Services Fund Grants

Applications for the next round of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Preservation Services Fund grants are due **February 1, 2004**. For information email Anne Gailliot at the Western Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation: [anne\\_gailliot@nthp.org](mailto:anne_gailliot@nthp.org)

## Preservation Week Poster Contest

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is sponsoring its annual Preservation Week Poster Contest. (National Preservation Week will be May 3-8, 2004.) The theme is *New Frontiers in Preservation*. Cash prizes will be awarded to the top three winners. Submissions must be postmarked no later than Monday, **February 2, 2004**. Details can be found at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Web site: [www.nationaltrust.org](http://www.nationaltrust.org)

Additional information is available from the Preservation Week Contest Coordinator. Phone (202) 588-6037 or email: [preservationweek@nthp.org](mailto:preservationweek@nthp.org)

## Historic Preservation Conference

A CLG Training and Historic Preservation Conference is being planned for Skagway in April. The tentative dates are **April 21-22, 2004**. Watch for further information...

*It is now time to renew your membership for 2004. Please complete and return the form below.  
You can also use the form to make a donation to AAHP's Top Ten Most Endangered  
Historic Properties matching-grant account. Thank you!*

**AAHP MEMBERSHIP 2004**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership term is Jan. 1–Dec. 31.**

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student \$15  | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributor \$ 50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$250            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$20   | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend \$100      | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$500 & above |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$30   | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate \$100   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit* \$25 (*includes federal, state, & municipal agencies) |  | Membership \$ _____                               |

**I/we wish to make a tax-deductible gift to the  
AAHP Top Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties matching-grant account.**  
*(Donations to AAHP are tax deductible, as allowable under IRS regulations.)*

Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Enclosed** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**I also wish to participate in AAHP activities in the following areas:**

- Fund Raising    Membership    Education    Legislation    Public Relations    Projects & Issues

**Please return to: The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation • 200 W. 34<sup>th</sup> Ave. #1184 • Anchorage, AK 99503**

## **THANK YOU for supporting AAHP in 2003!**

To each and every AAHP member, "Thank you for your support in 2003!" Your membership is vitally important to AAHP's programs, which support historic preservation in Alaska. AAHP had 132 members in 2003. We hope that number will increase substantially in 2004.

We extend a special THANK YOU to those members who joined at the *Contributor* level or above and to those who made contributions to AAHP or to AAHP's Ten-Most-Endangered Historic Properties matching-grant account. They are listed below:

Judith Bittner  
Sylvia Broady  
John B. Chenoweth  
Coghill's  
William F. and Geraldine Coghill  
Edwin B. and Katharine C. Crittenden  
Rogan C. Faith  
William J. Flynn Jr.  
Gary H. Gillette  
Karl Gurcke  
Stuart C. Hall  
Ivy & Co. Architects, Mark A. Ivy  
Jean C. Jackson  
Christy and Jan Konigsberg

Barbara Simpson Kraft  
Brooke and Wilda Marston  
David and Janet McCabe  
Robert and Mary Ellen Mitchell  
Peter and Sally Ramaglia  
Allan and Ann Renfroe  
Katharine Richardson  
Christopher H. Roe  
Fran Seager-Boss  
Bea Shepard  
Jay W. Snodderly  
Senator Ted and Catherine Stevens  
Amanda Welsh

**Many Thanks to All!**



200 W. 34th Ave. #1184  
Anchorage, AK 99503

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Anchorage, AK  
Permit No. 00587

G  
1

## **The AAHP Annual Meeting is coming up.**

**Special Program — The Historic Jesse Lee Home (Seward):  
Its Current Status & Future Prospects**

**Refreshments**

**Board Elections**

**Reports**

**We expect to hold the Annual Meeting  
in the first part of February  
and hope you'll plan to join us.**

**Date, time, and location to be announced.**

**Watch for further details...**