

BEACONS OF CIVILIZATION: THE ROADHOUSES OF THE RICHARDSON HIGHWAY

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the roadhouses of the Richardson Highway, a collection of 30 to 40 establishments placed along the 400-mile stretch of road connecting Valdez, Alaska in the south with Fairbanks, Alaska in the Interior. These roadhouses were byproduct of the gold rush era in Alaska, with the Richardson Highway being surveyed and routed over a course of several years beginning in 1898. The roadhouses of Alaska grew along transportation routes, and served as rest stations for travelers, freight, and mail lines. The roadhouses also served as community centers for prospectors and adventurers living in remote reaches of Alaska. Roadhouses ranged from simple tents and one-room cabins to large, multi-storied timber framed and/or stone structures. The Richardson Highway was chosen as the transportation route for investigation, as the roadhouses along this route are easily accessible and threatened by on-going road construction and settlement projects. Research for the roadhouses involved investigation of previous studies, news articles, and information obtained from area residents. Fieldwork was undertaken in the summer of 2012 to locate as many roadhouses as possible. A total of fourteen roadhouses and roadhouse sites were located, with several not accessible during the given time constraints for fieldwork. Histories were written for each of the located roadhouses and roadhouse sites, and as much information gathered on the remaining roadhouses as possible. A preservation plan was created which takes into account the variety of ownership and the distances separating the roadhouses. As the roadhouses of the Richardson Highway are held in both government and private ownership, the preservation of the remaining structures will involve the combined efforts of governmental, private, and nonprofit stewardship.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Casey Woster is a candidate for a Masters of Arts degree at Cornell University in the field of Historic Preservation Planning. She also holds a Bachelor's of the Arts in Art History from Montana State University. The inspiration for this work came about as a result of an internship with the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska in 2012. Casey is a life-long Alaska resident, and is dedicated to furthering the field of historic preservation within Alaska.

DEDICATION

For my brother Dusty, who knew every roadhouse on every stretch of highway he ever worked. Without his inside knowledge, passion, and good-natured pressuring, this work may never have been accomplished. So this is for you, little brother. You will always be loved and forever missed.



Dusty Woster, in the Chugach Mountains above Thompson Pass, March 2015. Photo courtesy of Scott Woster.

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INTRODUCTION

The roadhouses of Alaska have served as the gathering points for sourdoughs and old-timers since the very beginning of American history in the territory. Simply mentioning the name of a long-standing roadhouse to someone who has been in the state for more than a few decades will often trigger a flow of words that form the stories of their experiences. These stories are almost never negative, often comical, and always contain real life glimpses into the history of the land and its inhabitants.

Discovering the history of the roadhouses is often an exercise in discovering the life histories of the individuals associated with them. Alaska is not a place where deed chains can be easily put together; differences in government administration means that deeds and land grants are often spread between local courthouses, repositories in Juneau and Seattle, and archives in Washington, DC. Roadhouses often took the names of the people who built them, so it becomes necessary to look at old newspaper articles, obituaries, and personal interviews to gather any sense of the history of a roadhouse. In the process, one learns more about the people who built the country than the buildings themselves.

Roadhouses embody the stories of the people who built Alaska and stand as the physical evidence of a history that is difficult to glean from other sources. They sprang up as groups of people spread across the territory, prospered as the people did, adapted to the changes in the territory over time, and died when the people left. Those still operating today serve the exact same purpose they did more than a century ago: providing food, shelter, and community for the spread out and often isolated pockets of populations living in rural Alaska.

Despite their role as an embodiment of history, the roadhouses have only recently begun to be acknowledged as having played vital parts in the development of Alaska. This is likely due to the fact that many of these vibrant places were still operating in full swing when academia began writing Alaskan histories. Given the size and broad prehistory and history of Alaska and the lack of financial resources, endangered culturally and historically sensitive areas and properties often take priority over Alaska roadhouses.

For the purposes of this study, a roadhouse is defined as a building or group of buildings providing food and shelter for travelers along an established transportation route. Roadhouses typically developed at a distance of one day's journey apart. This trend began during the gold rush period, when a day's travel was limited to the number of miles a traveler could walk, and increased as road conditions improved. Eventually, the roadhouses were spaced at intervals obtainable by automobiles.

The roadhouses along the Richardson Highway, the focus of this work, were spread along 400 miles of rugged road stretching from Valdez, Alaska on the southcentral coast to Fairbanks, Alaska in the Interior. Estimates vary on the number of roadhouses along this route, as some were more permanent than others. The roadhouses provided food, shelter, and community centers for prospectors and travelers moving through the Alaska landscape beginning in 1898 and continuing through to the modern era. Several successfully diversified their activities to include recreational activities, which are in great demand by modern tourists.

The histories and physical conditions of the roadhouses have been documented twice, beginning in the mid-1970s when the Alaska Historic Society commissioned a study that would list all the roadhouses within Alaska. Some recommendations were made for the preservation and rehabilitation of certain roadhouses as a result of that study, but no further action was given.

The state had more pressing matters to focus on, such as the construction of the Alaska Pipeline and the subsequent economic boom.

Another study, conducted ten years later, served a similar purpose: to document one system of roadhouses, those along the Richardson Highway. When compared to the study of 1974, this newer study highlights the rapid deterioration and disappearance of these historic resources. This study, however, was undertaken with only recordation and documentation in mind, and no recommendations for treatment are proposed. In addition, Kenneth L. Marsh published a book entitled *The Trail* in 2008, an enthusiastic tribute to the roadhouses along the Valdez Trail. These three works encompass the efforts of archaeologists, historians, and hobbyists to locate and chronicle the roadhouses before they vanished.

These three works paint a very confusing picture, however. They do not always agree with one another in terms of dates, names, and locations. This is most likely due to the time constraints of each study, the resources available at the time of publication, and the gradual disappearance of resources through natural deterioration and human interference. Interestingly, the studies appear to be related, with the 1974 study being cited frequently in the study completed in 1984, and Marsh briefly mentions the 1984 study in his text. Difficulties arise in using Marsh's because he does not cite most of his sources and seems to have copied entire passages from the 1984 study without reference to it.

In researching the histories of these roadhouses, all three previous works were used as the baseline for my exploration. Newspaper articles were examined from the early days of Fairbanks through the late 1920s. By the late 1920s, however, mention of the roadhouses seems to dwindle in news sources as the Richardson Highway ceased to be a major transportation route. Various other sources were also available, notably cultural resource surveys completed by the

Department of Transportation in conjunction with roadwork taking place over the intervening decades.

The most reliable source of information about the roadhouses came from news articles as well as the people who live along the Richardson Highway. Often, the residents knew where the remains of the roadhouses were located, and were more than willing to share what limited information they had as well as stories that had been passed down to them.

The mileage listed for the roadhouses has changed little since they were originally constructed. The Alaska DOT&PF has taken care to preserve the mileage of the road, beginning in Valdez and ending in Fairbanks, regardless of the shifts in road alignment. When Valdez was moved following the disastrous Good Friday Earthquake in 1964, the mileage of the Richardson Highway remained the same, even though the town was moved several miles. This consistency in mileage makes for easier identification, both in terms of the traveler and the engineers working on the road.

Other studies have been done sporadically on other roadhouse systems within the state, to varying degrees of success. The National Park Service undertook a documentation effort involving the “roadhouses” along the Yukon River, which during gold rush times had been a year round highway between Nome on the west coast of Alaska and Dawson City in Canada. The roadhouses on the Kenai Peninsula have recently received increased attention, as part of the creation of the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance. State agencies within Alaska have been placing increased emphasis on historic trail routes and the towns and roadhouses along those routes. These trails were often the basis of modern transportation corridors or the source of local lore, and Alaska is moving toward a preservation of these routes.

The importance of the roadhouses to the history and development of Alaska is slowly being realized, but for many roadhouses, it is a case of too little, too late. These structures were often erected by pioneers more than a century ago from impermanent materials. They were built to be utilitarian and functional. The majority of the roadhouses were constructed prior to the enforcement of any sort of organized building codes. They fell victim to fires on a regular basis, although for the most part a new roadhouse was constructed almost immediately to replace the old. Roadhouses that went out of business were often abandoned, reused by locals as relief cabins, or cannibalized for newer construction or firewood. Since roadhouses were constructed along transportation routes, the abandoned structures are often knocked down and cleared as the roads are upgraded and widened.

One of the main obstacles to the survival of the remaining roadhouses is recognition. Individually, they often do not retain enough integrity for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Most with surviving integrity have been previously listed. Roadhouses, however, did not exist independently. Each one was part of the larger, overall system of transportation through the area and survival in the harsh environment. During territorial times, travelers died during bad weather if they could not locate a roadhouse. The roadhouse proprietors usually operated ferries across dangerous rivers. Repairs for automobiles have always been a very important part of the roadhouse business, and continue to this day to be a life-saving aspect to the remaining establishments.

Additionally, the roadhouse owners themselves could be argued to constitute their own community. Along a transportation route, roadhouse owners always knew one another, and when a change in ownership took place, the new owner was almost always someone who had been associated with a different roadhouse, either along the same system or from a different part

of Alaska. The comradery continues to this day. The owners of the lodges and roadhouses along a given route largely know one another and still come to the aid of others, from something as simple as a shared long distance grocery run, to as large as helping to clear the road of small avalanche debris and snow removal.

When the roadhouses are viewed in light of their overall systems, they suddenly become part of a much larger picture that has importance to such broad sweeping topics as transportation history, pioneering lifeways, and the survival and settlement of the early Alaskan pioneers. As the roadhouses disappear, this picture becomes less complete. The loss of any future understanding of an epic way of life is in very real danger of happening.

The preservation of the roadhouses, along the Richardson Highway in particular, is a matter of location and documentation. Most lie in ruins, forgotten on the edge of the road or in the woods nearby. The only people who remember the exact locations of abandoned roadhouses are the people who live in the area, and these are the people who are often most enthusiastic to share their stories. Roadhouse deterioration is so complete that most do not have any hope of being rehabilitated to use. By documenting what exists and stabilizing what can be stabilized, however, a much more complete picture of early transportation systems and corridors can be preserved.

Once compiled, this picture can best be presented to the general population in two ways. The first is through the implementation of a tourism program. Since most of the roadhouses are too deteriorated to withstand visits by buses loaded with anxious visitors, the scheme is best targeted to the more adventurous or history-minded visitors. These are also the same people who would more fully appreciate the rustic nature of the remaining roadhouses, where sharing a bathroom isn't unheard of and dogs are more than welcome.

The second way to present the roadhouses to the general public is through an educational program designed for school children. Alaskan history is part of all school curriculums within the state, and presenting children with a picture of what life was like in early Alaska would be incomplete without including a mention of the roadhouses and roadhouse life. They served as community and supply distribution centers for miners, trappers, adventurers, settlers, indigenous people, and travelers, and children would be fully capable of appreciating this sentiment.

The roadhouses along the Richardson Highway are only one aspect to the roadhouse systems within Alaska, but it is the one presented here. A comprehensive document covering all the roadhouses and systems within the state would be an extremely worthwhile undertaking, but it is not financially feasible at this particular time. The methods presented here, however, could be easily adaptable for other roadhouse systems within the state. As a result, this could be viewed as a plan for all the roadhouses, not simply the ones along the Richardson Highway.

Methods

The dangers facing Alaska's roadhouses were brought to the attention of the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer and the National Park Service in May 2012. Two historic roadhouses were completely destroyed by fire that month, one at Copper Center on the Richardson Highway and another in Petersville, Alaska, south of Denali State Park. The State Historic Preservation Office and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) at that time was focused on resolving issues surrounding the treatment of historic properties along roads, specifically the Richardson Highway. This provided the criteria necessary for narrowing the research topic to one specific roadhouse system.

The first step that was taken was to research literature on Alaska roadhouses in general. This activity led to the discovery of two previously commissioned studies and one published

book dealing specifically with the system along the Richardson Highway. Historic photographs were then located in the Alaska Digital Archives in order to get a more complete picture of what the roadhouses looked like in their prime. Archival searches also revealed historic maps of the road system as it shifted with trail and road improvements. Guides to the trail system were also located, and were found to be valuable as they listed the locations and reviews of the various establishments.

While reading the previously commissioned studies, it quickly became apparent that fieldwork would be required to locate the roadhouses. Given the age of the previous work and the developments that had occurred within the state since their completions, discrepancies began to appear as to the continued existence of certain roadhouses. Where one source listed a roadhouse as having been cleared, another emphatically stated that it was still in place. Photographs, written descriptions in period trail guides, maps, and the previous studies were all used to facilitate fieldwork undertaken during July 2012.

Fortunately, mile markers along the Richardson Highway have not been adjusted since the road was first officially surveyed in the 1950s. This provided in a relatively easy means of locating the remains beneath the undergrowth. When remains were discovered, their GPS coordinates were recorded so that maps could be generated confirming their exact locations. The site and buildings were then photographed to the fullest extent possible at the time of fieldwork. Photographing locations in times of limited vegetation such as early spring or late fall would be problematic to schedule, given the briefness of these seasons and the differences in seasons between the coastal area and the Interior. In most cases, vegetation has taken over the site and often begun to grow within the remaining structures themselves, making clear photographs difficult if not impossible to obtain. Careful notes were taken recording evidence of usage and

the scattered remains of human activity around the site. In some cases, this led to the identification of the sites as recreation spots or the use of standing structures as relief cabins.

The roadhouses that remain in use were also visited, GPS located, and photographed. The people working in the roadhouses were generally more than happy to share stories of the roadhouses, either the ones they owned or others nearby. In several cases, these people were instrumental in locating roadhouse remains.

These interviews, however, did provide some conflicting information. The people who live in the areas tend to be convinced of the accurate locations of the abandoned roadhouses, and those locations clashed with information that had been gathered from literary research. In some cases, the residents made strong cases for the continued existence of remaining structures, while the studies were definite that the roadhouses had been demolished or removed. All information was collected and included in the discussion of the individual roadhouses.

In order to paint a fuller picture of the life cycles of the roadhouses along the Richardson Highway, research was conducted utilizing alternative resources as well. Travel guides and news articles were especially useful. Publishers in the contiguous U.S. began producing guides to traveling and prospecting in Alaska as early as the late 1890s; the first guides to the overland route from Valdez to Fairbanks began to appear in 1910. The Alaska Road Commission (ARC) produced guides detailing the major establishments along Alaska roads on a per mile basis. *The Milepost*, a guide series published annually beginning in 1959, provides the most complete picture of the later road system, as it lists every pullout and business along the major transportation arteries through Alaska.

Finally, newspaper archives were consulted in order to find articles relating to the roadhouses. This produced the most detailed picture of life within the roadhouses. Through the

1920s, the newspapers regularly ran ads featuring these establishments, documented the comings and goings of the roadhouse owners to the larger urban centers, and published lengthy obituaries for anyone associated with the roadhouses. It is through these articles that the importance of the roadhouses to daily life within Alaska is best realized.

Once the histories were established and the roadhouse remains located, the next step was to prepare a plan to preserve the remaining roadhouses. The challenge to this is that these roadhouses are spread out over a 400-mile stretch of road, crossing through state and national land, borough land, private land, incorporated towns, and unincorporated borough territory. Any general plan would need to account for all of these differences in use, law, and tax structure. Preservation strategies for railroads in the continental U.S. were examined, and strategies for land conservation and preservation in other countries were considered. Clearly, a method for raising awareness and about the roadhouses needed to be developed, in such a way as to protect the rights and privacy of private property owners as well as raising awareness of the quickly vanishing resources. The result is a blend of strategies that is adapted to the unique circumstances in Alaska and will be beneficial all participants at every level.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One: Alaska History Overview – This chapter presents a brief overview of Alaska history from Alaska prehistory through the Russian period and early American Exploration efforts and culminating in a discussion of the Alaska gold rush period. Most roadhouses were a direct result of the movement of prospectors and the establishment of transportation routes to gold-bearing regions. These themes are necessary to understand the larger roadhouse context.

Chapter Two: Early Alaskan Transportation – Transportation routes and methods were uniquely devised in Alaska by prospectors, explorers, and the various governmental entities

assigned to road building. It is necessary to understand the difficulties of travel in early Alaska in order to fully appreciate the purpose of Alaskan roadhouses.

Chapter Three: The History of the Richardson Highway – The Richardson Highway is a 400-mile-long stretch of road running from Valdez to Fairbanks. This chapter lays out the history of the highway from the first pack-trails to the improvement of the modern road.

Chapter Four: Alaskan Roadhouses – This chapter deals with Alaskan roadhouses in general, providing detail and context on roadhouses along transportation routes across the state.

Chapter Five: Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway – This chapter details the individual roadhouses along the Richardson Highway, including location (if known), physical description, and history.

Chapter Six: Preservation Plan – This chapter outlines a potential general preservation plan for the roadhouses along this highway. The plan can be adapted to apply to other roadhouse systems across the state.

CHAPTER ONE: ALASKA HISTORY OVERVIEW

The prehistory and early history of Alaska had a great impact on the later development of the territory and Alaska roadhouses in general. Alaska Native groups populated the region, creating a sophisticated system of trade networks and transportation routes across Alaska. The Russian period, beginning in 1732 and ending with the purchase of Alaska by the U.S. in 1867, saw an increase in activity in fur trading and hunting in the coastal regions. The Russian period also laid a basis for exploration of Interior Alaska by the mapping of the Alaska coast, and the early cooperation between Russia and the U.S. in exploration efforts in anticipation of a telegraph line. Following the purchase of Alaska in 1867, the U.S. military undertook exploration efforts in order to further map and investigate the Interior regions. Prospectors, hunters, and explorers followed soon after, establishing unofficial transportation routes and furthering trade networks.

Alaska Prehistory

The history of exploration and transportation in Alaska is closely tied to the traditional Alaska Native ways of life and the impacts those methods had on colonial trade and expansion throughout the territory. Alaska is vast, and it's geography varied and often deadly. Many of the main roads used today follow routes that were originally known only to various groups of Alaska Natives. Additionally, many of the techniques used to mark traditional trails have carried over into modern usage, adopted first by colonial explorers and fur traders and later by prospectors following the call of gold in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Alaska Native cultures are divided and classified based on several language families. Specific languages and the tribes that speak them fall within these families. The language families are Eskimo, Aleut, Haida, Tlingit, Eyak, and Athapaskan. Each of these language

groups occupies a different region of Alaska, and while there is some crossover, each group has its own traditions and ways of life, as dictated by the land it occupies.



Figure 1. Map of Alaska Native Language groups and territories.
(<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/NPE/Summit/McDowell/reviewhistory.html>)

The Eskimo language group, which has perhaps the most readily recognizable name, consists of groups of people living along the coastal regions of the north, west, and southwest coasts of Alaska. Life was dominated by the family social unit, arranged in fixed villages dependent in size on the amount of available game. Large sea mammals were abundant in these regions and were therefore the game of choice, including whales, walrus, and seals. Other land-based game consisted largely of caribou, whose herds migrate annually through the various

regions of Alaska.¹ Neighboring the Eskimo language family is the Aleut language family, living primarily along the Aleutian Island chain stretching from southwest Alaska across the Pacific Ocean almost to the far eastern coast of Russia. Aleuts traditionally subsist on a steady diet of fish and sea mammals along with occasional birds caught on the islands. Their skills at hunting on the open ocean and surviving in the brutal climate of the Aleutians made the Aleuts extremely valuable to later Russian fur hunting endeavors as well as serving as scouts during the Second World War. The Haida and Tlingit occupy a richer environment along the Alaska Southeast, stretching from Yakutat Bay in the Gulf Coast of Alaska down through what is now British Columbia and Washington State. The milder climate of this region created a much more diverse and abundant food supply, consisting of fish, land game, and plants and vegetables harvested and even cultivated. The societies were matrilineal and warfare was common between the different lineages.²

The southcentral coast of Alaska and the Interior were occupied by the Athapaskan and Eyak language families. The Athapaskan language family consists of eleven separate groups occupying the central and northern regions of Alaska, stretching from the Yukon River basin just east of the western coast of Alaska into northern Canada. This region is known for long, cold winters and short, warm summers. It is also an area of great environmental contrasts, from flat, swampy plains to extremely high mountains providing natural territorial barriers. Only one group, the Tanaina, resided in a coastal area, occupying the south central coastal area of Alaska surrounding what is now Anchorage and Turnagain Arm. The Athapaskan people arranged themselves into small bands consisting of a small number of nuclear families or larger extended

¹ Claus-M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 29.

² Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 24.

families. Each band had its own territory, usually divided by natural features. The groups gathered together only when area resources could support larger groups, usually only at given times during the year. They inhabited the “difficult and demanding expanse of the arctic and subarctic lands... This vast area, greatly varied in topography, is not richly endowed with sustenance for life, and the Athapaskans had to search diligently for the resources they needed for survival.”³ The Athapaskans were a hunter-gatherer society relying on fish and caribou for sustenance. They maintained a seasonal lifestyle, congregating in fish camps along the main rivers during the summer months and following the caribou herds during the fall and winter. The extent to which they moved was dependent upon their location within Alaska; some areas were richer in natural resources and required less annual migration. These richer areas allowed for semi-permanent settlements, between which the groups would rotate through the year. Areas that were not as rich in natural resources required much more movement, and the people tended to carry construction materials with them for shelter.⁴

The way in which the Athapaskans travelled through their landscape was to have a lasting impact on transportation within Interior Alaska. The Athapaskans moved through their landscape on foot. Dogs and sleds, commonly used among coastal groups, only found use in the Interior at a later date, largely due to the heavily forested nature of regions away from the coast. Regardless, trails were established that aided movement through the landscape. These trails most often reflected the easiest route of movement, by utilizing low mountain passes and frozen rivers in the winter for swift travel. The trails were marked in a variety of ways, from rock cairns to tree blazes, which were cultural modifications made to trees for navigational or religious purposes. The more mobile bands carried their possessions with them, either carrying

³ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 25.

⁴ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 24-26.

them or pulling them on sleds. Once dogs were introduced into common use, sleds were adapted to be pulled by the animals, and packs were even constructed so the dogs could be used as a form of pack animal in the summer. The trails established were just wide and smooth enough to accommodate summer foot traffic and winter sled travel, a trait that would continue throughout the early days of Alaska exploration and settlement.⁵

Russian Alaska

The Russian colonial period of Alaska history was marked by exploitation of natural resources, native peoples, and little exploration beyond the coastline. Russians did, however, provide the foundation for many of the modern cities and villages and established routes for later exploration. This contributed to the shape of Alaska, including the state boundaries. It also began a pattern of relatively fair treatment of Alaska Native peoples and those of Russian-Native heritage that would not be equaled again until the late 20th century.

⁵ William Fitzhugh, ed, *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 150-156.

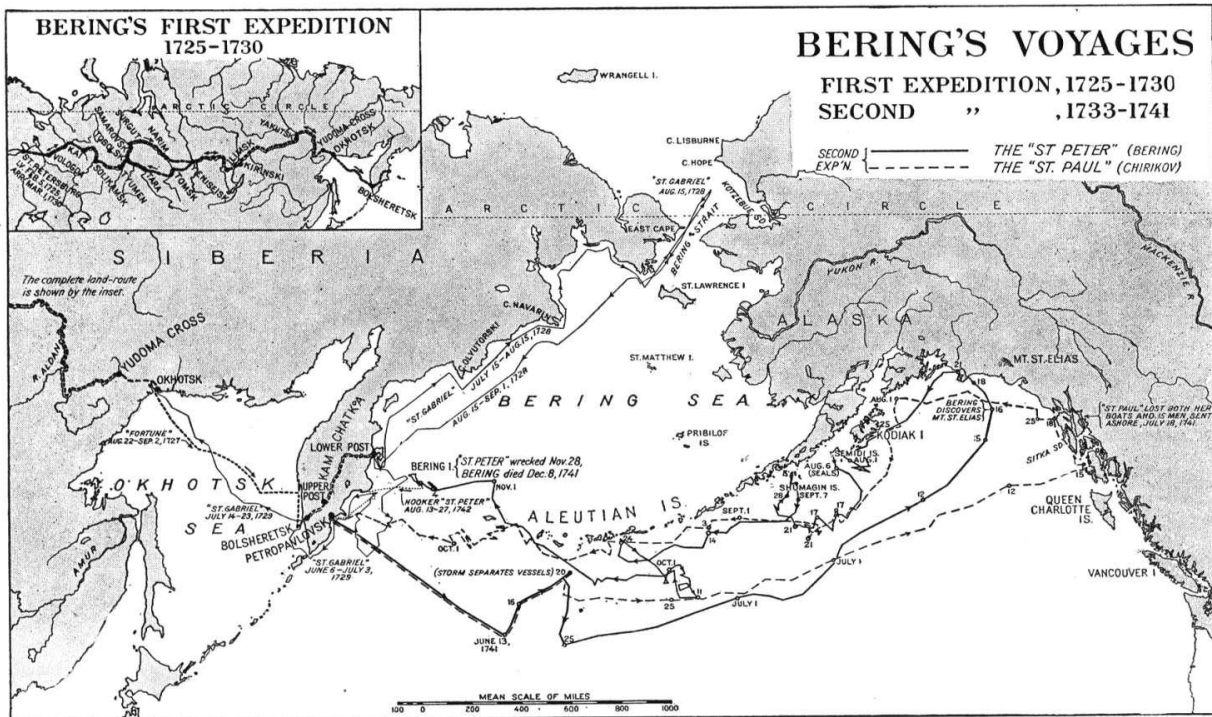


Figure 2. Map showing the Kamchatka Expeditions undertaken by Vitus Bering in the mid-18th century. (<http://www.explorenorth.com/library/maps/n-beringmap1.htm>)

The first “official” discovery of Alaska is credited to the First Kamchatka Expedition, undertaken by Danish sailor, Vitus Bering, on behalf of the Russian Empire. Beginning in 1728, the expedition was commissioned to sail north from the Kamchatka Peninsula in search of a land bridge connecting Russia to the North American continent. Ultimately, this expedition failed, turning back when the ice pack became impassible. It was during this trip, however, that Bering discovered and named one of the Diomedes Islands and St. Lawrence Island in what would later be named the Bering Strait. St. Lawrence Island is the largest island located off the western coast of Alaska.⁶ The first official landfall of a Russian naval vessel on the mainland of Alaska is credited to the next expedition, undertaken by Afanasii Shestakov, although he himself did not survive to witness the landfall. The expedition was scientific in nature. On August 21, 1732, a

⁶ Lydia T. Black, *Russians in Alaska: 1732-1867* (Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 2004), 22.

group led by a Russian geodist named Gvozdev, made landfall on the mainland of Alaska on what is now Cape Prince of Whales on the Seward Peninsula, almost directly east of the Diomedes Islands.⁷

The Second Kamchatka Expedition, Bering's second commissioned voyage by the Russian Empire, was to have even more lasting consequences for the history of Alaska. It succeeded in mapping the Aleutian Island chain and marked "the official discovery of Northwest America by the Russians."⁸ On July 16, 1741, sailing in the Gulf of Alaska along Alaska's southern coast, Bering and his crew sighted and named St. Elias Mountain, and the chain still holds the name St. Elias Mountains.⁹ Bering perished on the ill-fated return trip,¹⁰ but his contributions to the exploration of the Alaskan coast were vastly significant in the history of Alaska.

The driving force behind the Kamchatka expeditions was two-fold. The main purpose was to chart a route to North America across the Pacific Ocean and to chart the Northwest Coast of North America. The second purpose was of more direct benefit to the Russian Empire. Sea otter and seal furs were an extremely valuable trade commodity, as they were highly prized in China. The Russian Crown enjoyed a monopoly on the fur trade with China, and new grounds for seal and sea otter hunting were continually sought.¹¹ This trade market had quickly depleted the seal herds along the eastern coast of Russia.¹² The exploratory voyages to Alaska returned bearing high quality furs, taken along the Aleutians and the Gulf of Alaska,¹³ and sparked a rush of

⁷ Black, *Russians in America*, 25-26.

⁸ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 42.

⁹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 42.

¹⁰ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 47.

¹¹ Black, *Russians in America*, 40.

¹² Naskey and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 50.

¹³ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 49.

hunting expeditions to Alaska that was to dominate Russian interest in Alaska for more than a century.

Traditionally, fur hunters in Russia were called “promyshlenniks” and largely came from northern Russia, Siberia, and the Kamchatka region. Often of indigenous descent, they were accustomed to the harsh climate along the eastern coast of Russia and later, coastal Alaska. As the fur trade expanded into Alaska, promyshlenniks began to include “former peasants and townsmen, and only rarely intellectuals not belonging to the gentry; emigrants from various towns in European Russia” hoping to escape the rigid Russian social structure and seeking entrepreneurial freedom.¹⁴ Promyshlenniks often formed hunting companies, with each member holding a specified share of the profits. In this way, individuals had the opportunity to gain financial wealth above and beyond their specified social standing within the Russian structure.¹⁵

In 1781, the American, Northeastern, Northern, and Kurile Company was established, later known as the Russian American Company (RAC). Through well-funded hunting expeditions, the RAC quickly began to push out smaller companies and in 1799 was awarded a monopoly on the Alaskan fur trade by the Russian Crown. As their activities expanded, the RAC began to forcibly recruit Aleut hunters. Their physiologies and hunting techniques were adapted to hunting in the harsh climates of the Aleutians, and they proved to be extremely effective. They were also used as soldiers during times of unrest, with tribal rivalries exploited to keep tribes focused on each other rather than the Russian occupiers. While the result of this forced labor was to have tragic consequences on the Aleut population, these hunters and warriors were paid

¹⁴ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 50.

¹⁵ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 51.

(albeit with low wages) and were even considered to be Russian subjects.¹⁶ Evidence of Aleut activity on behalf of the Russian fur trade has been found as far south as California.

With exploration driven almost entirely by the fur trade, no provision was made for the colonization or settlement of Alaska, or for exploration beyond the coast. By the mid-1740s, small, semi-permanent settlements appeared at key supply locations such as Unalaska and Kodiak Islands, with the sole purpose of supplying longer-ranging hunting expeditions. The town that is now known as Kodiak on Kodiak Island was to prove to be the first permanent settlement by the late 18th century, complete with a Russian Orthodox church.¹⁷ New Archangel, located at what is now Sitka in the Southeast, was constructed during the first decades of the 19th century and served as the capital of Russian Alaska.¹⁸ The Russian government, however, had “no plan to establish a permanent Russian population in North America; in fact, its regulations prohibited Russian settlement for its own sake.”¹⁹ The primary focus for Russian America consisted of fur hunting activities, trade, and the marketing of trade goods.

The problem of maintaining the farthest flung settlement of Sitka began to arise almost immediately after it was established. Transportation of goods from mainland Russia to Sitka was sporadic and time-consuming. Trade with Tlingit groups in the region shifted with hostilities. When a solution presented itself, it took some time to convince the Russian government and the heads of the RAC to accept the solution. As early as the 1780s, Spanish, American and British ships had been sailing along the northwest coast of North America, up into the Gulf of Alaska, trading with any native groups they could find.²⁰ Trade with foreign vessels was strictly

¹⁶ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 60.

¹⁷ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 60.

¹⁸ Black, *Russians in America*, 155.

¹⁹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 81.

²⁰ Black, *Russians in America*, 126.

regulated by the Russian Crown, however, and theoretically prohibited except directly through the head of the RAC in Sitka, Alaska. Given the vast coastal area of Alaska, this restriction was occasionally circumvented. Eventually, a trade agreement was reached with the Spanish residing in California and Mexico.²¹ This closer source of necessary goods ensured the survival of settlements such as Sitka.

In 1839, an agreement was reached between the British and Russian governments allowing the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) to trade with the Russians in Alaska. The HBC had established a complex system of trading posts across Canada that allowed for easy movement of goods. The HBC recognized areas where they might make long-term investments, and often sold goods at an initial loss to ensure future trade. In return for consistent and continued trade with Russian America, the HBC was granted the right to explore the interior of Russian-held American territory by means of rivers that empty into the Pacific Ocean.²² The agreement meant that Russians residing in America had access to cheaper, more consistently delivered necessities and finished goods.

This agreement was to have a lasting impact on both the Russian occupation of Alaska and the knowledge of the interior of the territory. A shift in the fur trade with China toward the end of the 18th century has created an increased demand for land animal furs, particularly black and silver fox, squirrel, ermine, and sable.²³ These furs were readily available for hunters in the Interior and could be easily traded for with Alaska Natives. The dominant British presence in the Interior made these furs readily available not to the Russians but to the British. Additionally, the HBC established trading posts as far inland as the middle of the Yukon River, in the heart of

²¹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 69.

²² Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 77.

²³ Black, *Russians in America*, 69.

Interior Alaska. Trade was also flowing between the Eskimo groups on the west coast of Alaska and their counterparts in Siberia.²⁴ All of this took trade business away from the RAC. Despite attempts to diversify their activities (including a lucrative ice trade with San Francisco), RAC profits ultimately began to fail.²⁵

The decision of Russia to sell what became an American possession had been contemplated as early as 1857. Failing RAC profits, the expense of maintaining settlements as far flung as the northwest coast of North America, and the impossibility of defending the Alaskan territory from potential Euro-American aggressors were all serious factors in the Russian decision. There was also widespread criticism of abuses and corruption within the RAC.²⁶ American involvement in Russian America was not limited to exploration of the interior; in 1864, the United States was granted permission to conduct a survey for a proposed telegraph line connecting the United States with Moscow across Alaska and Siberia.²⁷ Secretary of State William Seward spearheaded the U.S. drive for the purchase of Alaska, arguing the wealth of natural resources, Manifest Destiny, and the importance of Alaska to the control of the Pacific sea lanes.²⁸

With the establishment of the HBC trade routes and the proposed telegraph line, parts of the Interior were subsequently mapped. Prospectors, hunters, and explorers followed on the heels of these endeavors, further increasing knowledge of Alaska and establishing rudimentary maps and routes of travel. These maps and routes would be beneficial during the gold rush period in Alaska, leading to an increased American presence and establishment of more permanent

²⁴ Black, *Russians in America*, 265.

²⁵ Black, *Russians in America*, 263.

²⁶ Black, *Russians in America*, 280.

²⁷ Black, *Russians in America*, 284.

²⁸ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 93.

transportation routes and trade centers. These routes and trade centers would later serve as jumping-off points for prospectors and roadhouse establishments.

The purchase of Alaska was finally approved with the completion of the Alaska Treaty and signed at four-o'clock in the morning on March 18, 1867 for \$9 million, an amount equaling roughly two cents per acre. The treaty provided for the retention of the name Alaska and officially labeled it as “Indian territory” for ease of administration.²⁹ The Russian flag was lowered at Sitka at four-o'clock in the afternoon on October 18, 1867 and the American flag was raised. Sitka would serve as the capital of Alaska several more decades.

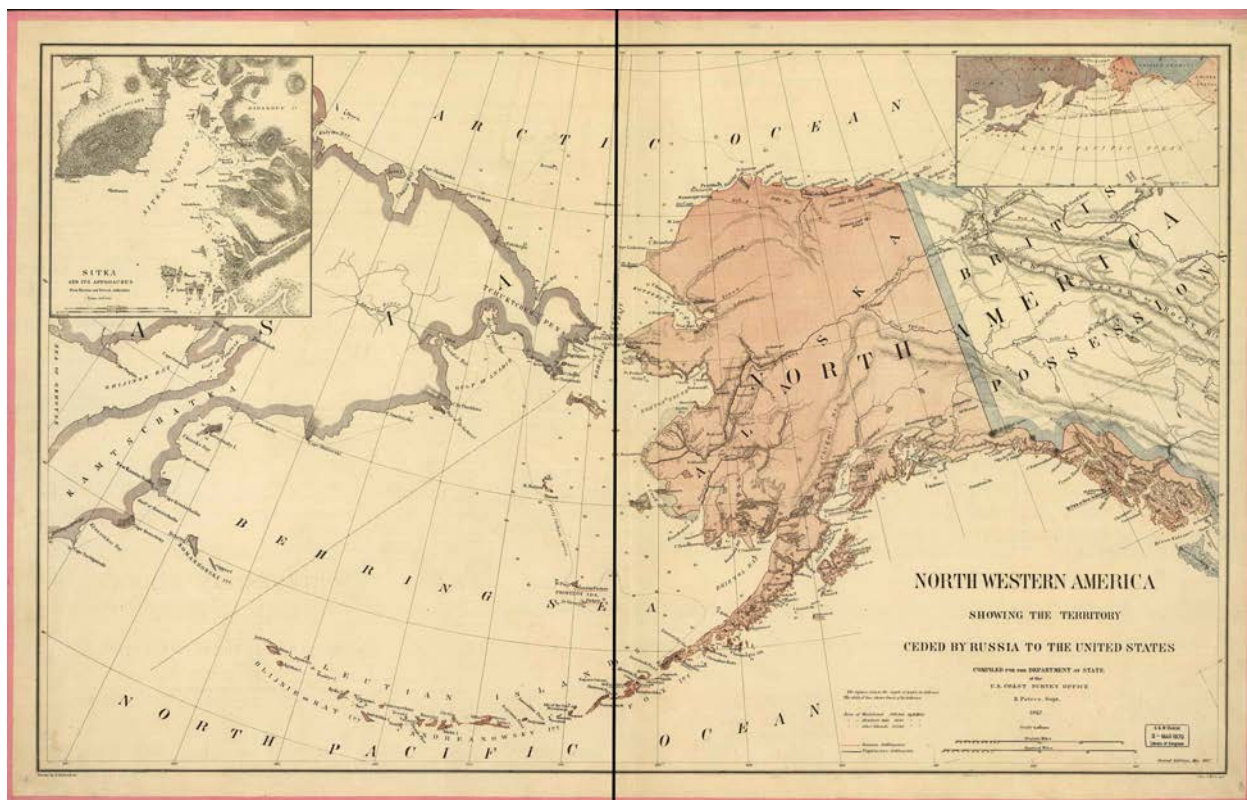


Figure 3. Map of Russian Alaska, as ceded to the US in 1867. (<http://alaskaweb.org/maps/map-1867alaska.jpg>)

²⁹ Black, *Russians in America*, 285.

Post-American Purchase

With the purchase of Alaska from Russia, the U.S. now faced the problem of governing a large and mostly uncharted territory. Immediately labeled Indian Territory for ease of transition, the U.S. Army was given responsibility for the vast region following the transfer of ownership in October of 1867. The territory was classified as the “Department of Alaska” and fell under the jurisdiction of the Division of the Pacific. The Army quickly established several military outposts at Sitka, Fort Wrangell, Fort Kodiak, Fort Tongass, Fort Kenai, and St. Michael in the mouth of the Yukon River delta.³⁰

The decision that turned control over to the U.S. Army was sound in theory. The Army’s mission was to further exploration of the vast territory, provide defense of the new territory from foreign powers, and maintain peaceful relations between existing territorial residents, Natives, and incoming American citizens. One of the provisions of the purchase was that Russians who remained became American citizens within three years. The majority of the Russian residents were of mixed Russian and Native ancestry who were not interested in citizenship. They moved to other locations, including British Columbia, Russia, and California.³¹

Problems began to arise almost immediately following the transition. The U.S. government had little knowledge of Alaska, and almost none pertaining to the interior of the territory. It had to rely on knowledge acquired from the RAC at the outset, which had largely occupied itself with the fur trade along the coastal regions and up some distance along the Yukon River. Additionally, lack of commerce from the U.S. meant that the Army had to rely on the RAC for

³⁰ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 101.

³¹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 99.

many initial supplies.³² The company obliged, having retained ownership of commercial enterprises within the territory. It proceeded to sell these properties and enterprises to the U.S. piecemeal.³³ Military personal were largely confined to island outposts, limiting any authority over neighboring or more inaccessible regions.³⁴

Most importantly, the U.S. Army had no authority to enforce any laws within the territory. There was a lack of written laws, general orders, or any guidelines to sanction and direct the military's actions. "The law never authorized the military regime, except for a statute that liquor be kept out of Native hands."³⁵ Additionally, any arrests that could be made were meaningless. The Army was only authorized to hold someone under arrest for five days before being turned over to a civil court, the nearest of which was in Seattle, Washington. This rarely left time to arrange for transport outside of Alaska let alone the amount of time the journey south would take.³⁶ As a result of these limitations, troops stationed in Alaska largely represented a show of force to prevent any hostilities against American citizens.

In 1877, the Army withdrew from Alaska. The Army was facing a shortage of manpower in the wake of the Civil War and troops were required to address the massive unrest throughout Native American populations in the American Midwest. Tasked with garrisoning troops throughout the South and enduring more than eleven Indian wars during the late 1860s, the Army struggled to find funds or manpower to staff the outposts in Alaska.³⁷ By the mid-1870s, only the troops in Sitka remained.

³² Major General Gilman C. Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, prepared by the Information Office, U.S. Army Headquarters, Alaska, 1958, 18.

³³ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 100.

³⁴ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 107.

³⁵ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 102.

³⁶ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 25.

³⁷ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 109.

Following the Army's pullout in 1877, the governance of Alaska fell to the U.S. Treasury. In Washington, D. C., the Treasury decided that the Marine Revenue Service could better police commerce along coastal Alaska.³⁸ Without troops as a display of force, Tlingit residents of the area around Sitka began to display limited unrest, largely pertaining to the previous construction of barricades that barred them from entering the town. The residents of Sitka, fearful of attack, had no recourse but to appeal to the British in Canada for aid. On March 1, 1879, the British ship HMS *Osprey* arrived at Sitka to provide support. This incident, involving a British Naval ship providing aid to U.S. citizens on U.S. territorial soil, embarrassed Washington, D. C. to the extent that Alaska was immediately placed under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Navy and a ship was dispatched to Sitka to provide aid to the residents.³⁹

In many ways, Navy governance of Alaska was more of a success than previous efforts. Naval ships were a more mobile force than had previously existed. Efforts were also made to help Native groups set up their own system of government so that they could police themselves according to their laws and codes of conduct. These efforts were largely made as an attempt to lessen the demand on Navy manpower.⁴⁰

During the 1870s, the population grew slowly within the Alaska Southeast. Most of the newcomers were prospectors or miners, relocating from the placer mines in the Cassiar Mountains in British Columbia. This period also saw the establishment of the fishing and canning industry throughout the Southeast, although it did not experience its great growth until after the turn of the century."⁴¹ In 1870, the Alaska Commercial Company (ACC) was formed, and would prove to be prolific across the territory in fur, fishing, and trading businesses for

³⁸ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 107.

³⁹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 111.

⁴⁰ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 30.

⁴¹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 111.

decades. The ACC was an efficient organization, and became an extremely influential entity in Alaska because it had the money to build and maintain the ships that brought labor and supplies to the territory.⁴²

It was the discovery of gold on Douglas Island near what is now Juneau in 1880 that began to impose a sense of order. In addition to placer mines, hard rock lodes were discovered in the area as well as near gold-bearing quartz veins near Sitka. These brought an influx of even more prospectors, several of whom had the means and inclination to develop hard rock mines in the region. By 1890, the established town of Juneau could boast a population of 1,251 and it included schools and a privately funded hospital.⁴³

The miners and prospectors who flocked to the region during this period established what was known in the other gold-rush areas of the U.S. as the “miners’ code.” Miners within a certain area often gathered together and decided on the boundaries of their mining district, then created the rules for staking claims. They elected a recorder who registered the sites of each prospector and stated the rules of conduct. These included fines, banishment for stealing, and occasionally hanging for murder. Prospectors would then provide a court of peers, who would often prescribe the penalties.⁴⁴ These mining districts often served as the basis of later officially recognized jurisdictions.

Written law came to the territory of Alaska with the Organic Act of 1884. In essence, this legislation extended all the laws of the Oregon Territory to Alaska and “provided for the governor, judge, attorney, clerk of court, marshal, four deputy marshals, and four commissioners, who were to function as justices of the peace,” officials who were to be appointed by the

⁴² Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 112.

⁴³ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 113.

⁴⁴ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 115.

president. Most importantly, the Act confirmed the authority of the miners' courts within each of their districts.⁴⁵

Governing Alaska was made difficult by the vastness of the region, a general lack of knowledge on the part of government officials, the remoteness of the territory, and the character of the people who resided there. While many never intended on remaining in Alaska, many were true mountain men who had no intention of returning to civilization. These were often the kind of people who resisted governmental authority in favor of judgments handed down by their peers, a trait that was to continue to play a role in Alaskan society.

⁴⁵ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 117.

Early Alaskan Exploration



Figure 4. Map showing U.S. exploration routes in Alaska through 1998.
(<http://www.raremaps.com/gallery/enlarge/32126>)

Despite lack of manpower and the difficulty of obtaining supplies in the far reaches of the north, the U.S. Army continued to have a vested interest in exploring Interior Alaska. This interest began to take shape as early as the 1860s, prior to the Alaska Purchase, and continued through the gold rush period, evolving in goal and nature until the early 1900s. Originally pushing an agenda of constructing a telegraph line between the U.S., Russia, and Europe, interest shifted to scientific curiosity and finally to attempting to gauge the conditions of gold rush routes and mining centers.

The first systematic exploration of Interior Alaska was undertaken in 1865 by the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Although embroiled in the Civil War, the U.S. government never ceased searching for a method of speedy telegraph communication with Europe. As laying cable across the Atlantic Ocean was a difficult feat, the U.S. turned its attention to Alaska, where it was known that only a narrow passage separated the North American continent from Asia. While entirely possible to lay cable across this passage, the interior northern reaches of Alaska and Siberia were largely uncharted. In 1864, the U.S. Army Signal Corps was given permission to lead an exploratory expedition into Interior Alaska to investigate the feasibility of such a line. The Western Union Telegraph Expedition took place in 1865, with only minor success charting the Yukon River.⁴⁶ The project would continue in fits and spurts following the Alaska Purchase until the 1880s, when it was largely abandoned in the face of the sheer expanse of the rugged Alaska wilderness.

Gradually, exploration of the interior began to shift away from the necessity of a telegraph connection with Europe and began to take the form of scientific exploration. This went beyond geology to academic groups and researchers in the Smithsonian Institute. Pressure increased on military expeditions to gather as much scientific information on the region as possible. Various military weather stations were established and operating as early as 1876.⁴⁷ Weather station operators such as military officers Lucien McShan Turner and Edward W. Nelson collected and sent to the Smithsonian vast amounts of data relating to Alaska geography, ethnology, and zoology.⁴⁸ The International Polar Expedition was undertaken in 1881, one in a series of joint ventures between the U.S., British, and Russian governments to map the northern coast of the

⁴⁶ Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*, 35.

⁴⁷ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 37.

⁴⁸ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 103.

North American continent in the hopes of locating a northern shipping route. The expedition of 1881 served to gather scientific data on geology, zoology, and the lives and cultures of the Natives. The expedition established a station on the northern coast of Alaska, which operated for two years before growing hardships forced its abandonment in 1883.⁴⁹

By the 1880s, the growing number of prospectors in the territory prompted the U.S. government to begin embarking on a series of expeditions not only to gather scientific data and chart the territory, but also to find new, safe routes into the interior for the scattering prospectors. The Alaska Military Reconnaissance of 1883 was undertaken to explore the area from the Chilkoot Inlet, near what would later be Skagway, inland to the ACC trading station Fort Selkirk on the Yukon River. The purpose was to gauge the attitudes of the natives towards Americans and the American government.⁵⁰

In 1885, the U.S. government authorized Lt. Henry Turman Allen to lead a spring expedition to map the Copper River. Beginning at the mouth of the Copper River near what is now Cordova, Alaska, the party followed the Copper River across the Alaska Range and down the Tanana River to the Yukon River in late June.⁵¹ This was Allen's second attempt to map the Copper River, and not the first undertaken by the Army; the violent nature of the Copper River had halted previous attempts.⁵² The fifteen-hundred mile trip proved to be the most extensive and successful exploration of Interior Alaska to be undertaken by the U.S. Army up to that point and the first time these major river systems had been fully charted.⁵³

⁴⁹ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 38.

⁵⁰ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 40.

⁵¹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 104.

⁵² Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*, 103.

⁵³ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 104.

In addition to these early official explorations, other Americans were making headway in opening the vast Alaska wilderness. The increasing numbers of amateur prospectors filtering into the region in the 1890s began to concern many officials both in Alaska and in Washington, DC. Reports of widespread starvation and death by exposure of men who entered the wilderness unprepared for the harsh reality of the landscape led to several expeditions undertaken in the 1890s to determine the conditions of the prospectors and Natives in the gold rush areas. The expeditions were also tasked with locating easier transportation routes for both prospector traffic and the importation of necessary survival goods. The first major expedition of this kind was undertaken in 1897 by Captain Edwin F. Glenn. His task was to travel the All-American land route from the deep-water port of Valdez north to Dawson City. The report that followed was discouraging, as the conditions along this route were far from favorable.⁵⁴ Echoing this report was one filed the same year by Captain Patrick Henry Ray, who, along with then-Lieutenant Wilds Preston Richardson, had undertaken an investigation of conditions along the Yukon River from St. Michael to Dawson City, an all-water route favored by other prospectors for the relative ease of transportation.⁵⁵ They discovered and reported similarly poor conditions along the entire water route.

By 1899, prospectors had had begun to move from the Klondike region down the Yukon River into Alaska. The growth of mining settlements along the river prompted officials to begin to contemplate the construction of an official overland route from Valdez, a deep-water port open through the winter, up to the Yukon River, in order to make transportation possible into the Yukon region throughout the year. Cut off from the outside world by ice and snows in the winter, the U.S. government determined that it had an obligation to ensure that the residents of

⁵⁴ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 60.

⁵⁵ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 48.

this interior region had access to goods necessary for survival as well as mail throughout the winter months. Finally, an overland route open all year would provide the Army with relatively swift access to the interior regions of Alaska should the need arise to maintain order. It was a project that was to be completed in a matter of years and would change the face of Alaska.

The prehistory and history of Alaska from prehistory through the late 19th century established the basis for the future development of Alaska. Trade and transportation networks from the Russian period followed patterns established by Alaska Native groups, and the early American period built upon these previously established networks and patterns. By the 1890s, most exploration efforts were upstaged by prospectors, with American and Canadian gold-seekers venturing into the Interior from the coast ahead of official military expeditions. The routes and subsequent roadhouses established by these prospectors often became the basis of official transportation routes in the later American period.

CHAPTER TWO: AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT OF ALASKA

Gold Rush Alaska

The gold rush period in Alaska served the purpose of opening the country to settlement and development. The transportation routes and urban hubs established during this period became the foundation on which the modern Alaska was built. The gold rushes began in 1897 with the Klondike Gold Rush to Dawson City, Yukon Territory in Canada, followed by the rush to the Fortymile Region of Alaska, then the rush to Nome in 1899. The gold rush to the Interior quickly followed in 1901, and served the purpose of establishing permanent transportation routes from the coastal regions into the Interior. Transportation routes stretched for hundreds of miles and were constructed to the best of the abilities of their builders. The distances spanned and the difficulty of the terrain led to the establishment of roadhouses at strategic locations along transportation routes.

Prospectors, fur hunters, and adventure seekers trickled into Alaska decades before the territory had been sold to the U.S. These new comers were, for the most part, seeking fortune and adventure in an unopened territory. By their actions, however, they were helping to open the region to a flood of civilization that would come as a result of the discovery of gold. While the most famous of these strikes was made on the Klondike River in the northern reaches of Canada, it was not the first or the one with the longest-lasting influence.

By the 1870s, small amounts of gold had been discovered in the Southeast, the Kenai Peninsula, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Interior. Few of these early strikes proved overly profitable in light of their remote locations. The first major strike in the region occurred in 1886 at Fortymile River, in Canadian territory near the border. In 1874, Al Mayo, Jack McQuesten, and Arthur Harper, all ACC employees as well as fur traders and prospectors, had established an

ACC trading post on the Yukon River called Fort Reliance. The post provided supplies for prospectors operating on tributaries of the Yukon, such as Twelvemile River, Fortymile River, and Sixtymile River. All of these rivers were later named for their approximate distance from the trading post. Mayo, McQuesten, and Harper would also occasionally grubstake prospectors coming into the country, enabling newcomers to purchase necessary survival and mining goods on credit.

By 1886, nearly two hundred prospectors had come into the region via the Chilkoot Pass to prospect the Stewart River in Canada. Harper, on a prospecting trip that year, “persuaded a couple of prospectors to try the Fortymile River, which flowed into the Yukon one hundred miles farther downriver.”⁵⁶ Heeding his advice, these prospectors began to pull course gold nuggets from the Fortymile River. As word of the discovery spread, prospectors from throughout the territory flocked to the Fortymile River, leading to the establishment of the community of Fortymile at the confluence with the Yukon River.⁵⁷ The settlement existed until 1894, when surveyors marking the border between Alaska and Canada informed the mostly American residents that they were actually on Canadian soil. The errant residents moved further down river into Alaska, and established Circle City. By 1896, that community would boast a population of 1,200 residents and contained the area’s major ACC trading post, which was run by McQuesten.⁵⁸

The Klondike gold rush is probably the best known of all the gold rushes in the northern regions of the continent, although news of the strike took nearly a year to reach Seattle and San Francisco. The strike began in 1895 when Robert Henderson, a life-long prospector, being

⁵⁶ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 124.

⁵⁷ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 124.

⁵⁸ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 125.

working along the Indian and Klondike Rivers, where he located what he considered to be decent prospects. On his way downriver for supplies in 1896, he shared news of these finds with several men, among them George Washington Carmack, also called McCormick. With his family, Native wife, and two of her brothers, McCormick relocated his operations to Rabbit Creek on the Klondike River, where they discovered rich gold deposits worth nearly ten times that of any other decent prospect. They renamed the creek Bonanza and spread word of their rich find. “Soon Fortymile emptied, and the news spread up and down the Yukon Valley the little camps emptied and men rushed to the Klondike.”⁵⁹

By August of 1896, all of Bonanza Creek had been staked and prospectors had begun to spread across the Klondike watershed. By early 1897, the tent town of Dawson was established along the Yukon, near the mouth of the Klondike.⁶⁰ Word traveled south that summer with the first steamers to leave the region, and the passengers that docked in Seattle and San Francisco in July of 1897 brought news of the strike to the southern states. Prospectors traveled from all over the world to take part in what has been dubbed one of the world’s greatest gold rushes, eventually producing an estimated \$150 million in gold.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 126.

⁶⁰ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 126.

⁶¹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 126.



Figure 5. The three main routes into the Klondike. (<http://alaskatrekker.com/places-go/skagway-alaska/klondike-gold-rush/>)

All together, four routes were advertised for reaching the Klondike during the three years of the gold rush. The first was the all-Canadian overland route, with the “stampeder” traveling north from the western states through Canada to reach the Klondike. The second was advertised

as the all-water route, by means of an ocean steamer from Seattle to St. Michael off the west coast of Alaska, and then by riverboat up the Yukon River to Dawson. This route, the most expensive and longest, was also the easiest. However, it also placed the stamper at Dawson late in the short summer season. As most stampers intended to make their fortunes in a single summer season and return home wealthy men, this late start was less than ideal. The third route, perhaps the most popular and most used, was also the hardest. It involved taking a steamer from Seattle to Dyea or, later, Skagway, where the gold seeker would be forced to pack over the high coastal mountains to Lake Bennett and the headwaters of the Yukon River. The two trail options, the Chilkoot and White Passes, could most easily be passed during the winter with the use of sleds, and had the advantage of placing the prospector, after several months of hard work, in the gold fields at the time of the spring break up when work could begin.⁶² A railroad later ran through the White Pass, making travel much more pleasant.

⁶² Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 128.



Figure 6. All-American route into the Klondike, with options from Port Valdez. Rare Maps Collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks. 1897.

The fourth route, largely impossible but still advertised, was referred to as the “all-American” route, and began at Port Valdez on the Gulf of Alaska before traveling north cross-country to the Yukon River. While it advertised avoidance of Canadian officials, it was longer and more difficult than any of the other routes.⁶³ The initial mountain crossing, upon leaving Valdez, was over the Valdez Glacier. Of the thousand or so prospectors known to have attempted this route during the Klondike stampede, only two hundred made it to Dawson. Most returned to Valdez while others struggled North into the Copper River Valley, where they began prospecting.⁶⁴

⁶³ Alaska Geographic Society and Milepost, *Adventure Roads North: The Story of the Alaska Highway and Other Roads in the Milepost*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Geographic Society, 1983), 86.

⁶⁴ Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*, 157.

Gold had been discovered on the Alaska Peninsula near what is now Nome in 1866 by Daniel Libby, who had been working on the Western Union Telegraph Extension survey project in the 1860s. Unequipped at that time to do more than note the location, he returned to the area in 1897 following the hoards of stampedeers heading for the Klondike. Together with two partners, Libby organized the area, one hundred miles south of St. Michael in the mouth of the Yukon, into the Council City Mining District. A great strike was made in this district in September of 1898 on Anvil Creek, but as the Klondike gold rush was in full swing, stampedeers were slow in coming. By October of 1899, however, there were an estimated three thousand prospectors working in the district.⁶⁵ As production on the Klondike began to slow and the initial rush ended, prospectors flocked back down river to Nome, which by 1900 was a tent city with over twenty thousand men.⁶⁶

What is widely considered to be the last great gold strike took place in the Tanana Valley two years later. Although prospectors and adventurers had been working in the area for decades, it wasn't until 1901 that a prospector named Felix Pedro and partner Tom Gilmore found gold at Fish Creek and Goldstream Creek. With the help of riverboat captain E. T. Barnette, who sold winter outfits to Pedro and other prospectors in the region after his riverboat was caught in the ice on the Chena River, Pedro was able to spend the winter thawing and digging paydirt for spring cleanup. Word spread of the discovery, triggering a minor stampede in the summer of 1902. In September of that year, Barnette was elected recorder of the district and became known as the founder of Fairbanks, named for Senator Charles W. Fairbanks, a senior senator from Indiana who later became vice president in 1904.⁶⁷ Senator Fairbanks was also instrumental in

⁶⁵ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 129.

⁶⁶ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 130.

⁶⁷ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 136.

the negotiations with Canada that permanently established the Alaska-Canada border. Hoping to increase activity in the region, Barnette sent word of the strike to Dawson, and that winter some 800 men were said to have left Dawson for the Tanana Valley despite temperatures that reached fifty degrees below zero Fahrenheit.⁶⁸ Three further discoveries on Cleary, Fairbanks, and Ester Creeks brought further prospectors to the region, and by Christmas of 1903, there were between fifteen and eighteen hundred men working in the Tanana Valley. Most were employed by others, as the gold in the region was buried much deeper than it had been in other locations and required more man-hours to extract. Special equipment was also needed, so few individual prospectors succeeded.⁶⁹ The nature of the work required a sense of permanence, and many of the men sent for their families and settled in the Fairbanks area. By 1904, most of the residents of Dawson had moved to Fairbanks, and Judge James Wickersham moved the headquarters of the Third Judicial District Court, previously located at Eagle, to Fairbanks. By 1905, the city had a population of 5,000, complete with schools, churches, and a hospital, and was establishing itself as the population center of Interior Alaska.⁷⁰

The gold rush period of Alaska led to an increase in interest in the territory by the federal government, forcing it to deal with crimes and claim problems. As a result, funds were approved for survey and exploration by the USGS, coal-mining laws were extended, Army forts were constructed, and studies were commissioned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to “examine the potential of farming in Alaska.”⁷¹ The territory was slowly gaining recognition and importance.

⁶⁸ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 137.

⁶⁹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 138.

⁷⁰ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 139.

⁷¹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 140.

The men and women who took part in the gold rushes both in Alaska and across the contiguous United States created a diverse cross-section of American culture. Beginning with the California gold rush of 1849 and continuing until the last acknowledged “poor man’s” stampede to Fairbanks in 1902, the stampeders came from many walks of life and just as many ethnicities. They began with varying intentions. Some intended to make their fortunes and return home in a short amount of time, others were determined to stay in the gold fields, always following the frontier. The ones who stayed, whether by choice or by circumstance, often charted the country and created a base from which other pioneers could build. The majority of the stampeders during the early years were from rural areas, accustomed to outdoor work and possessing at least a rudimentary knowledge of how to survive in a rugged landscape.⁷² The increased industrialization and urbanization of the late 19th century, however, meant that during the Klondike and Alaska gold rush period, stampeders were increasingly from urban areas. Regardless, “many came with skills for making a living: trades, professions, and experiences at common labor. When gold was not readily found, many of these men fell back on these skills for survival.”⁷³

The reality of the hard work and commitment of the gold rush lifestyle often changed those plans.⁷⁴ Prospectors would work a claim until a new rumor would come of a strike in some other place, prompting prospectors to leave their established claims in pursuit of the possibility of an even better one. The inevitable chance of striking it rich elsewhere never completely went away.

Often, the attitudes of the prospectors reflected the larger national attitude of Manifest Destiny. It was this spirit of national dominion over the North American continent that had been

⁷²Marks, *Precious Dust*, 127.

⁷³ Herbert L. Heller, ed., *Sourdough Sagas* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1967), 9.

⁷⁴ Marks, *Precious Dust*, 36.

one of the reasons behind the Alaska Purchase, and it was also present in the minds of the prospectors who traveled west. They often saw it as their national duty to explore the west and only their due for the country to reward them with easy riches.⁷⁵

Many of the prospectors, especially those participating in their first stampede, expected the work to be easy. The rumors of gold nuggets the size of fists being picked up like rocks along creek beds in some other part of the country were often spread by individuals and companies providing services for, to, or in the gold rush regions. Maps showing drastically reduced distances and non-existent resupply stations were readily available along-side fanciful equipment purported to make the work of getting the gold from the ground easier.⁷⁶ Such maps and items often made the sellers easy money, but they also caused much hardship and death.

In spite of such dubious activities, the stampeders themselves tended to be generally helpful. Community spirit occasionally became obvious, particularly in the face of common danger.⁷⁷ The majority of these people knew that their life and livelihood depended on others, whether en route to an area or already residing and working a claim.⁷⁸ This was especially true in the rugged Klondike and Alaska regions, where survival could often depend on the willingness and kindness of strangers.

During the gold rush period that brought people into California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, the main method of transportation was often that of wagons or pack animals. The choice was based on the destination and the condition of existing trails. A wagon, traveling slower, could carry more goods purchased further east at a cheaper price than what was available in the gold rush areas, but with a pack animal the prospector could make good time even over

⁷⁵ Marks, *Precious Dust*, 32.

⁷⁶ Marks, *Precious Dust*, 130.

⁷⁷ Marks, *Precious Dust*, 75.

⁷⁸ Heller, *Sourdough Sagas*, 4.

rough and unforgiving trails. Supplies and supply stations could be found along the majority of the routes, including supply towns at trail forks.⁷⁹

With the cases of the Klondike and Alaska strikes, the transportation options were much more limited. To begin with, most prospectors who did not come to the territory from British Columbia were forced to travel to trailheads in Alaska by steamer ship from Seattle or San Francisco. By this time, rail lines connected the east and west coasts, making transportation to these points relatively easy. Upon arrival at the trailheads of Skagway, Dyea, and Valdez, the prospectors flooding in were faced with a dilemma. There were two methods of transportation during this period, one by water through the river channels and the second by foot over rugged terrain. To complicate matters, each prospector hoping to enter Canada in pursuit of the Klondike was required to carry with them a pre-determined set of gear, guidelines of which were set out by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to help combat desperate conditions in the Klondike area. If not brought from Seattle or San Francisco, these items had to be purchased in port towns at inflated prices and then transported over mountain passes to the river hubs either by foot or by hiring pack animals or freight services.⁸⁰ “The contrast between the need to haul as many provisions as possible and the rigors of the trail resulted predictably in jarring extremes of excess and shortage.”⁸¹

This dilemma created an interesting situation that tested some of the bounds of ingenuity. Many of the first prospectors had to live without modern conveniences of any kind. By the end of the gold rush period in the early 1900s, enough people were present within the territory that

⁷⁹ Marks, *Precious Dust*, 65.

⁸⁰ Julie Johnson, *A Wild Discouraging Mess: The History of the White Pass Unit of the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park*, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Anchorage, 2003, 47.

⁸¹ Marks, *Precious Dust*, 143.

such goods as finished lumber, furniture, and even chandeliers were becoming more accessible.⁸² With the onset of winter, many prospectors built small log cabins or lean-tos, chinking the wood with mud, moss, fur, and even burlap and horsehair. Stoves, which were far too heavy to be carried with ease into the territory, were often constructed from mud and stone.⁸³ A Dutch oven for baking could be created with ease by inverting one metal gold pan over the other.⁸⁴ When butter was scarce, a substitute could be made by boiling caribou antler, and scurvy could be fought to some extent by brewing tea from spruce tips.⁸⁵ At least one ingenious prospector “made fish hooks by wrapping tin foil from tobacco cans into hooks baited with bacon and made a sinker from shot.”⁸⁶

Additionally, Alaskan prospectors quickly developed their own terminology. The most common and most confusing term originating in this period is that of “sourdough.” In modern use, a sourdough is an aging person who has lived the majority of his or her life in Alaska. The source of the term comes from the early prospectors, however, who often traveled into the country with sourdough, a type of live-culture dough starter kept alive by being fed equal parts flour and water. Sourdough was commonly used in California when yeast was not readily available for fresh baked goods. When the earliest prospectors came into Alaska, they often carried jars of this starter with them, earning them the nickname of “sourdough.” The term evolved over time and never had any one specific meaning; one source claims that originally it “was given to anyone who remained in Alaska long enough to see the Yukon River or one of its tributaries freeze in the fall and thaw in the spring. As Alaskan winters are unusually long, this

⁸² Heller, *Sourdough Sagas*, 4.

⁸³ Heller, *Sourdough Sagas*, 93.

⁸⁴ Heller, *Sourdough Sagas*, 51.

⁸⁵ Heller, *Sourdough Sagas*, 53.

⁸⁶ Heller, *Sourdough Sagas*, 39.

confined the honor to those who held promise of remaining and of truly becoming Alaskan residents.”⁸⁷

Along with the term sourdough, a second term was applied to newcomers into the territory. “Cheechako,” a Native term meaning “tenderfoot,” applied to all those newly arrived in Alaska or the Klondike. Slightly derogatory and more seldom used than sourdough in common use, cheechakos during the gold rush period lost the title after spending one or two winters in the territory.

Overall, the majority of those who came to Alaska and the Klondike expected the same thing as those who traveled to California. They had heard that gold was easy to pull from the ground, and hoped to make a quick fortune and return home. Those who stayed, either by choice or circumstance, were the hardy men and women who built the foundation of the territory for future pioneers. In 1925, Frank Carpenter was to say in his travel guide *Alaska, Our Northern Wonderland*, that Alaska residents were “the survivors of stampedes to many a far-away camp, true men, and strong men, the weaklings having died along the way. Indeed, I met no one in my journeys who, to use an Alaskan expression, had ‘a wishbone where his backbone should be’.”

The gold rush period of Alaska’s history established the basis of most modern urban centers and transportation routes. Hardy prospectors began filtering into the territory during the second half of the 19th century and were often in areas of Alaska ahead of military expeditions. The gold rush strikes in the Klondike, Nome, the Fortymile, and Fairbanks in 1901 led to the establishment of permanent cities, and agricultural settlement soon followed. These activities lead to the foundation of urban centers and transportation routes across the territory.

⁸⁷ Heller, *Sourdough Sagas*, 2.

Early Alaska Transportation

From the very beginning, Alaska roads have been a special case for engineering and road building. Far-flung populations, difficult terrain, vast distances, and adverse climatic conditions have all conspired against road construction since it was first attempted. Excluded from federal highway funding for several decades, Alaskans alone were responsible for the construction and maintenance of many roads, including the maintenance of military roads. In contemporary times, the term highway as used in Alaska creates confusion to those from more populated regions of the United States. Even as far back as 1925, “Alaskans beg you to remember that a road in Alaska is not the same thing as a road Outside.”⁸⁸

By peak of the gold rush period in the late 1890s, Alaska was already crisscrossed with a series of established trails leading to gold-producing areas. These trails, however, were often roughly marked with tree blazes and landmarks, and knowledge of them was only spread by word of mouth. Rivers were the preferred method of transportation, both in summer by boat and winter by sled, for their relatively easy navigability in comparison with dense forest and mountain terrain. When established roads and trails did exist, they had most often been constructed by a private individual or mining or trading company to the standard that each deem necessary. Due to the nature of the Alaskan terrain, however, summer and winter trails and bridges needed to be reconstructed at the beginning of each travel season.⁸⁹ This process slowed work and often made it difficult to get goods into and out of the country.

The early roads attained three designations: wagon road, sled road, and pack trail. Wagon roads, the most expensive to build, were also the best. These roads consisted of “any roads

⁸⁸ Harry A. Frank, *The Lure of Alaska* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1939), 165.

⁸⁹ Claus-M. Naske, *Alaska Road Commission Historical Narrative*, (Fairbanks, AK: State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, 1983), 18.

cleared, grubbed, ditched, graded, and drained sufficiently to accommodate wagon traffic.”⁹⁰ In 1907, the ARC reported that the wagon roads were essentially “good country highways and nothing more,” although suitable for traffic throughout the year.⁹¹ Sled roads, by contrast, were cleared and grubbed like wagon roads, but only graded and drained sufficiently to prevent their disintegration over the summer months.⁹² Sled roads were only used and maintained in the winter months, and wide enough to accommodate a sled with double-horse team.⁹³ Pack trails, the least maintained of the categories, consisted of any trail or road that did not meet the standards of a wagon or sled road, and was used by dog or single horse sled in the winter and pack trains and foot travel in the summer.⁹⁴ The most common type of road, these were almost always built and maintained by individuals and private companies. They also usually served as the basis for many of the roads in existence to this day.

Of necessity, travel in Alaska took place all year, but the kind of transportation available varied by the season. Most often, a combination of methods was utilized to reach a given destination. Early on, the most common form of transportation was by waterway. Alaska is crossed by an infinite maze of rivers, streams, creeks, and lakes, and it was on these waterways that gold and furs could be found. Virtually every gold rush in the region centered on specific watersheds, and used steamers and makeshift craft to navigate the mazes. During winter months, frozen streams and rivers were used as clear routes by travelers and could support dogsled and even wagon travel.

⁹⁰ Grace Edman, Alice Hudson, and Sam Johnson, *Fifty Years of Highways* (Nome, AK: Alaska Department of Public Works, Division of Highways, 1960), 33.

⁹¹ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report 1907* (Department of the Interior, 1907), 14.

⁹² Edman, Hudson, and Johnson, *Fifty Years of Highways*, 33.

⁹³ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report 1907*, 10.

⁹⁴ Edman, Hudson, and Johnson, *Fifty Years of Highways*, 33.



Figure 7. Prospector-made craft at Lake Bennett, on the trail to the Yukon, 1898. Alaska State Library, Historical Collection.

A winter form of transportation introduced by the Natives, and readily adopted by anyone staying in Alaska for a prolonged period, was by dog sled. The fastest and lightest form of winter transportation, it was used by Alaska Natives, trappers, prospectors, and government officials alike. Freight companies used dog teams to haul supplies to mining camps and trading centers, and for many years dog teams delivered mail in the winter. Beginning in 1900, Judge James Wickersham used this method of transportation to spread law and order to various mining settlements scattered across Interior Alaska as part of his duties as judge of the Third District

Court of Alaska.⁹⁵ Dog teams were used to haul freight and mail over high mountain passes along the military road from Valdez to Fairbanks as late as 1914.⁹⁶ Even in the 1920s, dog sleds were discussed in travel guides as being the only method of winter transportation away from established rail lines and automobile roads.⁹⁷



Figure 8. Dog team freighting in the Yukon, ca. 1897. Alaska State Library, Historical Collections.

Travel in Alaska at any time of year could be dangerous and fraught with natural disasters. Flooding was possible at any time of year. At its worst during the spring breakup period, a river could destroy bridges and wash away sections of roads when it overflowed its banks. The

⁹⁵ Terrence Cole, ed, *Old Yukon: Tale, Trails, and Trials* (Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 2009), introduction.

⁹⁶ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, November 3, 1914.

⁹⁷ Rand McNally, *Rand McNally Guide to Alaska and Yukon for Investors, Homeseekers, and Sportsmen* (New York and Chicago: Rand McNally Company, 1922), 84.

Tazlina River bridge, for instance, had to be replaced nearly every year.⁹⁸ Winter overflow was possible at any time between freeze-up and spring thaw, with water flowing up over thick river ice and onto roadways.⁹⁹ Winter storms could be particularly brutal, claiming several lives each year. The winter of 1910 was especially horrible along the military route from Valdez to Fairbanks. The *Fairbanks Daily News Miner* reported on February 2, 1910, that “of all the winters the North has known, this has been the worst for trail travel, and more people have lost their lives by freezing on the Fairbanks-Valdez trail than in all the time that has gone before.” Avalanches posed continual threats to travelers, closing mountain passes until they could be cleared by the Army or area residents. Avalanches and overflow continue to be a threat to the operation of roads in Alaska; on January 24, 2014, massive avalanches in the area of Keystone Canyon just north of Valdez, Alaska pushed more than 100,000 cubic yards of snow onto the Richardson Highway. The avalanche closed the major artery for more than two weeks, damming the Lowe River and creating a half-mile-long lake.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Reports, 1907-1922*.

⁹⁹ *Tanana Tribune*, January 25, 1908.

¹⁰⁰ Tegan Hanlon, “Richardson Highway reopened after 2-week avalanche closure,” *Anchorage Daily News*, February 3, 2014.

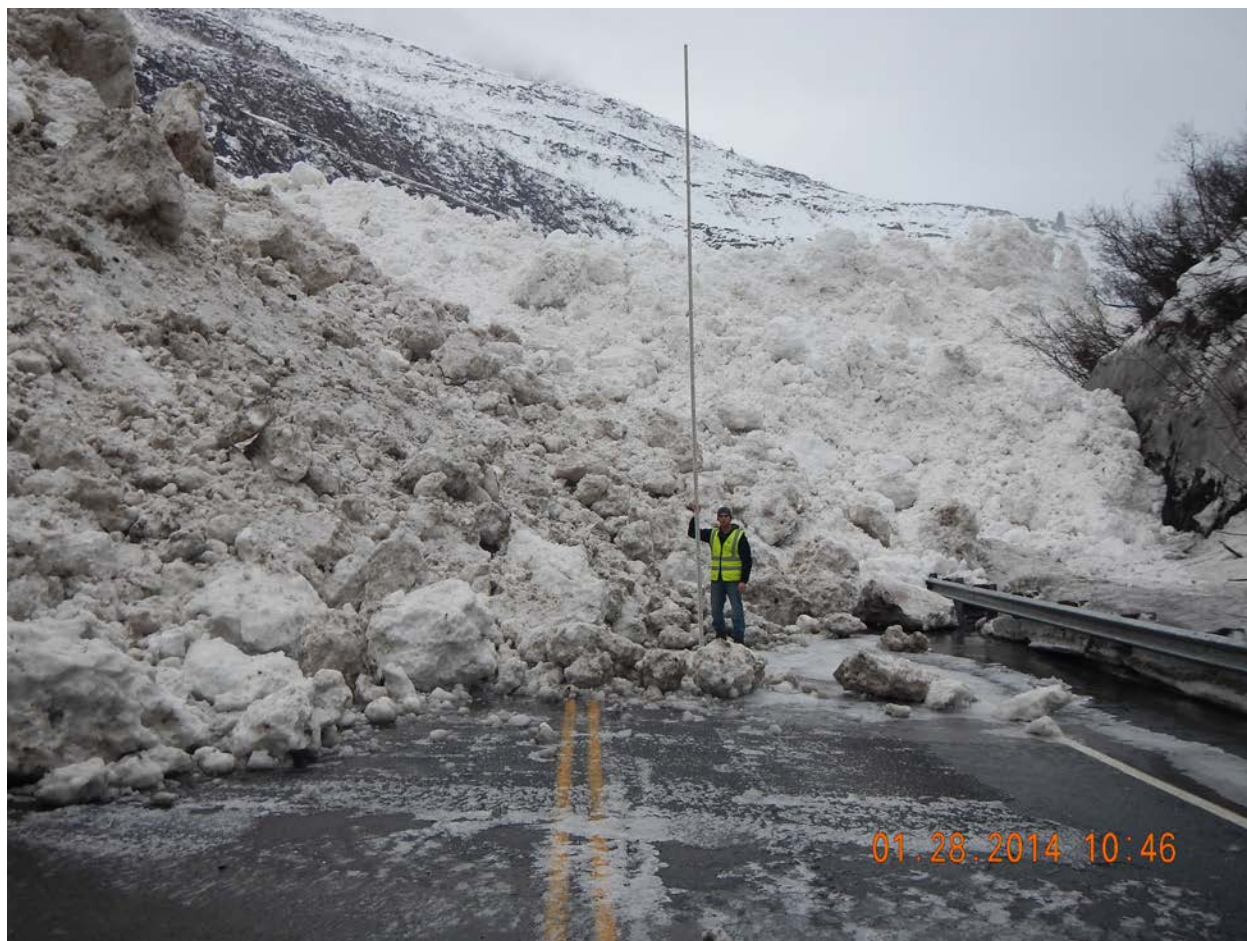


Figure 9. Avalanche on the Richardson Highway, January 24, 2014. Photo courtesy of Dan Adamczach, DOT Engineer.

Summer travel held risks as well. In addition to trail washout by flooding, glacier breaks could cause water and ice to flow swiftly downriver, destroying bridges and roadways in the process. Landslides could also block the road; one particularly large landslide in Keystone Canyon in 1911 destroyed the established roadway, forcing travelers to take an older, higher trail on foot.¹⁰¹ Summer forest fires could also halt traffic along the route with smoke and flames.¹⁰² Even the road itself could hamper travel. Road construction would often involve removing vegetation and surface sediment layers insulating permafrost. The permafrost would then melt,

¹⁰¹ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, August 29, 1911.

¹⁰² *Alaska Citizen*, September 29, 1913.

creating muddy, boggy pits, difficult to drain and unsuitable for heavy loads. Even so, “in many places it is impossible at any reasonable expense to grade and drain the roadway and corduroy must be resorted to. Fortunately the scrub timber generally available makes good corduroy.”¹⁰³

Corduroying a road or trail involved laying small diameter trees into the bog to provide a more stable surface. Most roads were unpaved, subject to potholes, ruts, mud, steep grades, and sharp turns.



Figure 10. Richardson Highway near Gulkana, with remnants of ice run, 1933. Walter Hodge Photographs, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives.

To ease travel, transportation companies began to appear soon after trails were established. The two longest lasting and most successful were those owned and operated by Ed Orr and Robert “Bobby” Sheldon. Ed Orr, perhaps best known in the early years of transportation along the route, transported people and freight by wagon and sled, and maintained a series of barns for livestock at roadhouses along the trail.¹⁰⁴ His advertisements ran in newspapers in Fairbanks and Valdez for many years, and he was capable of making multiple trips per week in the later period

¹⁰³ Edman, Hudson, and Johnson, *Fifty Years of Highways*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Michael A. Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses* (Anchorage: Alaska Division of Parks, Office of Statewide Cultural Programs, 1974), 6.

of operation. Sheldon, by contrast, was a dedicated automobile man, having built the first automobile in Alaska in Skagway in 1904 by hooking a boat motor to an abandoned horse buggy using bicycle parts.¹⁰⁵ Relocating to Fairbanks sometime later, he began to haul supplies to nearby areas using automobiles that he either built himself or purchased and repaired. In 1913, he completed the first trip between Fairbanks and Valdez in an automobile, and he continued to do so for many years. A common joke, as relayed by Frank Glaser, was that a typical activity for Sheldon involved “getting a Model T Ford to go where it didn’t want to go.”¹⁰⁶ Sheldon would go on have a successful career running tourist transportation in what is now Denali National Park.

Beginning in 1899, the military began a process of road building with Abercrombie’s assignment of building a road into the Copper River Valley. Originally intending to blaze a trail to Eagle and the troops stationed at Fort Egbert, the focus shifted with the gold rush further west to Fairbanks.

Transportation in Alaska evolved from foot and pack animal to wagon and sled to automobile during the quick shift from gold rush to settlement. Transportation routes needed to be improved with equal quickness, including alternate routes and road building activities. While the Army was initially in charge of these improvements, with the establishment of the ARC in 1905 construction activities began to be more uniform. Improvements were distributed across the territory as demand shifted, although focusing on large main arteries for the ease of travel of military bodies. By the time that automobile travel was proved efficient for long journeys, a

¹⁰⁵ Tanana Yukon Historical Society. “Bobby Sheldon Speaking at the Tanana Yukon Historical Society Meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska, July 23, 1964,” audio on compact disc at the Alaska Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

¹⁰⁶ Jim Rearden, *Alaska’s Wolf Man*, (Missoula, Montana: Pictoral Histories Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 15.

system was in place to improve existing transportation routes for this new method of travel.

Roadhouses developed in strategic locations along transportation routes, such as river crossings and trail junctions, and proved to be essential for safe travel through Alaska.

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORY OF THE RICHARDSON HIGHWAY

The Richardson Highway began as an All-American route from the Port of Valdez into the Interior and the Klondike gold fields in the Yukon. A dangerous route, few prospectors achieved their destination during the peak Klondike years. As the focus of prospecting activities shifted to Interior Alaska and the Fairbanks region in particular, the U.S. Army was charged with the establishment of a transportation route to facilitate law-enforcement activities. The Richardson Highway was officially begun in 1899 as a route from Valdez to Eagle and was known as the Valdez-Eagle Trail. Following the gold strike at Fairbanks in 1901, however, the route was shifted west and became known as the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail, the Valdez Trail, and the Military Trail. As Alaska grew in population and activities in the Interior became more permanent, the route was renamed the Richardson Road and then the Richardson Highway in honor of Wilds P. Richardson, who focused energy and money on the construction and maintenance of the route. Use of the road declined in the 1920s and 1930s, seeing resurgence in activity during the World War II era and again in the 1970s with the construction of the Alyeska Pipeline.

The Richardson Highway today is a 366-mile long stretch of two-lane road running from the port town of Valdez in the Gulf of Alaska to Fairbanks, a former-gold rush town located just south of the Yukon River in Interior Alaska. Two sections of the route have been designated as Alaska Scenic Byway: the northern segment, from Fort Greely to Fairbanks (Mile 261 - Mile 362) and the southern segment from Valdez to Glenallen (Mile 0 - Mile 128). Despite these designations, the central portion of the route, from Glenallen to Fort Greely, contains some of the highest and most scenic spans of the road, as well as some of the most violent areas for storms.



Figure 11. Modern Richardson Highway, with Trans-Alaska Pipeline shown alongside. (<http://www.alaska101.com/exploreAlaska/maps/richardsonHwy.gif>)

The route begins in Valdez, located at the head of Prince William Sound, a deep glacier fjord in the central region of the Gulf of Alaska. Valdez is the farthest north port in North American ice-free year-round, making it a natural early choice for a port. From Valdez, the Richardson Highway travels east, following the Lowe River for several miles, passing through the narrow Keystone Canyon around Milepost 14. Once clear of the canyon, the road begins the ascent of the coastal Chugach Mountains through Thompson Pass. The summit lies 25 miles north of Valdez at an elevation of 2,678 ft. Thompson Pass is a popular recreation area for Alaskans, giving access to vast tracks of world-class backcountry ski terrain, glaciers, numbered mountain peaks, and fertile hunting and fishing areas. Once over the pass, the road descends into the Copper River Valley, a vast area stretching from the coastal Chugach Mountains to the Wrangell Mountains further north. The road parallels the Copper River for more than 50 miles, and provides access to the Wrangell-St. Elias national Park, the largest and most glaciated national park in North America.



Figure 12. Thompson Pass from the surrounding mountain ridges, showing the cleared space for the Trans Alaska Pipeline. Photo courtesy of Scott Woster.

Once leaving the Copper River, the road crosses the Gulkana River at Mile 129 and travels north between the Gulkana and Gakona Rivers as it begins to climb into the foothills of the Alaska Range. The road follows natural benches in the foothills, avoiding many of the boggy arctic swamps that fill the lowlands. At Mile 186, the road enters into the official beginning of Isabel Pass, the highest point along the route. The pass runs for more than 50 miles, beginning at Paxson and ending in the area just south of Donnelly Creek at Mile 238. Isabel Pass is another popular Alaskan recreational area and contains several clusters of hunting cabins at Summit Lake, Paxson Lake, and Meier's Lake. The violent Delta River begins in this high pass, and the

Richardson Highway begins to parallel the river as it descends down from the Alaska Mountains into the Interior.



Figure 13. Richardson Highway, view to the south, through Isabel Pass. Photo courtesy of Scott Woster.

Once out of the pass, the road continues to follow the Delta River to the confluence of the Delta and Tanana Rivers just north of the present day Delta Junction at Mile 275. The confluence point is known as Big Delta, and was the original settlement in the Delta Junction area. From Big Delta, the Richardson Highway follows the Tanana River north and west towards Fairbanks. There are numerous recreation areas along this 96-mile stretch of road, including Harding and Birch Lakes. The area is more heavily populated, containing several small rural farming communities. The larger Fairbanks area begins at Eielson Air Force Base at

Mile 341, followed soon after by North Pole. At Eielson, the Richardson transforms into a four-lane divided highway, which continues into Fairbanks to the end of the road at Mile 362 where it meets the Steese Highway.

The current route of the Richardson Highway was not the original or originally intended route from Valdez into the Interior. Following the gold strike in the Klondike in 1896, Valdez became touted as the jumping off point for the all-American overland route to the Klondike, which had the advantage of avoiding Canadian customs officials. Originally, the route from Valdez was intended to weave north to the gold rush city of Dawson; subsequent gold rushes eventually shifted the route to Eagle, Alaska, and then ultimately to Fairbanks.

The all-American route to the Klondike was short lived. Initially, the route was heavily advertised in newspapers despite a government report from 1884 on the impassible terrain in the area.¹⁰⁷ In 1884, Lt. W. R. Abercrombie was dispatched by the U.S. Army to investigate previous Russian reports of hostile Alaska Natives in the vicinity of the Copper River. With the increase in prospecting and exploration of Alaska that began after the Alaska Purchase in 1867, the government recognized that American citizens would eventually explore and interact with the native people in this region. After a failed attempt at ascending the Copper River from its delta terminus, Abercrombie employed two Russian Creole guides who knew of a route into the Copper River Valley. The route utilized the Valdez and Klutina Glaciers to cross the Chugach Mountains.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Jim and Nancy Lethcoe, *Valdez Gold Rush Trails of 1898-99* (Valdez, Alaska: Prince William Sound Books, 1996), 7.

¹⁰⁸ Geoffrey T. Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900* (Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation, 1997), 5.

It was this route that was first utilized by prospectors heading to the Klondike in 1897. Glacier travel was particularly dangerous, as the softening of snow and ice during spring and summer months could weaken ice bridges over vast crevasses. Avalanches and storms were of particular danger on the exposed faces of the glaciers. Exposure, scurvy, and starvation claimed the lives of many prospectors attempting to travel this route. Of approximately 3,000 prospectors known to have attempted this route during the Klondike stampede, only two hundred are known to have made it to Dawson. Most returned to Valdez while others struggled North into the Copper River Valley, where they began prospecting.¹⁰⁹

In response to the plight of the prospectors returning to Valdez in sick and starving conditions, the government sent Abercrombie to Valdez again in 1898 with the hopes of locating a safer trail into the Interior. Reports vary as to the exact method by which Keystone Canyon was discovered, but the government reports indicate that Abercrombie located the canyon pass, giving easier access through the initial impassible stretch of mountains surrounding the port of Valdez. The pass had originally been used by area Natives as a method of travel between the port and the hunting grounds of the Copper River Valley. Plans were quickly made to blaze a trail through the canyon and over Thompson Pass.¹¹⁰

Between 1898 and 1900, the gold strike in the Klondike began to slow, and prospector began to move down the Yukon River towards the previously investigated Fortymile region and Nome. In an attempt to provide law and order to the Interior along the Yukon, military forts were established at strategic points: Fort St. Michael near the mouth of the Yukon River, Fort Gibbons at the confluence of the Yukon and Tanana Rivers, and Fort Egbert near the gold rush

¹⁰⁹ Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*, 157.

¹¹⁰ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 6.

settlement of Eagle City in the Fortymile region. Eagle City was of particular concern, as it was located just a few miles from the Alaska-Canada border and served as a port of entry. It also “provided services to more mining camps than any other along the Yukon” at the height of its prosperity.¹¹¹ Additional military reservations were established also established, most notably Fort Liscum at Valdez. However, as a consequence of the increased population and military presence, “inadequate transportation was becoming an ever-increasing problem.”¹¹² A method of transportation needed to be established to provide access to the Interior on a year-round basis. Summer transportation could be arranged by utilizing open water, sailing to the mouth of the Yukon and then taking steamers up the Yukon to Dawson. In the winter, however, the Interior was largely isolated by sea ice.

¹¹¹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 139.

¹¹² Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 58.

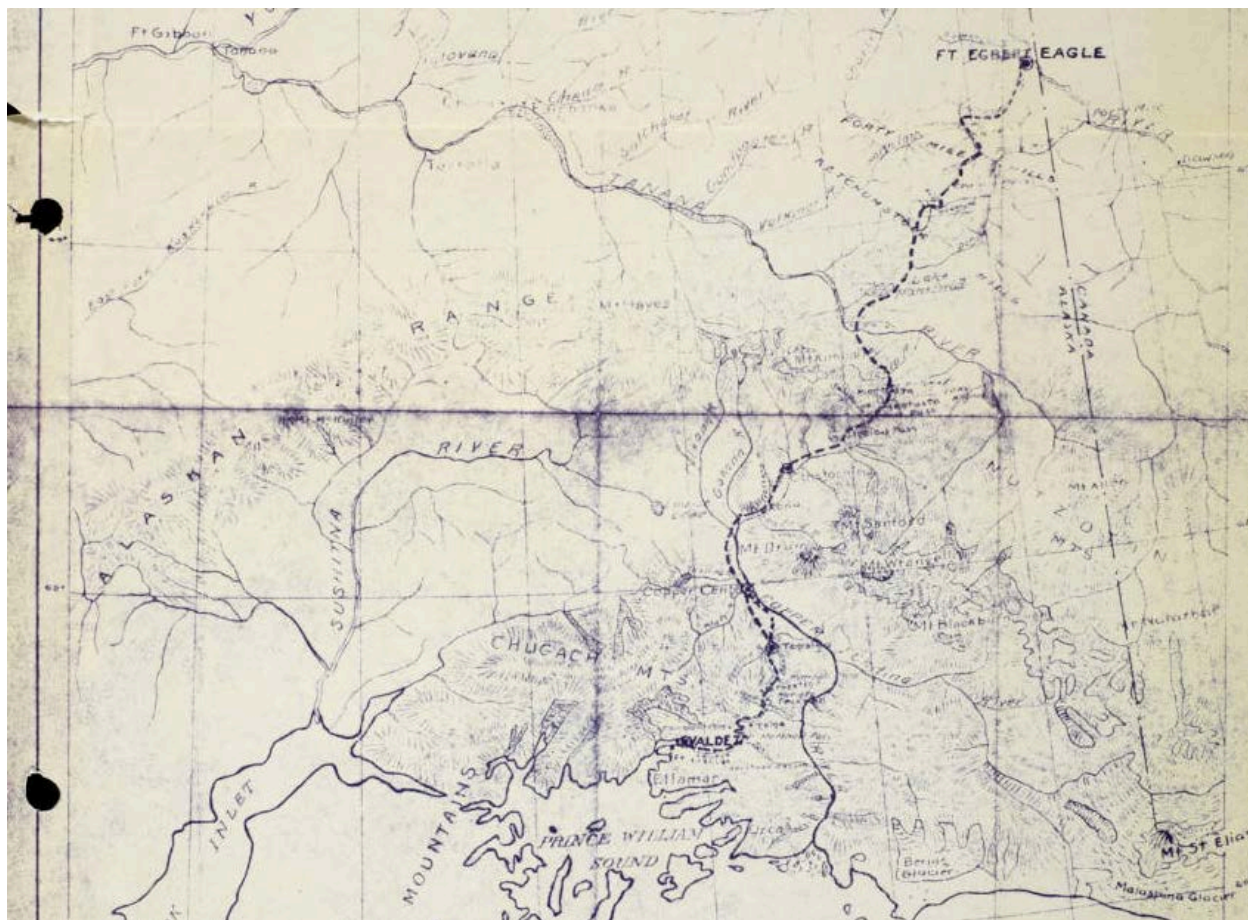


Figure 14. Trail from Valdez to Fort Egbert in Eagle, Alaska, ca. 1904. Rare Map Collection, Alaska and Polar Region Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

In the summer of 1899, Abercrombie returned to Alaska with the charge of creating the Trans-Alaska Military Road from Valdez to Fort Egbert on the Yukon. Congress appropriated funds totaling \$49,975 for the construction effort, and by the close of the season in 1899 Abercrombie had succeeded in establishing a mail route to Fort Egbert and cleared 93 miles of packhorse trail from Valdez to the Tonsina River.¹¹³ In addition to trail building efforts, Abercrombie also became aware of the serious conditions of the prospectors who had wintered in

¹¹³ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 73.

Valdez. He was obliged to extend aid to approximately 500 miners and prospectors, housing and feeding them through the following winter.¹¹⁴

In 1900, a U.S. Senate subcommittee decided to establish “a system of transportation routes and that the basis of such as system should be a well built wagon road connecting the Pacific Ocean at Valdez with Eagle on the Yukon River, a distance of approximately 400 miles.”¹¹⁵ Pressure had been placed on the government by the people residing in Alaska through Judge James Wickersham to improve road and trail conditions within Alaska, and argued that doing so would be to the economic benefit of everyone. “The lack of good trails and wagon roads made mining very expensive. Miners and trading companies had built trails and bridged by subscription, each contributing as much as they could afford. But each fall the winter trails had to be reconstructed, and each spring the summer trails and bridges had to be rebuilt.”¹¹⁶ The basis for the transportation route would follow the rudimentary trail already surveyed by Abercrombie from Valdez to Fort Egbert, dubbed locally as the Valdez-Eagle Trail. In doing so, the government also hoped to open up more of Alaska to development and promote a more permanent population, one based in Alaska for agriculture as well as mining activities. By 1901, the U.S. Army had completed a pack trail from Valdez to Eagle City.¹¹⁷

In 1902, a mining small stampede took place in the area of the confluence of the Chena and Tanana Rivers, just upstream from the confluence of the Tanana and Chena Rivers. Prospectors from Nome flooded east in response to reports of gold found in the vicinity of Ester Dome in the fall of 1901. In September of 1902, Fairbanks was officially established by the area miners. In

¹¹⁴ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 72.

¹¹⁵ Naske, *Alaska Road Commission Historical Narrative*, 22.

¹¹⁶ Naske, *Alaska Road Commission Historical Narrative*, 18

¹¹⁷ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 6.

December of that year, a minor stampede to the Fairbanks area occurred from Dawson City, with approximately 800 miners and prospectors setting out for Fairbanks in temperatures close to fifty degrees below Fahrenheit.¹¹⁸ One year later, by Christmas of 1903, there were approximately fifteen to eighteen hundred people working in the vicinity of Fairbanks.

Owing to the population increase of Fairbanks from 1902 to 1903 and the subsequent drop in population in the Fortymile district, Fairbanks quickly became the focus for the military in terms of peace keeping. Judge James Wickersham, serving for the Third District Court of Alaska, moved his headquarters from Eagle City to Fairbanks in 1903 and proceeded in setting up a judicial court system from the burgeoning metropolis.¹¹⁹ Prospectors traveling north from Valdez into the Interior took advantage of the Trans-Alaska Military Road, traveling the pack trail as far north as the Gakona River before turning northwest for Fairbanks. By 1904, this trail, dubbed the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail or alternately the Valdez Trail, had become the dominant route of transportation into the Interior. In response, the U.S. Army was authorized to build a branch of the Trans-Alaska Military Road northwest from Gakona, providing reliable access from Valdez to Fairbanks.

¹¹⁸ Naske, *Alaska*, 136.

¹¹⁹ Cole, *Old Yukon: Tale, Trails, and Trials*, xxvi.

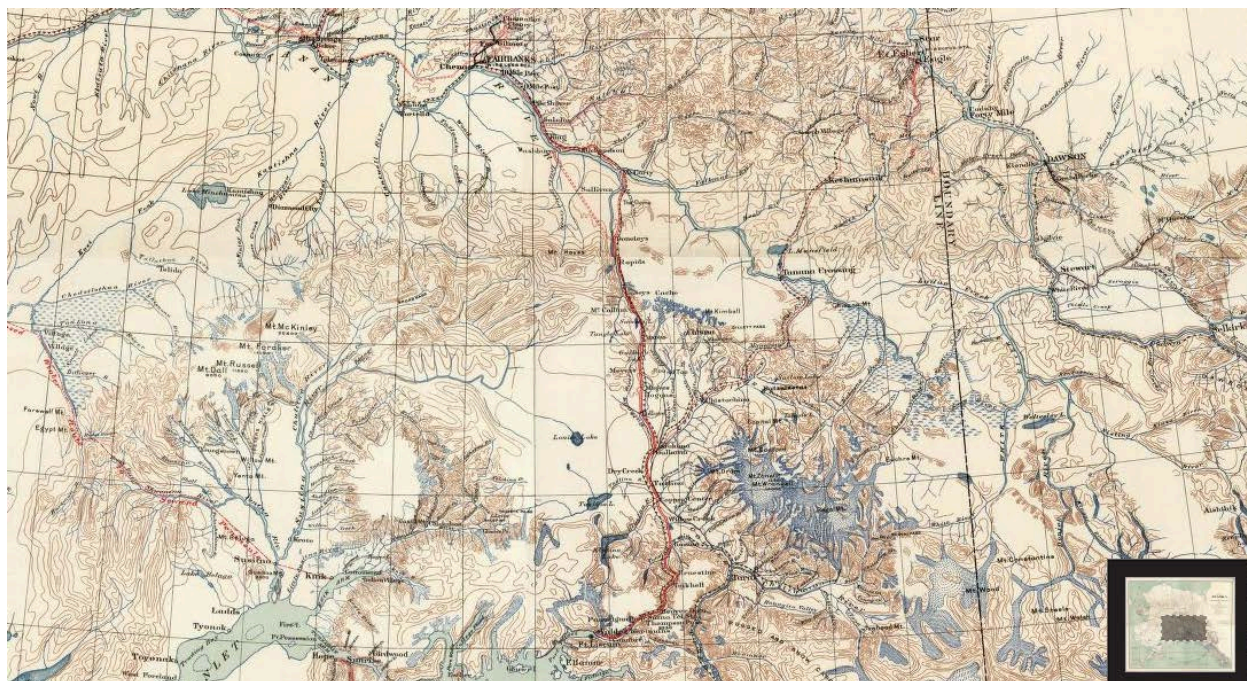


Figure 15. Valdez-Fairbanks Trail, 1909.
(<http://www.alaska101.com/exploreAlaska/maps/richardsonHwy.gif>)

An initial survey of the route was conducted in the summer of 1904, and estimates of \$1.5 million were made to improve the existing route from pack trail to wagon road.¹²⁰ In order to fund the road construction work, legislation was suggested that 70% of the taxes on licensing fees within Alaska be set aside for road construction work, dubbed the Alaska Fund.

Construction would be overseen by a Board of Road Commissioners, “composed of an engineer officer of the U.S. Army to be appointed by the Secretary of War and two other officers drawn from troops stations in Alaska.”¹²¹ The board was also given the ability to decide where roads were needed based on petitioned need. Roads were only to be built to permanent settlements, thereby not wasting funding and effort constructing roads to transitory or impermanent mining settlements.

¹²⁰ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 7.

¹²¹ Naske, *Alaska Road Commission Historical Narrative*, 24

On January 27, 1905, the legislation was signed into law creating the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) with Major Wilds Preston Richardson was named as the president of the board. Richardson was familiar with Alaska, having been stationed at Fort St. Michael at the mouth of the Yukon River and overseeing military and judicial action along the Yukon River prior to the establishment of the Third Judicial District of Alaska. Richardson was also familiar with the previous road construction work of the U.S. Army.

Five years prior in 1900, Congress had appropriated \$450,000 to build “a communications system which would tie Alaska and the United States together.”¹²² The proposed telegraph line, dubbed the Washington Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph line (WAMCAT), was intended to connect all of the military forts within Alaska, and from them to the contiguous United States and was specifically to be for military purposes. By 1901, landlines had been constructed connecting Dawson City, Yukon Territory, to Fort St. Michael. Soon after, cables were completed connecting Valdez to Fort Egbert along the Trans-Alaska Military Road. In view of this previous connection, Richardson enlisted the U.S. Army to aid in construction efforts, as the military was already in charge of the telegraph line. As branch from Gakona to Fairbanks was of particular military importance, “Richardson then asked the Army to assign a company of engineer troops to Alaska. This company, to be stationed at Valdez, would work under the direction of the Board in improving the military trail and mail route between Valdez, Fairbanks, and the Yukon” as well as construct new telegraph cable along the new route.¹²³

During the winter of 1905, construction efforts were concentrated on surveying and flagging the new military route. In 1906, the ARC and the U.S. Army Signal Corps began an official working relationship, with the telegraph cable line being officially changed to match the

¹²² Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 81

¹²³ Naske, *Alaska Road Commission Historical Narrative*, 31.

line of the new road. Having the road and telegraph lines parallel one another would provide additional funding for the road and allow for easy access to the cable line by established wagon road. Construction on the wagon road commenced, with funding coming from two different sources. Military funds were used primarily on the main Trans-Alaska Military Road, while the Alaska Fund was used for local road improvements and construction of smaller trails leading from the main road to smaller communities along the route.¹²⁴



Figure 16. Traveling to Fairbanks by bicycle, in Tielke Canyon, undated. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum.

¹²⁴ Naske, *Alaska Road Commission Historical Narrative*, 40.

Prior to the creation of the Trans-Alaska Military Road and the ARC, travel from Valdez to the Interior was accomplished by foot or pack animal. The trail was often just barely wide enough for a small wagon or sled. During winter months, sufficient snow coverage was required in order for supplies and mail to be brought over the route from Valdez,¹²⁵ as dogsled was the most efficient means of transportation in the winter months. In the later winter months of January and February, it was possible to ride the trail on a bicycle; the wisdom of this means of transportation was questioned, but adventurous travelers had succeeded by 1905.¹²⁶ In 1907, the best time made for travel over the route from Valdez to Fairbanks was accomplished by Ed Orr in a time of six days, ten hours, and ten minutes for the entire 400-mile-long route.¹²⁷

There were two major routes once north of Isabel Pass, the Winter Trail and the Summer Trail. The Winter Route followed the Delta River once out of the pass to the junction of the Delta and Tanana Rivers at Big Delta. This route was not ideal for summer travel, however, due to the shifting nature of the Delta River, and a secondary Summer Route was constructed on firm ground. The Summer Trail diverged from the Winter Trail at Donnelly Roadhouse just north of Isabel Pass, crossed overland around the east side of Donnelly Dome, and up to Big Delta where it rejoined the Winter Trail. The Winter Trail was permanently abandoned in 1907 following road improvements on the Summer Trail.

The goal of the ARC was to improve both routes into a wagon road, thereby improving on the total travel time and the difficulties associated with traveling extensive distances over pack trails. The trail was increased to a width of ten to sixteen feet depending on the section of road, with adequate grade and drainage to sustain traffic. In order to improve drainage, it was

¹²⁵ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, December 10, 1906.

¹²⁶ *Fairbanks Daily News*, February 18, 1905.

¹²⁷ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report 1907*.

sometimes necessary to remove the vegetative ground cover, which resulted in the melting of the permafrost layer not far below the surface. To combat this, crews utilized corduroy construction, a technique that involved placing wood poles parallel to the roadbed and then covering it with a second layer at right angles with the first.¹²⁸ Corduroy construction is still employed on small rural access trails, as it provides a stable platform for travel over bogs and swampy ground. Additional drainage was provided by the construction of additional culverts as needed, usually of log taken from the surrounding vegetation. The construction of permanent-intending bridges also began, although bridge construction was often inadequate in the face of violent glacier rivers.



Figure 17. Corduroy road construction, ca. 1930s. Walter Hodge Papers, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives.

¹²⁸ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 8.

By 1908, over one-third of the route was officially suitable for wagon travel and “with the steady improvement of the overland trail to the coast, our spring and fall periods of isolation diminish with equal steadiness, and the time is now in sight when the freeze-up will have lost much of its significance.”¹²⁹ Nineteen construction crews were in working steadily on the trail during the construction season of 1909,¹³⁰ and the first motorcycles were able to make the trip in two days in April of 1909. Motorcycles became increasingly used on the trail, outfitted to pull sleds.¹³¹ The trail was officially deemed a wagon road by 1910, although it was still not meant for heavy traffic during the summer months or automobiles. Mail runs were being made three times per week by 1910,¹³² and 3,500 people and 2,500 tones of freight were moved over the Trail during that season.¹³³

The first serious discussion of upgrading the road for automobile use was suggested in 1912, and by 1913 had been improved to the extent that an automobile was able to make the trip from Fairbanks to Valdez. Bobby Sheldon, a Fairbanks freight hauler and automobile hobbyist, successfully made the trip in a 1913 Model T, averaging nine-miles-per-hour.¹³⁴ Following this success, more automobiles quickly followed suit, to the extent that the ARC was forced to declare that it made “no pretense of having built roads adapted for automobile travel” and widely discouraged their use on the trail.¹³⁵ By 1915, automobiles were in such extensive use that the

¹²⁹ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 23, 1908.

¹³⁰ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 8.

¹³¹ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 13, 1909.

¹³² Hallock Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail* (Seattle: The Alaska Publishing Company, 1910), 14.

¹³³ Edman, Hudson, and Johnson, *Fifty Years of Highways*, 7

¹³⁴ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 10.

¹³⁵ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 10.

mail runs were made exclusively by auto.¹³⁶ The use of automobiles to haul freight and passengers quickly followed.



Figure 18. Model T Ford traveling from Fairbanks to Valdez, 1913 or 1914. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

The entrance of the U.S. to World War I in 1917 saw the use of the road as a military transportation route, with trucks introduced for use along the entire length for hauling freight and inspecting and repairing the telegraph system. The use of motorized vehicles “was responsible for cutting the time necessary for an inspection of the line, a round trip of 740 miles, from six weeks to ten days.”¹³⁷ Richardson was relieved of ARC command in August of 1917 and transferred to the war effort, ending his official stewardship of road construction in Alaska. His commitment to the route had been so extreme that it had for some years been referred to as

¹³⁶ *Alaska Citizen*, October 4, 1915.

¹³⁷ Mudgett, *Building Alaska with the U.S. Army*, 104.

“Richardson’s Hobby” and he continued to write editorials praising the road and the work of the people who maintained it.¹³⁸ In 1919, the ARC officially renamed the route from Valdez to Fairbanks the “Richardson Road” in honor the amount of work Richardson had put into the road, and in 1920 the road was rebranded the Richardson Highway.¹³⁹

A shift in the use of the Valdez Trail began in 1911. All travelers heading for Fairbanks since 1901 had used the route, and all mail and freight was hauled over the trail. Freighting companies, including the Ed Orr Stage Company, regularly made trips from the coast to the Interior and back again, leaving several times per week by 1911. However, discovery of high-grade copper ore in the mountains 60 miles east of Copper Center resulted in an increase in transportation needs to the region. Initially, the mines were accessible by road, with a trunk road connecting to the Valdez Trail at Chitina south of Copper Center. A secondary road connected the mines with the port town of Cordova, east of Valdez. Construction on a railroad connecting the mines with Cordova was completed in April 1911, leading to easy transportation through the coastal Chugach Mountains.¹⁴⁰

The completion of the Copper River and North West (CR&NW) Railroad resulted in a drastic shift in use for the lower section of the Valdez Trail. It proved to be cheaper to send mail and freight over the rail line to the mines and then on to Chitina over a connector line. As a result, the lower section of the Valdez Trail fell into disuse. Stage and freight began to connect from the rail line terminus at Chitina to Fairbanks, and by 1913 little stage or freight was being taking over the southern portion. The route was a faster method of travel, with the travel time

¹³⁸ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 22, 1917.

¹³⁹ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 20, 1920.

¹⁴⁰ Lone E. Janson, *The Copper Spike* (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 1975), 137.

from Fairbanks to Chitina listed at 45 hours in August of 1913.¹⁴¹ In January of 1913, news items in Fairbanks urged people to consider traveling by stage through to Valdez rather than taking the rail line from Chitina, in an attempt to support the now-failing roadhouses south of Chitina.¹⁴² The trail was kept open all winter only through the efforts of the residents of Valdez in an attempt to prove that the Trail was the only sure route into the Interior.¹⁴³ By 1915, the main users of the southern portion of the trail consisted of area mushers.¹⁴⁴

The use of the Valdez Trail declined further beginning in 1921. Beginning in 1917, the federal government began investing in the Alaska Railroad, a rail line to connect the major port of Seward, Alaska with the then-named Mt. McKinley National Park and ultimately with Fairbanks. The goal of the federal government was to further open Interior Alaska for further settlement and development. The project was completed in 1923 at a total cost of \$65 million. The rail line began operating in 1917, even before the line was fully complete, with construction moving north from Seward and south from Fairbanks simultaneously. The Alaska Railroad had the advantage of providing comfortable, fast, and easy transportation of goods and people into the Interior, although at a steeper price than the stagecoaches on the Trail. Trains leaving Seward would run as far as the line had been completed, after which people took stagecoaches to reach the opposite end of the operating rail line.

In the end, the Trail could not compete with this new means of transportation. There was a massive move to rebrand the route as a pleasant and scenic method of accessing the Interior and began to be marketed for tourism. A mass marketing strategy was enacted in 1920 to advertise

¹⁴¹ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 25, 1913.

¹⁴² *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 27, 1913.

¹⁴³ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 27, 1913.

¹⁴⁴ *Alaska Citizen*, October 14, 1915.

the route Outside, complete with the distribution of post cards.¹⁴⁵ The completion of the Alaska Railroad as far as Broad Pass in 1921, leaving only a few miles of coach travel, meant that the decision was made to begin closing the Richardson Highway for winter travel. This decision was in direct contrast to the original use of the route, which had been focused almost entirely as a winter route into the isolated Interior. The highway had lost significance to the point that the only winter travel over the route was localized or for the purpose of maintaining the telegraph line, which for several years had been gradually being upgraded to telephone line.¹⁴⁶

The advertisement of the Richardson Highway as a tour route was relatively successful, and by 1923 the road had been officially upgrade for use by automobiles.¹⁴⁷ Outside tour companies had picked up advertisements for the route and began working to provide tour trips, calling the highway the “Golden Belt Line” and “appealing to the more adventurous traveler.”¹⁴⁸ The name “Golden Belt Line” and the use of the term “highway” were considered misnomers to travelers unfamiliar with Alaska; “to Outsider and inexperienced travelers who are used to concrete highways and easy travel, the term highway (it being like no other highway they ever saw) enables them to criticize it harshly from a highway standpoint, whereas if it were called trail, and the found it anything better than a trail anywhere, they would be compelled to boost it.”¹⁴⁹

Transportation of mail and passengers along the Richardson highway further declined with the introduction of aviation. The earliest flights in Alaska had taken place at air shows beginning in 1914, but the potential for the use as a viable means of transportation did not begin to catch on

¹⁴⁵ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 20, 1920.

¹⁴⁶ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 11, 1921.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 11.

¹⁴⁹ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 14, 1925.

until the early 1920s. It was not viewed as a practical means of transportation until 1925 due to the extreme temperatures of Alaskan airspace in summer and winter and the lack of appropriate landing areas. In 1925, however, the Territorial legislature appropriated \$5,000 for the construction of airfields, and the ARC was given the task of construction at major locations.¹⁵⁰ By 1930, 61 government-funded airfields had been constructed, with countless more in private operation. “Increased use of airplanes led to decreased use of some trails and roads, and in some cases to their decreased maintenance or abandonment.”¹⁵¹

During the 1930s, the Richardson Highway saw an increase in passenger and freight traffic linking the Interior to the coast and newly opened mining opportunities. While the rest of the U.S. was in the throws of the Great Depression, mining activity increased as a response to the increase in the price of gold and other precious metals. Additionally, the federal government had raised the cost of transportation over the Alaska Railroad in an attempt to cover losses. This led to a thirty-five percent increase in traffic along the Richardson Highway. Attempts to raise taxes on licensing fees and the requirement of tolls to utilize bridges and ferries on the Richardson Highway in order to encourage use of the Alaska Railroad led to sometimes-violent conflict with Alaska residents. By 1942, the government had “effectively given up the struggle to force the Alaskan residents and businesses to use the railroad rather than the road system.”¹⁵²

The Richardson Highway became the object of military study during the build up of international hostilities in the late 1930s. In 1939, “Congress passed a bill (later known as the Initial Defense Appropriation Act) that provided federal funding to states and territories for

¹⁵⁰ Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview* (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, 2014), 57.

¹⁵¹ Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview*, 58.

¹⁵² Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview*, 69.

military readiness.”¹⁵³ This included funds for the creation of military installations. Alaska had the distinction of being considered a strategic military location, and Army air and naval bases were constructed across the territory. In order to better connect the various bases on the Alaskan mainland (primarily in Anchorage and Fairbanks), funds were dedicated to the connection of roads from Anchorage to the Richardson Highway and the overall improvement of the Richardson Highway to handle the increase in heavy traffic. The First Deficiency Bill of 1941 provided for the construction of a highway from Palmer (Anchorage) to the Richardson Highway, later known as the Glenn, Highway, and in 1942, the First Deficiency Appropriate Act provided \$2.2 million for bridge construction and widening and realignment of the Richardson Highway.¹⁵⁴ Construction of the Alaska Highway, connecting Alaska to the contiguous U.S., began in 1943. Funds totaling nearly \$1 million were appropriated for the Richardson Highway to bring the road up to the same standards as were being employed on the Alaska Highway. Despite the increase in funds and road improvements, the ARC in 1944 continued to report the need for funds to continue and increase construction of the Richardson Highway.¹⁵⁵

The 1950s and 1960s saw an expansion of tourism, mining, oil, and fishing industries across the state. The military presence in Alaska remained high, owing to the ongoing conflicts of the Cold War and Alaska’s proximity to Russia. “The defense industry in Alaska was the

¹⁵³ Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview*, 75.

¹⁵⁴ Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview*, 76.

¹⁵⁵ Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview*, 78.

biggest employer and biggest spender in the state from the 1940s to the 1970s,” and was only surpassed in the late 1970s by the sudden massive expansion of the oil industry.¹⁵⁶

In 1968, vast oil fields were discovered in Prudhoe Bay off Alaska’s North Slope. The problem was transporting the oil from the North Slope of Alaska to the contiguous U.S. Construction quickly began in the 1970s on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, which runs from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez, a distance of approximately 800 miles over unsettled country. In order to facilitate construction and maintenance of the pipeline, a gravel road was built from Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay, which became known as the Dalton Highway, and was eventually built to state secondary road design requirements.¹⁵⁷ The Dalton Highway was constructed to connect to the Richardson Highway, and the pipeline beings to follow the Richardson as soon as it passes Fairbanks. The existing road provided and continues to provide easy access to the pipeline. Construction activities brought a sudden economic boost to the communities along the highway, providing seasonal labor and utilizing the resources available at each community.

Today, the Richardson Highway is used for access to the pipeline, for recreational purposes, and as a route for hauling freight from Valdez. The communities along the route continue to provide support for travelers. The Richardson is a favorite route among Alaskans, and is currently being investigated for historic significance. The DOT&PF and SHPO have both agreed to treat the stretch of highway from Sourdough to Delta Junction as eligible for inclusion in the NRHP on the basis of the importance of the route for the development of the state overall and the Interior specifically. The various involved parties are investigating what the designation

¹⁵⁶ Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview*, 98.

¹⁵⁷ Mead and Hunt and Cultural Resource Consultants, LLC, *Alaska Roads Historic Overview*, 119.

of a 150-mile long stretch of mostly rural highway will entail, and how it will impact construction and usage in the future.

The Richardson Highway stands as a testament of the activities of Major Wilds P. Richardson during his tenure as head of the Alaska Road Commission. The route, stretching from Valdez to Fairbanks and crossing two major mountain ranges, evolved from a trail suitable for foot and pack animal to a fully-paved two-lane transportation route into the Interior. The route from Valdez to Fairbanks has not shifted dramatically during its more than 100-year history, with only slight realignment along most of the route to accommodate changing engineering and automotive technologies. The importance of the highway as a major transportation artery is not to be understated.

CHAPTER FOUR: ALASKAN ROADHOUSES

Alaskan roadhouses are establishments providing life-saving amenities such as food, shelter, and information to travelers in Alaska. Roadhouses originally developed along transportation routes approximately one day's travel apart and succeeded and failed in relation to their location rather than quality of amenities. While roadhouse systems were not unique to Alaska, they were extensive, growing along every transportation route in Alaska. The importance of roadhouses in Alaska was obvious to travelers, who often lived or died depending on their ability and intelligence at stopping for food, shelter, and information.

Roadhouse systems in Alaska grew as a direct result of the increase of travel along defined transportation routes. As prospectors, fortune hunters, and adventure seekers poured into Alaska, the immediate need for food and shelter along the trail led to the creation of rudimentary establishments. They were usually situated approximately one day's journey apart and at the crossings of bodies of water and trail junctions. The earliest roadhouses were built at a distance of ten to twenty miles apart depending on the terrain and method of transport. Because roadhouses were essential to the survival of travelers, they were integral to the transportation system. More generally, the roadhouses were viewed as potential locations for growing settlements, as recommended by Richardson in 1908.¹⁵⁸

For the purposes of this study, a roadhouse is any establishment that provided food and shelter to travelers along an established transportation route. As late as 1925, it was reported that

¹⁵⁸ *Hot Springs Echo*, October 31, 1908.

roadhouses were known to be rustic affairs and tourists were warned not to expect them to be up to contemporary hotel standards.¹⁵⁹ Roadhouse systems themselves were not unique to Alaska.

In Alaska, roadhouses developed along every trail system, including the famed Chilkoot and White Pass trails, leading from Skagway and Dyea to Dawson City at the heart of the Yukon Klondike gold rush. Roadhouses in Alaska did not operate solely as sources of survival, although that is what caused their initial development. The roadhouses also served as community centers for the spread-out prospecting population that had invaded Alaska, distributing mail and civic notices along with news and supplies. Established roadhouses served as gathering points during holidays, drawing in tens of prospectors from the surrounding areas for celebrations and potlucks. As the roadhouses were located on the road system and were generally larger spaces than the average prospector's cabin, they often served as locations for area residents to engage in civic events when a judge or other authority passed through, including court rulings and marriages. The roadhouses also served as natural points for the staging of ARC crews. Located a day's journey apart, they provided easy access to construction areas and had ample room for men and equipment. The operating roadhouses could often make extra revenue by covert activities such as gambling and prostitution. Rika's Roadhouse and Rapids Roadhouse both had prostitution operating in the vicinity; there are conflicted reports as to whether this was encouraged by the roadhouse owners and proprietors. Several of the roadhouses also sold postcards to travelers, providing them with a method of communication to the outside while also promoting trail establishments. An interesting alternative use for the roadhouses occurred during the winter of 1919; in response to spreading flu epidemic that year, quarantine centers were set

¹⁵⁹ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 4, 1925.

up at various roadhouses to hold travelers so as to ensure they were not infected. On the Richardson Highway, these roadhouses included Rapids Roadhouse and Pile Driver roadhouse.

Dogsled teams hauling freight were often based out of individual roadhouses. Mail deliveries were initially done through dogsled, and the mail drivers had individual sections of trail for which they were responsible. The mail drivers were occasionally owners and proprietors of roadhouses, such as Fred Nichols at Paxson Roadhouse.¹⁶⁰ The roadhouses almost always had accommodations for dog teams, usually long low buildings adjacent to the mail roadhouse buildings. “Proprietors generally had a stock of dried salmon, the most common dog food in early days.”¹⁶¹ Additionally, the roadhouses often served as official post offices, including Gulkana Roadhouse and Copper Center Roadhouse, and furthering the connection of the roadhouses and the mail lines.

As the trails improved and transportation moved from dogsled to horse sleighs, the roadhouses constructed barns and sheds to house and maintain freight horses and equipment. Some of them were independently owned and maintained. Edward S. Orr, owner of the main freight company on the Richardson for many of the early years, maintained barns and spare horses at many roadhouses, including Paxson Roadhouse and Donnelly Roadhouse. Orr was also a main source of information on road conditions throughout the Interior. Orr had previously worked as an investigator of trail conditions and improvements in the Klondike, working with the Canadian government.¹⁶² Orr also undertook many road improvements himself in the early years, working in tandem with the roadhouse operators.¹⁶³ As road conditions improved even

¹⁶⁰ “Fred Nichols, veteran of trails, dies at Gulkana,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 14, 1926.

¹⁶¹ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 6.

¹⁶² “Orr not satisfied with Valdez Trail,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, November 10, 1906.

¹⁶³ “E. S. Orr tells of winter trail to Valdez,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, November 17, 1906.

further, the roadhouses began to offer mechanical services for automobiles, which were necessary due to the rough conditions on the road. This is a service many still offer.

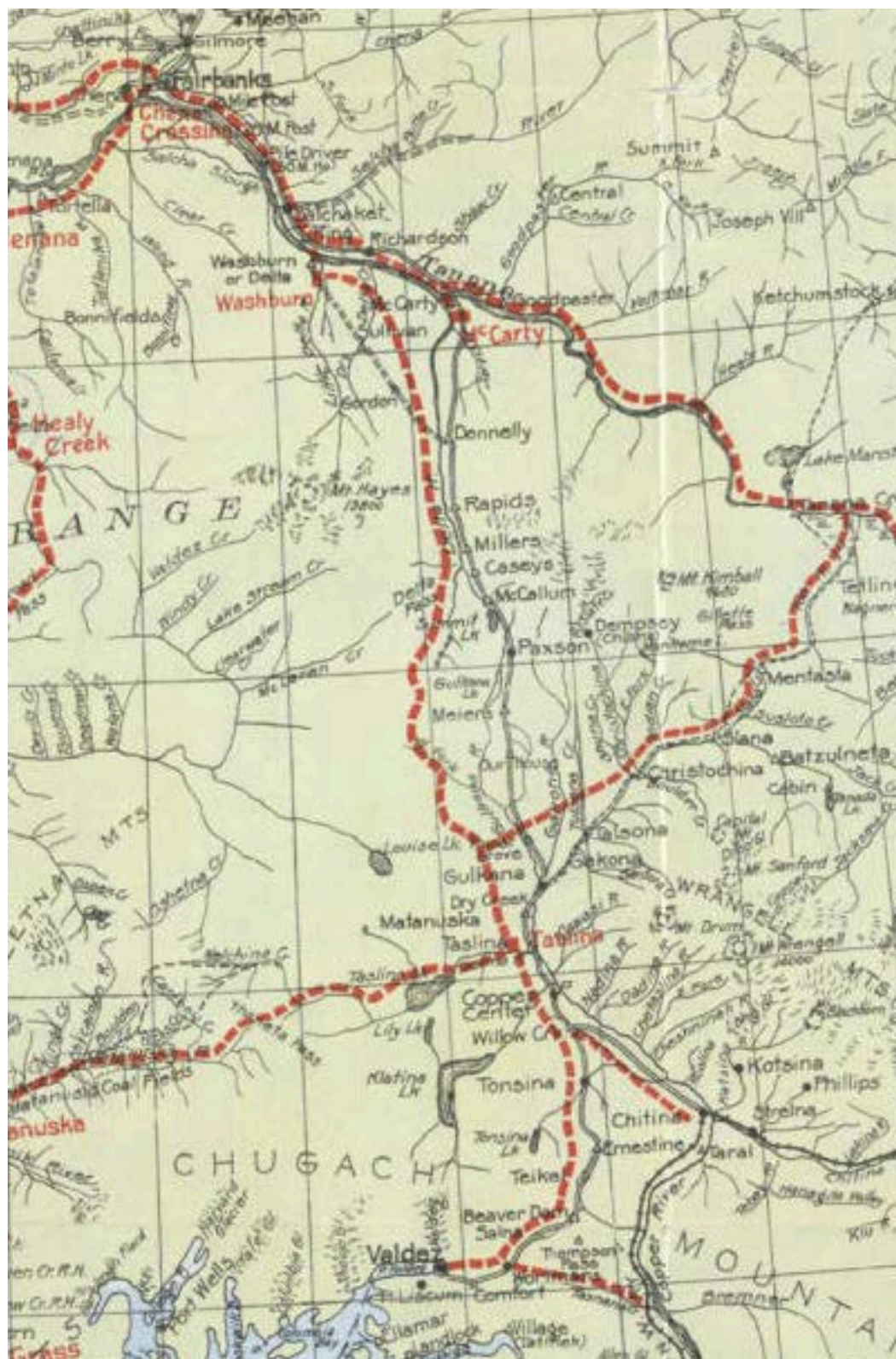


Figure 19. Map of the Richardson Highway, showing roadhouse locations, ca. 1914. Rare Map Collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The roadhouses of the Richardson Highway began to appear with the first beginnings of trail in 1899. Originally, tent communities and small shantytowns had appeared at various locations along the Valdez Glacier, providing for travelers attempting to cross over the glacier route. With the start of the Valdez Trail by Abercrombie in 1899, more formal roadhouses began to appear and spread quickly along the trail ahead of Abercrombie's construction crews. These early roadhouses were little more than reinforced tents and spruce log shelters. In a storm, however, or after a hard day along the trail, they were welcome respites for travelers.

As travel increased following the strike of gold in the Fairbanks region and the Valdez Trail was subsequently upgraded, roadhouses grew in size and popularity. At certain areas, such as Big Delta and Copper Center, multiple roadhouses sprang up, competing with one another until one folded and the other assumed its activities. When the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) was being built in 1900 onward, the U.S. Army Signal Corps located the telegraph maintenance and operating stations in conjunction with established roadhouses, as this offered further safety and stability for the one or two officers who would be stationed at each.

As the Valdez Trail was improved, the distance traveled in a day increased, and this caused several of the early roadhouses to fail and ultimately fold. Often, these failed roadhouses would be dismantled and transported to a neighboring roadhouse, where the materials would be then incorporated into an operating roadhouse. This happened to Wortman's Roadhouse, which was rebuilt following a fire using materials from the neighboring failed Wilson's Roadhouse. Other failed roadhouses became emergency shelters for travelers caught between operating roadhouses, such as happened at Glacier House. A few, such as the Overland Roadhouse, were given new life as a private farm and homestead base.

The declining use of the Richardson Highway and the increased speeds and capabilities of the automobile led to an increased number of failing roadhouses. Through the late 1910s and early 1920s, reports abound of roadhouses being closed for good. Just as the highway was being rebranded for use as a tourist route, the surviving roadhouses often shifted their focus from the conventional Alaskan traveler to the Alaskan tourist. Given their rustic nature and the natural landscape in which they were located, many of these roadhouses were able to market themselves as ideal locations for big game hunting and guided fishing. This was especially true for Rapids Roadhouse and neighboring Yost's Roadhouse. During the 1920s, Alaskan hunter Frank Glaser had taken over ownership of Rapids, and utilized it as a base for his activities as a big game hunting guide and market hunter. Yost's Roadhouse, by this point abandoned, was likewise utilized in the 1920s by bear hunters seeking to provide specimens for academic study.

The operation of a roadhouse was a difficult task, made so by the remote locations, the severity of the landscape, and the scarceness of resources. However, they provided life-saving services to travelers, and as such the owners and proprietors were often afforded celebrity status by area residents and those who utilized the trail. In 1906, it was reported that "roadhousing, at its best, is a thankless and almost profitless business, and we are inclined to consider the man who has the hardihood to out on the trail and build a shelter against the storm, as a good of a Samaritan."¹⁶⁴ News articles throughout the early twentieth century reported on the comings and goings of roadhouse proprietors and almost always included praise for their activities. The owners and proprietors seemed to constitute a community unto themselves. They often traveled together into Valdez or Fairbanks for supplies, and news articles report that they even attended weddings and holidays hosted by one another. They also provided one another with emergency

¹⁶⁴ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, December 10, 1906.

services. When the Birch Lake Roadhouse burned down in November of 1916, the proprietor, James Chisholm, was forced to walk to neighboring Dad Martin's Roadhouse to seek assistance. The roadhouse was lost, but the actions of the people at Dad Martin's Roadhouse were able to save Chisholm's feet, which had been frost bitten so badly they later required a two-week hospital stay in Fairbanks. In a similar vein, when Paxson's Roadhouse burned down in 1924, Alvin Paxson and his family were taken in by Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith at the Gulkana Roadhouse. This move was fortuitous for Paxson, as he took over operation of the Gulkana Roadhouse after Mrs. Griffith's death in 1925.

The operation of roadhouse systems as a single unit was aided by the fact that many establishments, especially along the Richardson, were often owned and operated by the same people over the years. Paxson, originally establishing his base of operations at Paxson's Roadhouse at Mile 185, also eventually came to own Our Home Roadhouse further south and operated the Gulkana Roadhouse until his death in 1926. Mrs. E. E. Dotty was the main proprietor of Wortman's Roadhouse for many years, but also owned and operated the roadhouse at Ptarmigan Drop further north. Charles Nevelius was an interesting character; by all account, he never owned a roadhouse, but operated Ptarmigan Drop, Rapids, and Yost's Roadhouses at various times throughout his life. Jack and Florence Sullivan began operating roadhouses together in Nome during the Nome gold rush; Florence had previously operated a roadhouse establishment near Dawson City during the height of the Klondike gold rush. When the couple moved to the Richardson Highway, they opened Sullivan's Roadhouse, which they operated from 1906 until its closure around 1920, after which they purchased and reopened Byler's Roadhouse closer to Fairbanks. They operated Byler's until their deaths a few months apart in 1924.

The roadhouses that remain today range from archaeological remains to fully operational roadhouses updated with the latest in modern conveniences. The operating roadhouses are not generally considered to be on par with modern luxury hotels such as the Princess Hotel chain, which operates one hotel on the Richardson. By Alaskan standards for local establishments, however, they are generally considered to be enjoyable. They generally offer a variety of food and drink, and operate in tandem with area guides for hunting, fishing, and even backcountry skiing. Two are operating as museums showcasing the history of transportation and pioneer life in the area. The greatest danger the roadhouses face is construction activity, as they are often close to the right-of-way for the Richardson Highway or lie in the path of proposed road realignment projects. The activities of construction crews can also be damaging to historic properties; the original 1905 roadhouse at Gakona was used by construction workers as a “smoke shack” while using the roadhouse as a base of activities in 2011. Vandalism occurs in these types of situations, whether intentional or not to the integrity of the historic property. Many of the operating roadhouses are also in danger from outdated modifications such as wiring; aging faulty wiring is blamed in the destruction of the Copper Center Roadhouse in 2013. Significantly, the roadhouses are most often threatened by a lack of knowledge of their significance within the historic development of the state of Alaska.

Alaskan roadhouses provided life-saving food, shelter, and information for early Alaskan travelers. They developed along every transportation route in the territory and served as community centers, hospitals, and bases for construction activities. The importance of roadhouses to the success of Alaska cannot be overstated, and they are quickly vanishing from the built environment. It is vital that the state take action to prevent the loss of these important early structures.

RICHARDSON HIGHWAY CASE STUDIES

Tiekel/Tiekhell Roadhouse, Vaughn's Roadhouse



Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Figure 20. A winter scene of a few log buildings and horses pulling sleighs full of hay and other supplies at Tiekel. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

There is some debate as to when the Tiekel Roadhouse, 50.8 miles north of Valdez, was constructed. The identity of the original builder is also open to question. According to the 1974 study, the roadhouse was first established in 1904 by Frederick Vaughn and was called Vaughn's Roadhouse.¹⁶⁵ The 1984 study has a more detailed history, claiming that it first opened in March 1902 and was constructed by the Copper River Mining, Trading, and Development Company, after which it was purchased by Mrs. Ed Wood in 1904, and then passed to Fred Vaughn in

¹⁶⁵ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 13.

1909.¹⁶⁶ Regardless of its origins, it was situated in a settlement called Tiekhell City, a mining boomtown situated on the west bank of the Tiekel River.¹⁶⁷ The roadhouse consisted of a two-story log roadhouse with a complex of outlying buildings. It operated as a roadhouse during the 1930s, but by 1948 it was used as a refreshment stand. By 1962, it was operating as a truck stop, offering gasoline, sandwiches, telephone, and emergency lodgings.¹⁶⁸ At one point, the roadhouse was torn down due to deterioration and the present residence constructed with the salvaged lumber.¹⁶⁹

The roadhouse site today is no longer located on the road, the route having been straightened in this area. It is accessible, however, and is used as a private residence. The rebuilt roadhouse is beautifully maintained, sitting on a foundation of stone not far from the bank of the river. The outbuildings remain standing and in use, and objects obviously associated with the early years of the roadhouse lie scattered about the site. In all, the site is in excellent condition and bears further investigation for its potential historic significance.

¹⁶⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 15.

¹⁶⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 15.

¹⁶⁸ Morris Communications Company, *The Milepost* (Augusta, Georgia: Morris Communications Company, 1962), 98.

¹⁶⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 15.



Figure 21. Residence at the Tiekel location. Photo by Casey Woster.

Tonsina Roadhouse



Figure 22. Tonsina Roadhouse, ca. 1910, with group preparing to leave on the stage. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The Tonsina Roadhouse was located 78 miles north of Valdez on the south bank of the Tonsina River, at the best site to locate a river crossing. A primitive log structure was built at the site in 1900 by Jim Donaldson and was the first recorded roadhouse at the location. In 1903, he traded the roadhouse for a share in the Gold Dust Exchange in Valdez. The company then leased the roadhouse to a man named Jake Nafsted, who in later years operated the Windsor Hotel in

Seattle and dealt primarily in bootleg liquor.¹⁷⁰ Nafsted constructed the first permanent building at the site that same year.¹⁷¹ When Judge Wickersham stayed at the establishment in 1905, he reported a decent meal in the company of a “motley crew of Indians, miners, mushers, prostitutes, etc.”¹⁷² Nafsted continued to add onto the roadhouse, and by 1907 the building could provide shelter for up to 60 travelers.¹⁷³ It was advertised as being “modern and up to date,” with a store, post office, telegraph station, saloon, and providing hot baths.¹⁷⁴

In 1927, the roadhouse was purchased by Andy Deringer, who operated automobile tours in the region. He began to use the lodge as an overnight stop for his tours.¹⁷⁵ In 1928, the original roadhouse burned to the ground. There is no recorded cause of the fire, but many of the early roadhouses fell victim to kitchen grease fires, or later, to electrical fires caused by poor wiring. Deringer, knowing the value of a roadhouse at that crossing, purchased and dismantled a surplus building from Fort Liscum, an Army post in Valdez. He transported the building to the roadhouse site, and reconstructed it.¹⁷⁶ The total cost of the purchase and transport was more than \$30,000, but was advertised as having hot and cold running water in every room and was called “a credit to any highway anywhere.” The improvements included the construction of a new airfield adjacent to the roadhouse.¹⁷⁷ This is the building that stands today. Originally, the

¹⁷⁰ Bufvers, *Valdez Trail Days*, 6.

¹⁷¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 22.

¹⁷² James Wickersham, *Personal Diary of James Wickersham, 1900-1939*, on microfilm at Alaska State Historical Library, Juneau, Alaska.

¹⁷³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 20-23.

¹⁷⁴ “Tonsina roadhouse ad,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 12, 1909.

¹⁷⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 22.

¹⁷⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 22.

¹⁷⁷ “Rapid journey is made by Marshal,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 13, 1929.

building contained 16 guest rooms. Deringer later built onto the roadhouse, adding 8 more guest rooms to the overall layout.¹⁷⁸



Figure 23. The new Tonsina Roadhouse, ca. 1930s. George A. Parks Photographs, Alaska State Library, Historical Collections.

The roadhouse has been in operation continuously from the time it was constructed, under a succession of owners. The construction of the Alyeska Pipeline in the 1970s brought change to the region, with a large construction camp quickly surrounding the roadhouse. The pipeline, which follows the route of the Richardson Highway, was an economic boom to both Alaska and

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 14.

the roadhouses, bringing much needed money into the area beginning with the original construction. During this period, a new lodge was built next to the old roadhouse, a one-story L-shaped building. The new lodge still serves as a community center for the small population in the area. It hosts a Solstice festival in the summer, and a Super Bowl party in the winter.

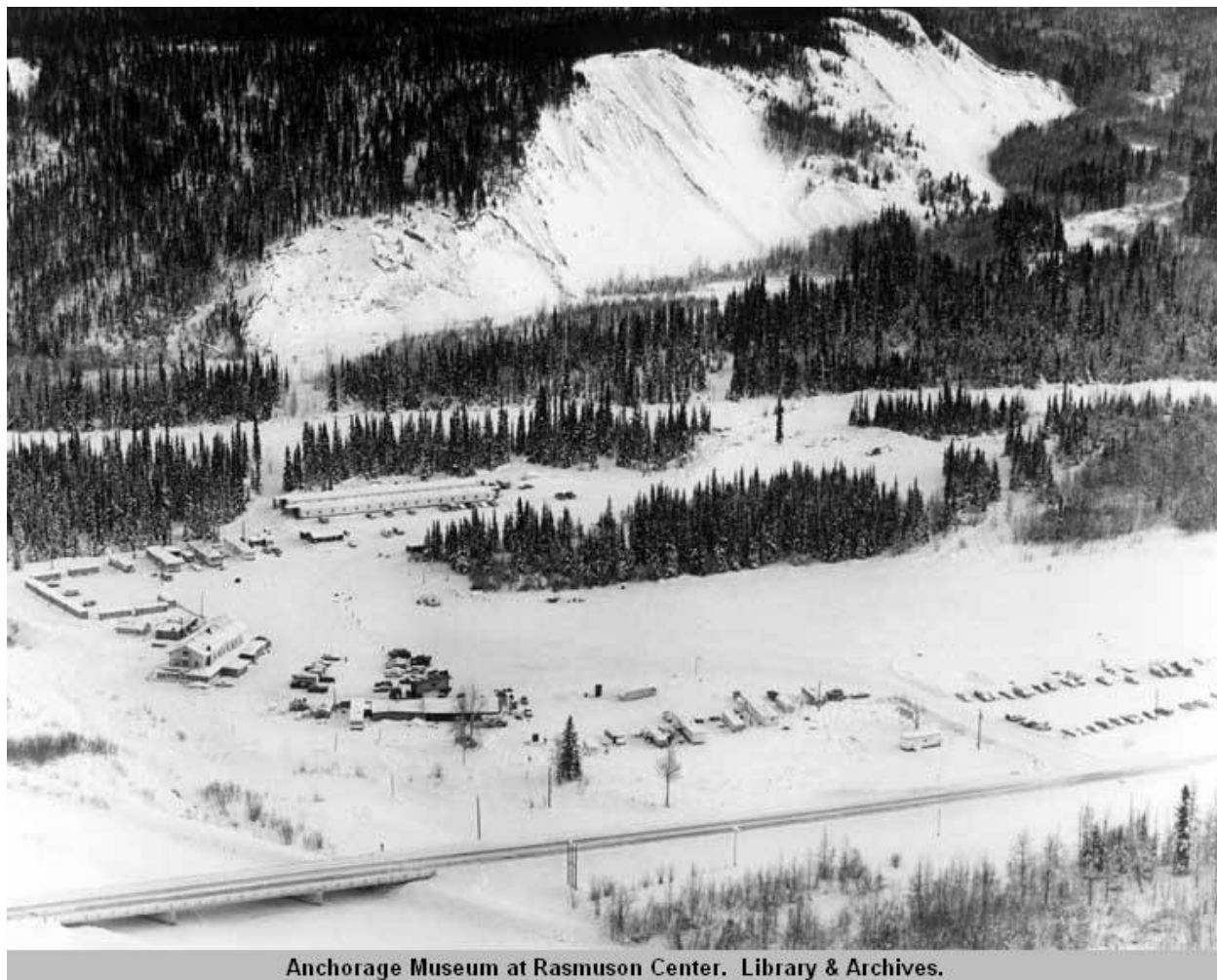


Figure 24. Tonsina Roadhouse surrounded by the Trans Alaska Pipeline construction camp, 1975. Steve McCutcheon Trans Alaska Pipeline System Construction Collection University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The 1929 roadhouse is a rectangular wood frame front-gabled structure with a metal roof and clapboard siding. The building is oriented east to west, with the main entrance to the lodge in the west façade of the building. The windows in the historic lodge are all green painted wood

framed, symmetrical, and vertically aligned. Both north and south façades have nine windows each on the second and third floors, with the north side containing additional windows along the ground floor. The upper most windows are the smallest, and are square, nine-light casement windows. The windows along the second floor are one-over-one double-hung sash windows. The windows along the ground floor of the north side are large modern picture windows, with one small rectangular window in the northwest corner. The gable ends also have symmetrical windows, with the third floor window centered the gable end and paired, two-over-two double-hung sash windows. An identical window is situated directly below it in the second floor. The second floor center window has two-over-two double-hung sash windows situated at even intervals on either side.



Figure 25. Tonsina Roadhouse today. Photo by Casey Woster.

The main entrance to the roadhouse is from the west façade. The main entrance into the building is currently disguised by a large glassed sun porch that wraps around the west façade of the building and continues for a short span along the north and south façades of the building. Entrance into the sun porch is through double swinging two panel doors centered on the west façade directly in front of the main entrance. They are painted green to match the color of the trim along the windows.

The sun porch across the front of the roadhouse consists of six-over-six single hung sash windows in the same treatment as the rest of the roadhouse situated above a wall covered in the same clapboard siding as the building. A large wooden fire escape and balcony was added some time after the original construction to the roof of the sun porch to provide access to the third floor. The east end of the building has another rectangular gabled addition with wood lap siding, presumably for kitchen or bath space.

There are two brick chimneys, one large near the southeast corner of the building, and a smaller one rising from the center of the building through the center roof peak. This smaller chimney has a rounded stovepipe and hood, indicating the use of a different type of heating unit. The roof is covered in corrugated metal and triangular brackets support the deep eaves along the gable ends.

The site immediately surrounding the historic roadhouse consists largely of untended grass that extends outward to the edge of the surrounding wooded landscape. Bushes and trees have taken root along the edges of the roadhouse, obscuring lower sections of it. The clearing extends to the west of the historic roadhouse, and is used for RV parking and campsites. The campsites are unorganized; as people come in they pick a clear area to use. Currently, overflow parking for the new lodge and attached camping area is along the south side of the roadhouse.

The overall condition of the roadhouse is fair to poor. Work will be required to bring it to a modern standard for habitation, but the work is largely cosmetic and well worth undertaking. The building is used by the owners for storage and appears to be largely weather sealed and in sound structural condition. Access to the interior of the structure was not allowed, and many of the interior conditions detailed here are based on similar structures along the road.

The primary concern with the roadhouse is bringing the wiring and plumbing to a modern standard. Many of the roadhouses were constructed prior to electricity being readily available in the rural areas of Alaska and wiring was often improperly installed, leading to fires. In addition, interior plumbing was often added after the original construction, and while it is adequate in most cases, it may need to be examined for failures prior to being inhabited.

The windows of the roadhouse are often broken and boarded over. Replacement glass will need to be installed where the panes are broken. Where windows have been removed entirely and replaced with plywood, replacement windows will need to be installed that match the original.

Much of the metal roofing material is corroded and buckled due to prolonged exposure. The worn material will need to be replaced to protect the integrity of the roof. Research will need to be done to determine an appropriate in-kind replacement.

Some of the exterior clapboard siding appears to be weather worn, the paint beginning to flake away. The damaged material will need to be replaced to match the historic, and the flaking paint sanded to prevent further deterioration. In addition, the paint will need to be examined to determine the original color, and possibly returned to that color.

The interior condition is largely unknown. The ground floor is used for storage, but the carpeting appears to be industrial and acoustic paneling was installed at some point in the past.

The carpeting will likely need to be removed entirely, to restore it back to the original hard wood flooring. The acoustic paneling will also need to be removed, and the above ceiling examined and possibly refinished.

Copper Center Lodge, Hotel Holman, Blix's Roadhouse, Copper Center Lodge



Figure 26. Copper Center accommodations, undated. Photo courtesy of Candy Waugaman.

The settlement known as Copper Center as a gathering of prospectors living in tents in the late 1890s. In 1898 Andrew Holman erected the first temporary tent roadhouse, calling it Hotel Holman. A log hotel and trading post followed quickly in 1899. Holman began working with the mail service, making runs by dog sled to deliver mail further down the trail with employees operating the roadhouse during the runs. In 1901, Holman became the president of the Copper River Mining, Trading, and Development Company, and the roadhouse became part of the company's assets. Ringwald Blix, the company secretary, was made postmaster for Copper Center that year. He began leasing the roadhouse in 1906, and was eventually able to purchase

the roadhouse from the company.¹⁷⁹ At this point, the roadhouse was referred to alternately as Hotel Holman or Blix's Roadhouse, depending on the source.¹⁸⁰ It was advertised as being "the ONLY hotel between Valdez and Fairbanks,"¹⁸¹ likely due to the name more than anything else. It also carried the very latest additions available of papers and magazines from the states.¹⁸² Blix operated the roadhouse with success until 1918, when he sold his holdings to Hans Distearson, stating his intent to returning to the states for an extended vacation.¹⁸³ In the Alaskan papers, extended vacation was often code for never returning.

In December 1919, a fire destroyed McCreary's Roadhouse, a secondary roadhouse and store in Copper Center belonging to Howard Barnes.¹⁸⁴ The fire did not deter Barnes and his wife, however. In 1921, Mrs. Florence Barnes, the postmistress of Copper Center, began to lease the Blix property and roadhouse. She was able to purchase the roadhouse in 1923, and changed the name to Copper Center Lodge.¹⁸⁵ In addition to being postmistress and roadhouse proprietress, Mrs. Barnes also had a habit of taking in orphaned children. Over the years, these included Lucy Craig, the daughter of a prospector and his Native wife,¹⁸⁶ and the four children of roadhouse man Fred Nichols of Paxson after his death in 1926.¹⁸⁷ She was also renown for her excellent cooking.¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 15.

¹⁸¹ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 13, 1909

¹⁸² Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 26.

¹⁸³ "Ringwald Blix, Copper Center roadhouse, sells out; goes Outside," *Alaska Citizen*, February 18, 1918.

¹⁸⁴ "Copper Center roadhouse fire," *Nenana News*, December 15, 1919.

¹⁸⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 28.

¹⁸⁶ Aileen Gallaher and Samme Gallaher, *Sisters* (Portland, OR: Epicenter Press, 2004), 186.

¹⁸⁷ "Personal mention," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 19, 1926.

¹⁸⁸ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 10.

In 1932, the Copper Center Lodge was partially destroyed by fire. Mrs. Barnes wasted no time in replacing the burned section, soon after replaced the section that had survived with newer, modern construction. The building was “an attractive building with diamond willow ornamenting the interior.”¹⁸⁹ The construction was reportedly undertaken by Art Laverty, an engineer for the Copper River and Northwest Railroad, in exchange for a life residence. Mrs. Barnes died in 1948, leaving everything she owned to the El Nathan Home for Children in Valdez. Three months later, the roadhouse was purchased by George and Katherine Ashby. The two were “determined to have a proper roadhouse... There were no hours, if a customer walked in late, a roadhouse owner had to get up, make them a coffee and food.” The roadhouse continued to serve as a gathering place, as well. “We inherited the old-timers left over from the gold rush. Every day in Mother’s lobby, they sat around the big Yukon stove playing cribbage while intermittently spitting tobacco into the stove.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 28.

¹⁹⁰ Judy Ferguson, “Gold Rush roadhouse: Jean Ashbury Huddleston, Alaskana Interview,” *Anchorage Daily News*, July 29, 2007.



Figure 27. Copper Center Lodge, August 1944. A. C. Kuehl Photographs, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

For several decades, the roadhouse continued to operate as it always had under the auspices of the Ashby family. Reviews of the roadhouse posted online ranged from life-long Alaskans extolling the wonderful food and atmosphere to tourists criticizing the establishment for not operating in the same manner and with the same luxuries as chain hotels. The roadhouse was often used as a base of operations for employees of the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, the National Park Service, Department of Transportation, and many other organizations and agencies.

Unfortunately for the Copper Center Lodge, tragedy struck in May of 2012. A fire broke out in the roadhouse on the morning of May 19th, with the suspected cause being bad wiring.

The fire quickly consumed the roadhouse, fueled by old dry wood and oiled logs, and fire services were relegated to simply protecting nearby structures.¹⁹¹

The site was quickly cleared however, as the owners plan to rebuild. By early June, the debris had been taken away, and plans had been formulated to rebuild the roadhouse. One realization that came out of the fire was that the structure had never been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, although it did have a Determination of Eligibility. The owners quickly rebuilt, and the new lodge was reopened in 2013. In 2015, the name of the establishment was changed to the Old Town Copper Center Inn and Restaurant.



Figure 28. Fire at Copper Center Lodge. *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 21, 2012.

¹⁹¹ “Bad wiring suspected in fire at historic Alaska roadhouse,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 21, 2012.

Gakona Roadhouse, Doyle's Ranch



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Figure 29. Undated photo of the Gakona Roadhouse. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

The Gakona Roadhouse is one example of extremely fortuitous placement along the trail system. Originally constructed by Jim Doyle in 1902 as a single story log building with a sod roof, it opened under the name Doyle's Ranch along what was then the Valdez-Eagle Trail.¹⁹² Doyle also established a homestead that included the roadhouse, clearing 80 acres of land for agriculture. In 1905, in response to the growing influence of Fairbanks as a mining boomtown and the decline of Eagle, the Army began construction of the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail, and

¹⁹² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 38.

Gakona served as the junction of the Valdez-Fairbanks and Valdez-Eagle trails. A new, larger roadhouse was constructed in either 1904 or 1905, a two-story log building with saddle-notched corners and a gable roof of rough sawn lumber covered by corrugated metal. The name had changed by that point to Gakona Roadhouse. The roadhouse had individual living quarters for the proprietor, a store, kitchen and dining room, two private rooms for guests, a dormitory on the second floor, and glass windows.¹⁹³ During a stay in 1905, Judge Wickersham recorded that while it was a good roadhouse, there was “no fresh air in it since the windows were put in last summer.”¹⁹⁴

In 1912 the roadhouse was sold to Mike Johnson, and passed to J. M. Elmer by 1919. Through Elmer, ownership was gradually taken over by the Slate Creek Mining Company. In 1926, the roadhouse was leased from the company by Arne Sundt, who was eventually able to purchase the property. A new roadhouse was constructed in 1929, in response to growing demand by increased mining in the nearby Chistochena and Nabesna areas.¹⁹⁵ Business spiked again during the Second World War with the construction of what is now the Tok Cut-off.¹⁹⁶

After the death of Arne Sundt in 1946, the roadhouse was operated by his widow and children until 1976, when it was purchased by Gerald and Barbara Strang.¹⁹⁷ In August of 1977, the original 1905 roadhouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2000 the newer roadhouse and surrounding buildings was listed as the Gakona Historic District. The 1929 roadhouse continues to operate, providing home cooked meals, and housing for tourists,

¹⁹³ Barbara F. Strang, *Gakona Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form 10-900* (Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation, December 2000), 8.

¹⁹⁴ Wickersham, *Personal Diary*, February 27, 1905.

¹⁹⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 38.

¹⁹⁶ Strang, *Gakona Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 9.

¹⁹⁷ Strang, *Gakona Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 9.

adventurists, and anyone employed in the area, including construction workers for the Department of Transportation.



Figure 30. 1905 roadhouse at Gakona, standing to the side of the Gakona complex. Photo by Casey Woster.

The roadhouse site is no longer along the route of the Richardson Highway. Currently, it is two miles east along the Tok Cut-Off. The 1905 roadhouse sits on the west side of the property, and is used for storage. It is slowly sinking into the ground as it deteriorates, and action is necessary to ensure that it remains standing. Recommendations were made in the 1974 study for the stabilization of the building and work done to return the building to use, but it is not determined if these recommendations were undertaken. If anything, the deterioration seems to have accelerated. The 1929 roadhouse, however, is in excellent condition.



Figure 31. 1929 roadhouse building at Gakona. Photo by Casey Woster.

Poplar Grove Roadhouse



Figure 32. Poplar Grove Roadhouse, undated. Photo courtesy of Candy Waugaman.

Poplar Grove Roadhouse, located 219 miles south of Fairbanks on the banks of an unnamed creek near the Gulkana River, did not start out with the intention of operating as a roadhouse. It consisted of two log cabins built by an unknown trapper at some point between 1904 and 1905. While he did not advertise his private residence, he gladly welcomed travelers for the night.¹⁹⁸ It first appeared in distance tables beginning in 1907 as Hamill's Roadhouse. By 1913, it was being operated by Dick Windmiller, and was referred to as Poplar Grove.¹⁹⁹ The name most likely derives from the large number of poplar trees in the immediate area.²⁰⁰ During

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 20.

¹⁹⁹ "Says trail is very rough," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 29, 1913.

²⁰⁰ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 20.

the 1920s, the roadhouse was operated by Gabe Aspland and partner Crampton.²⁰¹ In 1929, it was mentioned in travel guides as “a deserted roadhouse of days gone by.”²⁰²

Portions of the roadhouse still standing today, in a drastically deteriorated condition. It is located along a spur of the Richardson that is no longer in use, the road having been straightened and improved in this area. The old road veers away from the new road at Mile 138.5 and rejoins the road at 137.3, and the roadhouse lies on the west side in the middle of this abandoned overgrown stretch. Directly across the road is a large stockpile of aggregate for road maintenance, evidence that the area is used by the Department of Transportation for staging and storage.

²⁰¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 46.

²⁰² Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 11.



Figure 33. Poplar Grove Roadhouse remains. Photo by Casey Woster.

Evidence of both roadhouse cabins still exists. The cabin to the south is largely standing, although the metal roof has caved in. It was a simple single story log cabin with a central door and a gable roof. The ends of the logs have been squared off with an ax. Shadows on the west wall indicate an attachment of some kind, likely a shed or lean-to structure, based on observations from other surviving roadhouses. Several of the upper log courses of the walls have fallen in, and the walls themselves appear to be unstable.

The cabin to the north is mostly gone, rapidly disintegrating. The log walls have fallen in, and rows of logs are now sinking into the ground. The center of the cabin is visibly depressed, and it may be possible that a pit structure will be all that survives before much longer. A

makeshift outhouse was constructed using metal sheeting and timber at some point in the past and stands to the west of the main cabin. Although this may not be part of the original roadhouse complex, it is an interesting construction and its existence should be investigated.

During the study conducted in 1974, both cabins were photographed and their condition judged to be fair. Recommendations were made to return the cabins to operational status, including the stabilization of the foundation and the replacement of windows, doors, and the sod roof. These recommendations were not followed, however, and the deterioration of the roadhouse has increased drastically over the ensuing years.

In addition to the natural forces of neglect, the roadhouse is also subject to human interference. The area is used as a staging area for maintenance activities by the Department of Transportation. It is also subject to misuse by people coming into the area to camp. Recent fire rings sit in the center of the site, between the two cabins, and debris is scattered across the site from party activities. It is probable that some of the firewood for these activities came from the roadhouses themselves, which would have accelerated their destruction. Action should be taken to protect these ruins before they disappear forever.

Meier's Roadhouse



Figure 34. Meier's Roadhouse, undated. Photo courtesy of Candy Waugaman.

Meier's Roadhouse, located 4 miles south of Paxson Lake 170 miles north of Valdez, was established in 1906 by Charles J. Meier, who had previously been employed as a cook at Paxson's Roadhouse further north. It was located on the west side of the trail, and was a long, low, one-story log structure.²⁰³ The roadhouse appears in ads in 1909, advertising "first class accommodations for 42 people, heated stables for 40 horses."²⁰⁴ Meier had established a homestead at the site, and had an extensive garden in which he was able to grow more than \$1,300 worth of hay and "three tons of vegetables" in one season.²⁰⁵ Meier also dealt in furs,

²⁰³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 50.

²⁰⁴ "Meier's roadhouse ad," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 12, 1909.

²⁰⁵ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 27.

and by 1922 was advertising the sale of gasoline and oil.²⁰⁶ The roadhouse burned in 1925, and the original building was a total loss.²⁰⁷

By 1928 the roadhouse had been rebuilt by Al Norwood, who operated the roadhouse on and off for several years, closing when business was slow. It was operated later by Harry Newman, and later still by Adler and Maude TaTro. The roadhouse burned a second time in 1950²⁰⁸ and a third time in 1961.²⁰⁹ The building that currently stands on the original site and operates as Meier's Lodge is of recent construction, and a separate establishment consisting of a collection of individual cabins for rent just south called Meier's Roadhouse is newer still.

There is only one building at the site that can be dated to the original roadhouse period. The building is a 10ft by 16ft log cabin, with a shed roof and was originally used as a barn. The cabin was remodeled in the early 2000s and given a new use as a small chapel. The cabin is in immediate danger of being removed from the site. A project has been proposed to widen the road in this area, and the cabin lies within the boundaries of the new clear zone. The cabin was given a DOE as not eligible in 2004, as it is has been extensively remodeled, was not significant as a barn, and is not representative of any particular architectural style. Movement of the cabin to a location outside of the project zone is not possible, due to the extreme deterioration of the lower log courses.²¹⁰ When the project goes through, the cabin will be torn down.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ "Meier's roadhouse ad," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, July 24, 1922.

²⁰⁷ "More about the fire on the trail," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 13, 1925.

²⁰⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 50.

²⁰⁹ *The Milepost*, 1962, 107

²¹⁰ Daniel R. Thompson and Alan D. DePew, *Cultural Resource Reconnaissance of the Richardson Highway MP 148-173 Near Paxson, Alaska, AKDOT&PF Project Number 63186* (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Office of History and Archaeology, 2005), 23.

²¹¹ Conversation with Tim Woster, DOT Engineer.

The cabin is an interesting example of creative adaptive reuse by rural Alaskans. Once used as a barn and possibly for storage, it is now used as a non-denominational religious space, with a small sign announcing services every Sunday. The next closest religious building is in Glennallen, Alaska, some sixty miles distant. Because of its proximity to the road, it visually leaps out at drivers coming around the corner at Meier's. A white steeple and bell installed on the roof immediately announce its use, and a stained-glass window in the white door adds character. While it might not be the most pleasant religious space, it certainly is historically interesting.



Figure 35. Meier's Roadhouse remains today. Photo by Casey Woster.

Paxson Roadhouse



Figure 36. Paxson Roadhouse with mail sleigh, pre-1917. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Paxson Roadhouse began in 1906 as a “two-story Hudson Bay style log” building, situated on the east side of the trail three miles southeast of Summit Lake and 185.5 miles north of Valdez. It was built against the side of a hill, in order to shelter it from the high winds passing through the area.²¹² It was built by Alvin Paxson, who “was known for his skill as a cabin

²¹² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 51.

builder.”²¹³ From the beginning, the roadhouse was used as a station for the Orr Stage Line, with a man stationed at the roadhouse to care for the horses.²¹⁴ The roadhouse served as a crucial stop for the stage lines through the 1910s. At Paxson, they were forced to change from “four and six horse stages to double-ender sleds drawn by single horses” in order to cross Isabel Pass. The sleds were switched out again at Rapids Roadhouse on the northern end of the pass.²¹⁵ Paxson constructed a 30 ft by 112 ft barn in 1908, which included “a drying room, pump, and sleeping quarters for a stableman.”²¹⁶ In 1910, the roadhouse was advertised as having large, sunny, private bedrooms with spring beds and papered walls.²¹⁷ Paxson built a post office at the site in 1912.²¹⁸

By 1913, ownership of the roadhouse passed to Fred Nichols, a colorful character who had taken part in the stampede to Circle City and then later to Fairbanks. Failing as a prospector, he began operating a roadhouse on the Circle Trail leading to Circle City, and later was hired as a winter mail stage driver.²¹⁹ He seems to have settled with the purchase of Paxson’s. In 1914, a fire claimed the original barn, killing Matt Ryan, the stableman that had been stationed there as part of the Orr Stage station. Only intense action by the patrons saved the roadhouse from destruction, as well.²²⁰

²¹³ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 90.

²¹⁴ “Fatal fire at Paxson’s today,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 25, 1914.

²¹⁵ Ann Hopper, *Rapids Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form 10-900* (Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation, 2000), 6.

²¹⁶ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 90.

²¹⁷ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 27.

²¹⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 51.

²¹⁹ “Fred Nichols, veteran of trails, dies at Gulkana,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 14, 1926.

²²⁰ “Fatal fire at Paxson’s today,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 25, 1914.

Paxson continued to operate the roadhouse for several years, doing stints as a mail stage driver over the trail²²¹ and undertaking emergency supply runs into Fairbanks for the various roadhouses along the trail.²²² He was also arrested in 1921 for “selling a drink to a thirsty man.” In October 1923, however, the roadhouse burned to the ground, with a total lost estimated at more than \$9,000. Although arson was suspected, the area’s deputy marshals did not have sufficient funds to investigate the fire.²²³ Nichols ran ads in the local papers until his death in 1926, offering a reward for information leading to the capture of the arsonist,²²⁴ but the case was never solved.

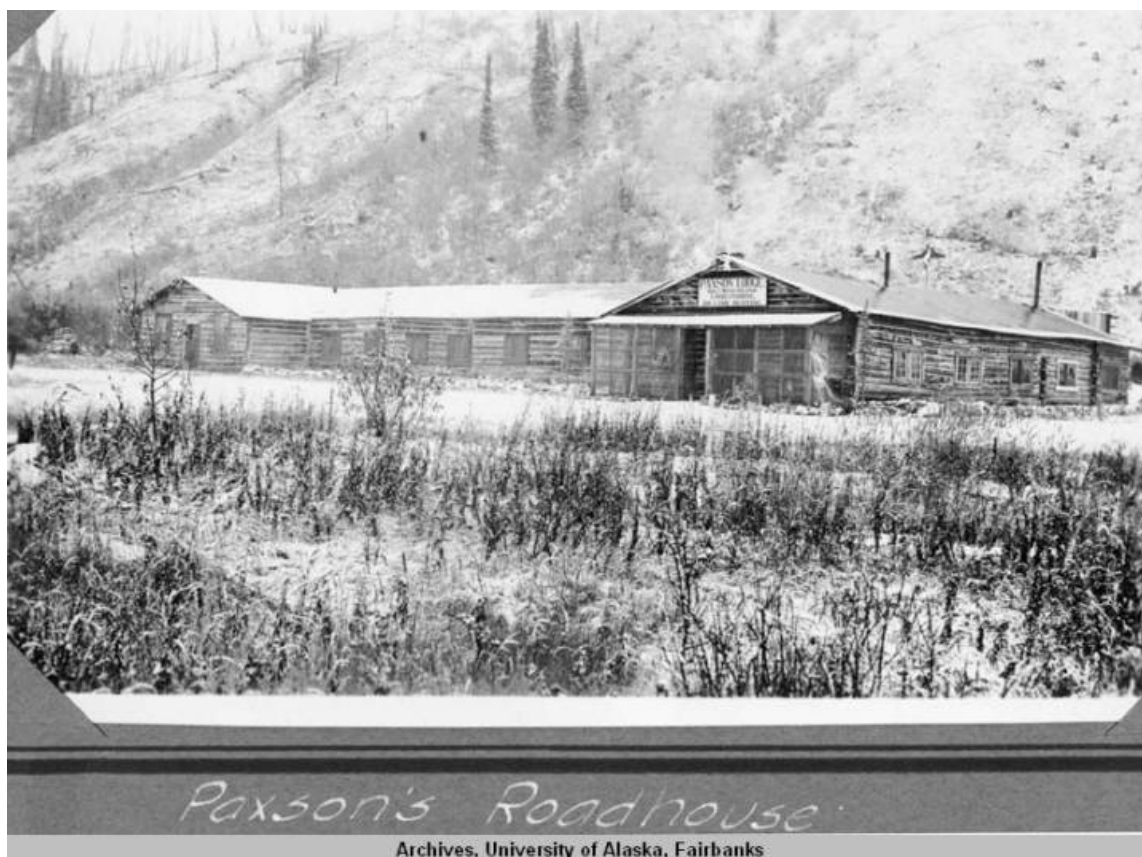


Figure 37. Paxson Roadhouse, 1931. Walter Hodge Papers, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

²²¹ “Fairbanks news,” *Nenana News*, November 9, 1918.

²²² “Personal mention,” *Nenana News*, July 24, 1919.

²²³ “Just a picture of life’s other side,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 16, 1923.

²²⁴ “Classified ads,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 16, 1925.

The site did not remain vacant for long. By 1928, Dan Whitman was operating a new roadhouse at the site, and soon added an addition provide more room for dining and dancing.²²⁵ From 1934 to 1943, the roadhouse was operated by Mr. and Mrs. Russel Keith, and by the time it had been sold to Mr. and Mrs. John M. Windust it had been enlarged to a two-story building capable of accommodating 40 people. This rebuilt roadhouse was partially destroyed by fire in 1957,²²⁶ the same year that the Denali Highway was completed and joined to the Richardson Highway. The completion of this road likely prompted Windust to immediately rebuilt, and by 1958 he had constructed Paxson Lodge,²²⁷ on the west side of the Richardson Highway, 300 yards south of the original roadhouse, at the junction of the two highways. This new lodge was concrete block construction and contained “20 rooms, all with private bath, dining, lounge” and a gift shop, and was open 24 hours a day.²²⁸ This lodge is still in use today, and has been added to extensively in the form of deck space and garages. It also operates as a gas station, and is a popular stopping point along the road with excellent French fries.

²²⁵ “Fishing party back from highway trip,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 25, 1928.

²²⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 51.

²²⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 51.

²²⁸ Morris Communications Company, *The Milepost 1962*, 102



Figure 38. Most recent Paxson Lodge. Photo by Casey Woster.

When he built the new lodge, Windust did not bother to clear the remains of the old roadhouse from the previous site. These remains are still visible from the road with nothing to discourage trespassers. The exterior doors and windows are all missing from the building, and roof has largely fallen in. The main body of the roadhouse was log construction, and appears to have been a single story. Substantial settling of the ruins in the northwest corner of the building has reduced the exterior walls to the level of the windows. The addition to the south has completely collapsed, and appears to have been of frame construction and possibly two stories in height. The timber flooring inside is still in place in some areas, although badly rotting and prone to collapse. The green felt carpeting is still evident on the interior of the cabin portion, and exploration of the interior reveals communal bathrooms for men and women with a separate

showering area, the plumbing still largely in place. Wiring still clings to the interior walls near the remains of the ceiling. Several thick, solid wood doors to private rooms remain on their hinges, and two of these doors still retain their numbers. Spring bed frames remain in a few of the rooms along with wallpaper remnants.



Figure 39. Remains of the old Paxson Roadhouse. Photo by Casey Woster.

The site is problematic, as it is unstable and not safe. The floor is giving out, and many of the remaining overhead timbers appear ready to collapse. Clearing the site without further investigation is not recommended, however, as it is on the original site of the Paxson Roadhouse, and investigation of the site could lead to recovery of valuable information.

Yost's Roadhouse



Figure 40. Yost Roadhouse, undated. Photo courtesy of Candy Waugaman.

Yost's Roadhouse, located at the confluence of Phalen and McCallum Creeks 203 miles north of Valdez, was one of the most important roadhouses during the early days of the trail. It began as a low, one-story log building, constructed in 1905 by Mrs. McCallum. In 1906, Charlie Yost had taken over ownership and added a two-story log addition.²²⁹ For travelers, this was also the most notoriously difficult roadhouse to find by travelers. The establishment was located near the summit of Isabel Pass, in a bend in the valley where storms had the potential for being particularly violent. The roadhouse was located 200 yards off the trail, and travelers would often miss the turn during storms and continue past the roadhouse.²³⁰ The winter of 1910-1911 was called the worst storm season in years, with the papers listing the dead and missing from along

²²⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 22.

²³⁰ Rearden, *Alaska's Wolf Man*, 18.

the Trail.²³¹ Stages reportedly refused to take passengers.²³² As a result of these deaths, the Alaska Road Commission built a wire fence across the Delta River to help direct travelers into the roadhouse, and a large bell was installed in such a way that it rang in the wind, directing travelers by sound to shelter.²³³

In 1910, the roadhouse was owned by H. L. Stahn,²³⁴ but by 1911 F. H. McDevitt was listed as the owner. McDevitt was also listed as the owner of Miller's Roadhouse several miles north.²³⁵ The roadhouse was almost claimed by fire in December 1911, when a blaze broke out in the chimney flume, but it was quickly extinguished by McDevitt and his patrons.²³⁶ In January 1912, McDevitt sold the roadhouse to Fred Nichols, owner of Paxson Roadhouse, for \$1,500 and left a family ranch in Yakima, Washington.²³⁷ Nichols did not operate the roadhouse although he owned it, turning the operation over to Charles Cole.²³⁸ In 1915, Nichols trusted the operation of the roadhouse to Fred Miller, a well-known roadhouse man on the trail, and he was reported to entertain his guests with dancing and music.²³⁹ Nichols listed the roadhouse for sale or rent in 1917,²⁴⁰ after which it drops from mention.

Jim Rearden, in his book detailing the life of Frank Glaser, mentions that in 1922 the roadhouse had been abandoned for some time.²⁴¹ A travelogue from 1929 states that the roadhouse and bell could still be seen on the banks of McCallum Creek. The study conducted in

²³¹ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, February 2, 1910.

²³² *Tanana Leader*, January 20, 1910.

²³³ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 22.

²³⁴ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 22.

²³⁵ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, June 10, 1911.

²³⁶ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, December 21, 1911.

²³⁷ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, January 4, 1912.

²³⁸ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 29, 1913.

²³⁹ *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 15, 1915.

²⁴⁰ *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 30, 1917.

²⁴¹ Rearden, *Alaska's Wolf Man*, 73.

1974 claimed that only a few rotten logs from the roadhouse existed on the site. The study conducted in 1984 reports that no trace of the roadhouse remained, but a Signal Corps station located near the roadhouse was still in existence. The two were situated closely to one another, and it would stand to reason that if one survived, they both would.



Figure 41. Remains of the Yost site today. Photo courtesy of Casey Woster.

Investigation of the site revealed remains of some kind, but whether this is the roadhouse or Signal Corps station is unclear. The remains of the cabin stand near the Alyeska Pipeline route, just east of the junction of Phalan and McCullum Creeks. Access to the site is from a four-wheeler track beaten into the surrounding vegetation leading from the highway on the northern side of the McCullum Creek bridge. There is no pullout for access to the trailhead. The trail

crosses the pipeline, paralleling Phalan Creek, passing directly in front of the roadhouse before continuing downstream.

The cabin has largely fallen in on itself from lack of maintenance. The main body of the structure remains standing and is constructed from rough-hewn spruce logs, roughly squared so as to facilitate construction. Remains of one gable end indicate that the structure was once a single story log cabin with a gabled metal roof. The remains of the walls stand roughly six feet high and are comprised of six logs. The gable ends are constructed from eleven logs. The logs range in size with the largest logs providing a foundation on the ground and the smallest logs along the roofline. The logs of the walls all show a similar condition of weathering for the most part, indicating that they are roughly the same age. Burlap and horsehair is still present between the logs, indicating the use of this material as chinking.

Much of the roofing structure and materials remain visible. The roof consists of corrugated metal that has largely fallen in on the west end of the building. Rough-hewn log rafters placed vertically along the length of the building supported the roof. These rafters are constructed of different sized logs, indicating that they have been replaced at some point. Presently, the rafters have collapsed inward on the west end of the building. The roof extended outward in a relatively deep eave, as evidenced by the intact east gable end. The wood immediately below the gable shows less deterioration, indicating that the eave projection was sufficient to protect the wall from the elements.

Access to the building was provided by a small door in the southern wall, offset west of center. The door was small and appears to be wood frame with a panel door, indicating that it is a replacement of some kind. The door is also small, no more than four feet high.

One window opening was cut into the log walls. The window is on the north side of the building. No glass or frame remains in evidence. The window is in the east corner of the north wall, and is no more than one foot in height. It gives the only clear visual access to the interior of the building, although too small to climb through.

The interior of the building is in ruins. No flooring material can be seen. On the west side of the interior is an old stove. Part of the stovepipe remains attached, although the caving in of the roof has knocked it to the ground. Heavy canvas and fiber insulation material hangs from the remains of the roof. A rusted bed frame remains in one corner.

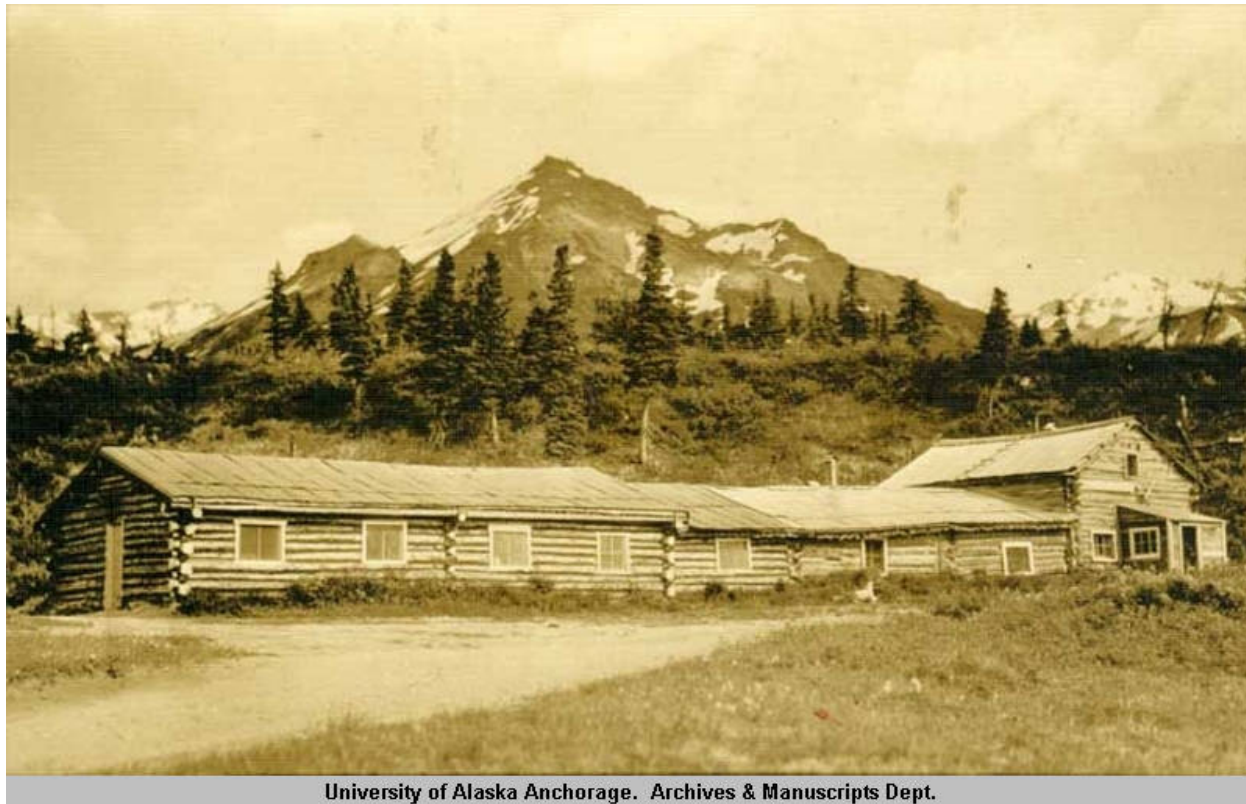
The west side of the building contains an interesting addition. The toppled gable end contains a series of holes that do not match with those in the opposite gable. Logs that were originally placed in a rectangular formation with the west wall as one side of the rectangle lie at various angles of verticality. The lack of solid walls would indicate that this was once a rectangular shelter of some kind.

The site immediately surrounding the cabin is heavily vegetated. The landscape is slowly reclaiming the area. Trees and bushes are growing against the building. A path has been beaten to the entrance, but otherwise access around the building is restricted by thick underbrush.

Exploration of the immediate site reveals a large rubbish scatter in the immediate vicinity of the cabin in various states of deterioration and decomposition. Further examination of the types of rubbish at the site can give an accurate indication as to the periods of activity at the site.

The location of the building is something of a local secret; only locals to the area use the trail. Further investigation of the area might produce the exact location of the roadhouse.

Rapids Roadhouse, Black Rapids Lodge, Lodge at Black Rapids



University of Alaska Anchorage. Archives & Manuscripts Dept.

Figure 42. Rapids Roadhouse, ca. 1915. Holmes Family Papers, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Rapids Roadhouse takes its name from the spot on the Delta River where it is located, 231 miles north of Valdez. The river is particularly violent in this area, and the Black Rapids Glacier, lying directly across the river valley from the roadhouse, likewise draws its name from this source. The roadhouse was established in 1902 by Peter Feindler, “to accommodate prospectors and hunters.”²⁴² It also served as a crucial stop on the stage line, as they changed from “four and six-horse stages to double-ender sleds drawn by single horses” for the crossing south over Isabel Pass.²⁴³ The original roadhouse was a two-story log cabin, 19 ft by 25 ft, on

²⁴² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 56

²⁴³ Hopper, *Black Rapids Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 6.

the east side of the trail tucked against the side of a hill. Additions were added in later years, until the roadhouse resembled a long, low, sprawling log complex.²⁴⁴

Findler operated the roadhouse until 1912, when ownership was taken over by Hugh F. and Lloyd E. Beckel. At one point in 1913, it was also being operated by P. Lasco.²⁴⁵ Ownership had been taken over by Frank (also referred to as Henry) Columbo before 1916, when he sold the roadhouse to Bob Robertson, a well-known trail cook.²⁴⁶ It was listed as being for sale in January 1917, after which it was taken over by Tom Flannigan, the proprietor of Donnelly's roadhouse. In January of 1919, the roadhouse was set up as an influenza quarantine station, and Flannigan was placed in charge.²⁴⁷ The purpose of the quarantine was to halt the spread of the virus from the coastal towns into the Interior. In 1920, however, Flannigan left the roadhouse with the intent of returning to the states, declaring that he would not be operating the roadhouse in the future. He cited declining business due to the coming completion of the Alaska Railroad, which even before its completion was offering faster, cheaper travel into the Interior than was possible over the Trail from Valdez.²⁴⁸

At this point, the roadhouse appears to have been taken over by Frank Glaser, a well-known market hunter and Alaskan character who became known as the "Wolf Man" for his ability to hunt wolves. There is no mention of the roadhouse in papers during this period. Drawing from the book written about his life in the 1990s, it would appear that Glaser ran the

²⁴⁴ Hopper, *Black Rapids Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 6.

²⁴⁵ "Roadhouses and Keepers from Fairbanks to Chitina via cutoff to Sullivans; all now open," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 19, 1913.

²⁴⁶ "Bob Robinson Buys Rapids Roadhouse," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, August 12, 1916.

²⁴⁷ "Dr. J. A. Sutherland establishes flu quarantine, Rapids Roadhouse," *Nenana News*, April 29, 1919.

²⁴⁸ "T. J. Flannigan, Rapids Roadhouse, leaves," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 20, 1920.

roadhouse primarily as a base for his activities as a market hunter and big game hunting guide.²⁴⁹

In 1924 Glaser sold the property to Charles Nevilius, who had also previously operated the Ptarmigan Drop Roadhouse closer to Valdez. A quote from Robert Sheldon at this time states that Nevilius was “building a chateau of the Alps,”²⁵⁰ making extensive improvements to the property. He operated the roadhouse until 1926, when he was found dead in his bed.²⁵¹

The roadhouse was taken over by Grace Low and Evelyn Mahan, who it would appear ran the establishment successfully into the 1930s, although it was listed as being for sale first in 1928²⁵² and again in 1929.²⁵³ In 1929, it was listed in travel guides as “the hunter’s paradise” in an area rich in mineral deposits.²⁵⁴ It was during the 1930s that a scientifically significant event took place at the roadhouse, when the Black Rapids Glacier began to rapidly advance, reportedly covering 25ft per day.²⁵⁵ It eventually stopped within half of a mile of the roadhouse, but geological investigations have revealed that during past surges the glacier has covered the area the roadhouse occupies. It is possible that the next time it surges, it could destroy the roadhouse and the road.

At some point in the 1930s, the operation of the roadhouse was taken over by Sue Revell and her son.²⁵⁶ In 1939, Sue Revell was reported to have been electrocuted when lightning hit

²⁴⁹ Rearden, *Alaska’s Wolf Man*, 55-92.

²⁵⁰ “Sheldon on Richardson Highway Roadhouses,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 26, 1924.

²⁵¹ “Charles Nevilius, Rapids Roadhouses, dead,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 7, 1926.

²⁵² “Rapids Roadhouse for sale,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 24, 1928.

²⁵³ “Rapids Roadhouse for sale,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, July 28, 1929.

²⁵⁴ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 15.

²⁵⁵ “Black Rapids Glacier Roaring,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, February 15, 1937.

²⁵⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 56.

the telephone pole at the roadhouse, although she survived without lasting effects.²⁵⁷ The Revells also extended the previously built runway at the roadhouse to a length of 2400 ft, in order to be able to handle any size of aircraft that might wish to land at the roadhouse.²⁵⁸

Through the 1940s and 1950s the roadhouse was owned first by JB Coble, then Edith Acres, until it was purchased by Bert and Mary Hansen in 1958.²⁵⁹ The Hansens had previously owned Bert and Mary's, on the north bank of the Tanana River across from Rika's Roadhouse. According to an interview with Irene Mead, the daughter of the Hansens and a member of the Delta Historical Society, the Hansens operated the Rapids Roadhouse until 1974, primarily as a hunting lodge that also had excellent meals, alcohol, and gambling.²⁶⁰ They sold the roadhouse in 1974 to Jerry and Wanda McMillian, who operated the roadhouse until the mid-1980s, when it was taken over by Earl Tourgeau. The doors of the roadhouse were closed in 1993.

²⁵⁷ "Lightening strikes Sue Revell," *Alaska Miner*, August 2, 1938

²⁵⁸ "Landing Field at Rapids Roadhouse," *Alaska Miner*, August 6, 1940.

²⁵⁹ Hopper, *Black Rapids Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 9.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Irene Mead, conducted July 21, 2012.



Figure 43. Historic Rapids Roadhouse with the new Rapids Roadhouse positioned on the hill above. Photo by Casey Woster.

The roadhouse today is owned by Ann and Michael Hopper, long time residents of Fairbanks. After purchasing the property with the intent of building a new lodge, they investigated the history of the old roadhouse, and as a result it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. The Hoppers were able to determine that the roadhouse had undergone approximately six building phases through its life cycle, culminating in a concrete addition in the 1950s, resulting in a rambling L-shaped structure with the original two-story log cabin anchoring the lodge to the southwest. Although the original roadhouse only measures 19 by 25 feet, the length of the roadhouse running north to south along the highway stretches for a length of 120 feet. The Hoppers proceeded in a campaign to preserve the roadhouse, which was

in danger of collapse from neglect. They were able to halt the settling of the building by installing a concrete footer beneath the base logs, which had originally been placed on the ground. They also removed the additions that were not present during the 1920s. A new roof of corrugated metal was installed to replace the badly deteriorated metal that had been previously installed. The roadhouse may have had sod roofing at one point, but this was later replaced. What is left is the main roadhouse on the south end and three successive additions stretching to the north. All are spruce log with saddle notched corners, and the chinking material is primarily rough burlap and moss. Ghosting of the removed additions is clearly visible on the southern and eastern walls of the original roadhouse. The windows and doors have not been replaced, and plywood or metal sheets have been installed to protect the interior.

The interior of the roadhouse has been completely gutted. The stairs were removed due to safety concerns. The floor of the roadhouse is bare earth, much as it would have been when originally constructed. Remains of removed insulation can be seen hanging from the interior rafters, and stovepipes hang down from the ceiling. The doorways have been reframed. The metal roof is held up by a series of vertical spruce rafters that still retain their bark. Bracing has been installed on the inside walls to keep them from caving inward.

The Hoppers have not found a use for the old roadhouse as yet, although they have mentioned that they would like to restore it so that it can be used as a museum of sorts, similar to the way Sullivan's Roadhouse is now used in Delta Junction. They have constructed a new upscale lodge on the hill above the old lodge. The views of the Alaska Range afforded from this spot are incredible. They cater to outdoor enthusiasts rather than the casual tourist, open year-round and advertising some of the best hiking and skiing anywhere. They also host a variety of activities, from annual holiday parties at which local residents are welcome, to ski team retreats.

This use is very much in keeping with the tradition of the original roadhouses, operating as community centers as well as hostels. At the time that the site was investigated for this report, the old roadhouse wasn't entirely abandoned. The Department of Transportation had established a base on the property, with portable facilities next to the old roadhouse. This represents just one of the ways in which the state continues to utilize the roadhouses along the Richardson Highway.

Sullivan's Roadhouse



Figure 44. Mrs. Florence Sullivan standing in front of Sullivan's Roadhouse, undated. Drane Family Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Sullivan's Roadhouse, originally located on the winter Delta Cut-Off trail 84.5 miles south of Fairbanks, was one of the only roadhouses to have a single owner during the entire span of its use. It was constructed in 1906 by Jack and Florence Sullivan along the original winter trail into Fairbanks, but when the trail was rerouted in 1907 the roadhouse was moved to the new location. The Sullivans operated a successful roadhouse business in this location until sometime between 1918 and 1922, when they relocated to Byler's Roadhouse closer to town.

The Sullivans were considered to be old-time Alaskans. Florence Sullivan had participated in the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, operating a successful hostelry in Dawson City. In the

winter of 1900, she took part in the stampede to Nome, walking the full length of the Yukon River with two men she paid to haul her outfit. She married Jack Sullivan in Nome, and they relocated to the Interior during the stampede in 1904.²⁶¹ They were familiar with the roadhouse business, and operated what was argued to be the best roadhouse along the trail for many years.²⁶² Jack Sullivan was also a carpenter, and was employed by the ARC from 1908 to 1922 in repairing the bridges in the area, for which he was paid \$1.75 per foot.²⁶³

The Sullivan Roadhouse was originally located on the south bank of the Little Delta Creek approximately 84.5 miles south of Fairbanks. Originally constructed with a sod roof, metal had been installed at some point early on and later replaced with modern corrugated metal, although the original pole decking was maintained. The roadhouse was a one-story, 18 by 76 foot building consisting of unpeeled white spruce logs with four rooms separated by interior non-structural walls. The rooms were divided by use, including a front room, a kitchen, a storeroom, and a room that was divided between dining and guest quarters. Cloth curtains were hung from the ceiling to create a series of small guest cubicles for privacy, and the dining room also served as overflow bunk quarters for men when the roadhouse was crowded. The original occupancy was listed at 40 guests.²⁶⁴

Abandoned by the Sullivans in 1922, the site occupied by the abandoned roadhouse eventually became incorporated into the Army training grounds associated with Fort Greeley U.S. Army Base just south of Delta Junction. The U.S. Army was aware of the roadhouse's

²⁶¹ "Mrs. Jack Sullivan dies Sunday morning," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 24, 1924.

²⁶² "Personal mention," *Alaska Citizen*, May 27, 1912.

²⁶³ Erica Z. Kracker and Edward B. Kiker, *Sullivan Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form 10-900* (Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation, January 1978), 4.

²⁶⁴ Kracker and Kiker, *Sullivan Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 4.

location and significance, and the roadhouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Unfortunately, the roadhouse ultimately stood at the edge of an artillery range and was constantly in danger of being hit by stray ordinance. In 1996, the Army agreed to help move the roadhouse to a more secure location within the town of Delta Junction. A site directly off the Richardson Highway was prepared, including a new concrete foundation. The roadhouse was successfully installed at the site and ownership transferred to the Delta Chamber of Commerce.²⁶⁵ Some time later, an anonymous resident of the area donated what was believed to be the original furnishings from the roadhouse, and it began to function as a museum dedicated to Alaska roadhouse and transportation systems.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Kracker and Kiker, *Sullivan Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, as Amended, 1997, 5.

²⁶⁶ Sullivan Roadhouse Historical Museum, online at: <http://www.alaska-highway.org/sullivanroadhouse/index.html>.



Figure 45. Sullivan's Roadhouse today. Photo by Casey Woster.

The site is pleasantly located and run by friendly volunteers from Delta Junction. The logs have been sealed to prevent further decay, and new windows and doors were installed. The area around the roadhouse is landscaped in an Alaskan manner, with vegetables and flowers mixing in the same beds. A farmer's market operates in the site's parking lot in the summer months.

Rika's Roadhouse, McCarty's Roadhouse, Big Delta Roadhouse



Figure 46. Big Delta Roadhouse, ca. 1928. Alaska Steamship Company Collection, Alaska State Library, Historical Collection.

The history and location of this particular roadhouse is well documented. The site was donated to the State of Alaska for use as a state historic park, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. It lies on the south bank of the Tanana River just upriver from the confluence of the Tanana and Delta Rivers, and the Alaska Pipeline creates the western boarder of the property. Today, it operates as a museum dedicated to roadhouses and pioneer life in Alaska. There is a historic interpreter on site, who leads the curious through the roadhouse-turned-museum and relates some of the more colorful stories about the site.

The first building on the site was recorded as a trading post constructed by Dan McCarty and Jack McCoormack in 1905.²⁶⁷ At one point, the trading post was associated with E. T. Barnette, famed Fairbanksan. Judge Wickersham refers to the trading post as Barnette's in 1905, and reported a native camp nearby. Wickersham described it as a 20x22ft log cabin, with a 16x30ft addition and a tent for storage, a stable, and doghouses.²⁶⁸ By 1909, McCarty had sold the site to John Hajduckovich and moved north to prospect in the Tenderfoot district. Despite the change in ownership, the roadhouse retained the name McCarty's. Hajduckovich constructed a two-story gable fronted log building that was much more ambitious than other roadhouses at the time. It had a large dining room, kitchen, parlor, 11 private rooms, a large dormitory, and a sleeping area in the attic. No fireplaces or chimneys were built into the structure; stovepipes were threaded through the floors and roof as they were later installed.²⁶⁹

Hajduckovich proved to be a lax roadhouse keeper; as a market hunter, miner, and professional game guide, he had a hard time remaining in one place. As a result, "travelers essentially had to take care of themselves – even cooking their own meals."²⁷⁰ The roadhouse remained moderately successful, however, and in 1920 Hajduckovich hired Louisa Erika Jacobson from Wallen, Nerike, Sweden, to run the roadhouse. She later became known simply as Rika Wallen. Rika proved more than equal to the task of running a successful roadhouse, and she assumed ownership in 1923. There is some debate over how exactly she acquired the roadhouse; one theory is that Hajduckovich signed over the roadhouse to her as payment for

²⁶⁷ Michael S. Kennedy, *Transportation in Alaska's Past*, Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Historical Society, Publication No. 30, 1982, 146.

²⁶⁸ Wickersham, *Personal Diary*, March 4th, 1905.

²⁶⁹ Alfred Mongin, *Rika's Landing and Roadhouse National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form 10-900* (Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation, January 1976), 2.

²⁷⁰ Kennedy, *Transportation in Alaska's Past*, 146.

wages he owed her.²⁷¹ She began renovating the roadhouse almost immediately, dividing the main dormitory into individual quarters.²⁷² In 1926, she went even farther, constructing a two-story log addition on the east side of the building that measured 20 by 40 feet,²⁷³ reportedly doubling the capacity of the roadhouse.²⁷⁴ Before long, the roadhouse became known as Rika's Roadhouse. Rika served as the postmistress for the community beginning in 1925 with the establishment of a post office, and the community was officially named Big Delta.

Rika maintained an excellent farm, and travel guides in 1929 were able to report that the roadhouse offered "such luxuries as fresh milk, and domestic fowls including chicken, geese, ducks, and turkeys, as well as all kinds of wild meats, berries, and fish."²⁷⁵ Rika, however, was not an excellent cook, and she preferred the patronage of Alaskan old-timers to tourists making use of the Richardson by the 1930s. In 1939, Bert and Mary Hansen opened an establishment of their own on the north side of the river, just across the bridge from Rika's. Bert and Mary's offered excellent food and catered more to tourists.²⁷⁶ In the beginning, those staying in the area would lodge at Rika's, and get their meals at Bert and Mary's.²⁷⁷

When the Richardson Highway was realigned in 1943 as part of upgrades made in conjunction with military defense activities, it no longer passed directly in front of Rika's. This realignment was followed by a general decline in business, and in 1947 Rika closed the roadhouse to overnight guests. A new frame house was constructed for her use in the early

²⁷¹ Kennedy, *Transportation in Alaska's Past*, 148.

²⁷² "Building boom along the trail," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 13, 1924.

²⁷³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 61.

²⁷⁴ "Richardson roadhouses will care for tourists," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, February 23, 1926.

²⁷⁵ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 16.

²⁷⁶ Kennedy, *Transportation in Alaska's Past*, 148.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Irene Mead, conducted July 21, 2012.

1950s a short distance from the original roadhouse.²⁷⁸ It was said to have been pink and resembled a dollhouse. Rika continued to sell some meals and baked goods from this new house to loyal customers.²⁷⁹ On Christmas Day, 1965, the frame building caught fire, and although wheelchair bound, Rika was able to escape the flames. After recovering from the fire in Fairbanks, she “lived the rest of her years in the ferryman’s cabin on the bank of the Tanana River – talking eagerly of plans for reopening the roadhouse – until death stilled her ambitions in 1969.”²⁸⁰

After Rika’s death, the property was abandoned and fell into disrepair. The construction of the Alaska Pipeline in the 1970s, however, saved the roadhouse from disappearing into the forest. The property was purchased by the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, and the pipeline constructed along its western edge between the roadhouse property and the Richardson Highway. Once construction in the area was completed, the company donated the land to the state for use as a state historical park.²⁸¹ Archaeological and preservation studies were undertaken,²⁸² and the roadhouse rehabilitated for use as a museum dedicated to pioneering life in Alaska.

The Big Delta State Historical Park is well maintained, landscaped, and interpreted for tourists. The interpreters at the site are quick to remind visitors that the objects within the roadhouses are genuine period pieces, though not necessarily original to Rika’s Roadhouse in particular. Original documents and homestead contracts are on display. A restaurant was constructed at the eastern edge of the property, complete with a gift shop that sells Alaska furs as

²⁷⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 61.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Irene Mead, conducted July 21, 2012.

²⁸⁰ Kennedy, *Transportation in Alaska’s Past*, 152.

²⁸¹ Interview with the Alaska State Park historian at the site, July 21, 2012.

²⁸² D. E. Gibson, *Cultural Resources Survey: 1983 Investigations of Rika’s Landing State Historic Site Roadhouse, Barn, and Blacksmith Shop*, (Fairbanks, Alaska: Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys, April 1984), 2.

well as the usual tourist items. The site is not safe from danger, however. A discussion has begun that would move a nearby boat launch onto the state historical park. The boat launch is currently just off the Richardson Highway, sandwiched tightly between the road and the Alaska Pipeline. Alyeska Pipeline Service Company has requested that for security reasons, the boatlaunch be relocated further from the pipeline and moved onto the park property.



Figure 47. Rika's Roadhouse today. Photo by Casey Woster.

The movement of this boat launch could create problems for the continued usage of the park as a museum. This particular boat launch is heavily used by Alaskans with recreational properties further up the Tanana River, none of which are accessible via road. In addition, excellent hunting exists along the Tanana River and can only be accessed by the boat launch.

The users of the boat launch are not always considerate. During hunting season especially, the parking area is cluttered with vehicles and trailers, and they often discard their garbage and unwanted carcasses at the site. This would detract from the experience of the visitor to Rika's, although providing tourist with an interesting glimpse into modern hunting practices in Alaska. It would also endanger the property from abuse and overuse by people ignorant of its historic significance.²⁸³

²⁸³ Interview with Irene Mead, conducted July 21, 2012

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESERVATION PLAN

Preservation of the roadhouses of the Richardson Highway can be accomplished through the cooperative work of the state government, private roadhouse landowners, and the implementation of a nonprofit organizational group to oversee activities undertaken by both to ensure the survival of the roadhouses. As representative of the gold rush period and useful in relating the history of the highway itself, the roadhouses should be documented and preserved. Their locations can help to map the original route of the highway, now often obscured by slight realignments, and are useful bases for recreational activities into the Alaska backcountry.

Why preserve the roadhouses?

The basis and rationale for saving and preserving the roadhouses of the Richardson Highway is based on the idea of archaeological stewardship. The roadhouses represent a very specific period of time within the history of the development of Alaska. As such, the roadhouses themselves are classified as finite, non-renewable resources. Given the impermanence of the materials from which they are built, the roadhouses are also destructible and therefore dwindling historic resources. Good stewardship of resources consists of the wise use and conservation of the resources while at the same time planning and providing for their future needs. Good stewardship is necessary for the survival of the resource and its continued usage and contribution to the fabric of the archaeological heritage.²⁸⁴

Roadhouses in Alaska help to delineate transportation routes and how they evolved over time. Each main artery through the territory had a system of roadhouses attached. The most famous today were along the Iditarod Trail, the Yukon River, and the Richardson Highway – all

²⁸⁴ Henry Cleere, *Archaeological Heritage in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1989), 52.

three major transportation corridors through the vast wilderness. The roadhouses were often the only source of shelter and edible food for travelers, especially during the winter months. When mail routes were established, many of these roadhouses served as stations for dogsled mail carriers in the winter and post offices for the immediately surrounding region year round. As transportation routes grew, so did the roadhouses. Likewise, a given transportation route was abandoned in favor of other routes, the roadhouses along that particular route would begin to fail, often at the detriment of the surrounding population.

As transportation routes can often be lost to overgrowth more quickly than a building, preserving roadhouses becomes a means by which a trail or transportation route can be better mapped. They can also serve as a focal point for locating nearby mining operations and settlements that may not be currently recorded. By tracking and dating roadhouses within Alaska, researchers can learn much about settlement patterns and population movement throughout the state in areas not otherwise well populated or documented.

Challenges to Preservation work within Alaska

Architectural preservation in Alaska is a new and slowly growing field of study and practice. Given the relatively short history of the presence of western civilization in Alaska, the majority of general preservation study done within the state pertains to prehistoric archaeological resources and environmental conservation. Archaeology, as a result, is a large concern within the state. The majority of architectural preservation is conducted largely by historic archaeologists who may not have a full understanding of historic preservation of architecture, and instead apply archaeological preservation principles. The lack of architectural historians and architectural preservationists within Alaska leads ultimately to many buildings being inappropriately treated, albeit with the good intentions of the practicing archaeologists.

By contrast, Alaska was one of the first states to adopt a historic preservation clause within the state constitution. The Alaska Historic Preservation Act (AHPA) was implemented in 1971 and provides broad coverage under Alaska law for the protection of prehistoric, historic, and tribal cultural resources. It also provided measures for special purpose withdrawals of sites, objects, and areas of natural beauty or of historic, cultural, recreational, or scientific value from the public domain. Additionally, the act contains a clause stating that “privately owned state monuments or historic sites are eligible to receive state support for their maintenance, restoration, and rehabilitation if they are kept accessible to the general public and application for support is made in conformity with regulations adopted by the commissioner.”²⁸⁵

In addition to the thorough language used in the AHPA, numerous nonprofit agencies exist across supporting preservation efforts on all fronts. Chief among these is the Alaska Association of Historic Preservation (AAHP), established in 1982 by state mandate as a nonprofit counterpart to the State Historic Preservation Office. AAHP oversees several other nonprofit preservation groups, including the Friends of Nike Site Summit and the Sitka Revitalization Group. AAHP was created in part to help provide monitoring and supervision of historic preservation projects across the state and serve as a liaison between local, statewide, and national historic preservation groups. This purpose, however, is not being met, with a complete lack of application for AAHP services. The number of historic preservationists on the board is capped at two, with the remainder made up of people with general interests in preservation, but who have made careers outside of archaeology, architecture, history, and preservation. AAHP has been largely inactive in recent years.

²⁸⁵ Alaska State Legislature, Alaska Historic Preservation Act, 1971, Sec.41.35.040.

The State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources Office of History and Archaeology does maintain the Alaska Historic Resources Survey, an extensive database of all reported prehistoric, archaeological, and historic sites within Alaska. The database also catalogues all cultural resource reports and impact statements submitted to the SHPO. This database is not accessible to the public, as many of the sites contain sensitive or restricted material. Unless a site is under direct threat of destruction, information pertaining to it is catalogued without later follow-up of the site.

Finally, the relatively young age of many of Alaska's architectural resources has a negative impact on the public desire for preservation. Alaska was not extensively explored until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and settlements by Euroamericans were slow to follow. As a result, much of the architectural landscape of Alaska dates to the 1920s and is not of a style immediately associated with preservation in the eyes of the general public. Attempts to raise awareness have largely all resulted from a desire to increase tourism, which likewise results in a negative sentiment from many Alaskans.

While Alaska's constitution and legislation all support preservation, the practice of preservation has been underutilized and mishandled when it comes to the preservation of architectural resources. The lack of practicing architectural preservationists and a general disapproval of architectural preservation on the part of the general public has led to an atmosphere that is not receptive to the idea of historic preservation.

Roadhouses – definition and context for preservation purposes

For the purposes of this study, a roadhouse is defined as a building or group of buildings providing food and shelter for travelers along an established transportation route. Roadhouses typically developed at a distance of one day's journey apart. This trend began during the gold

rush period, when a day's travel was limited to the number of miles a traveler could walk, and increased as road conditions improved. Eventually, the roadhouses were spaced at intervals obtainable by automobiles.

The roadhouses along the Richardson Highway saw several periods of evolution and development resulting from improved road conditions, shift in the traveler's need and purpose, and the rise and fall of the Alaskan economy. The most influential roadhouses survived to be used in modern times. There are several periods of context that follow the ebb and flow of roadhouse existence:

- Gold Rush period and early transportation route to the interior, 1890s through the opening of the Alaska Railroad in 1921;
- Development of the tourism in Alaska and along the Richardson Highway, and the shift in roadhouses uses to facilitate tourism rather than necessary travel, 1920s-beginning of World War II (1939);
- The construction of the Alyeska Pipeline in the 1970s, along the route of the Richardson Highway, which provided valuable income for remaining roadhouse proprietors and made possible the destruction of abandoned roadhouses in the path of the pipeline.

While other contexts do exist for other roadhouse systems, these are the principle periods of development for roadhouses along the Richardson Highway.

Previous efforts at preservation of the roadhouses

The importance of roadhouses to the history of Alaska has been previously understood, and efforts have been made to preserve them as elements of transportation routes. The NPS has conducted previous studies into the roadhouses along the Yukon River, which was used as a

transportation route in both summer by boat and winter by dogsled. These include Biederman Camp, Miller's Camp, Slaven's Roadhouse, and the Woodchopper Roadhouse. Slaven's Roadhouse was restored by the NPS and now serves as a modern roadhouse.

Additional work has been to identify and promote the original Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance is a nonprofit group behind much of that work, and they have conducted research into the roadhouses along the trail. Roadhouses existed at each stop and community along the trail, serving as shelter for the dogsleds hauling freight and mail to communities in western Alaska otherwise cut off by snow and ice during winter months. The IHTA works to bring recognition to not only the trail, but the roadhouses and communities along the trail.

While several studies have been done on the roadhouses along the Richardson Highway, interest in the roadhouse system is only now being presently generated. The Richardson Highway is being treated as a historic transportation route, with nearly 200 miles of the road being treated as eligible for the NRHP by the Alaska SHPO and DOT. As roadhouses can be used to trace the original route of the road and also serve as roadside features, information on the roadhouses is actively being sought. Treatment plans for the existing roadhouses will need to be formulated if the road is indeed listed to the NRHP in order to allow further road construction plans to take place.

Several of the roadhouses along the Richardson Highway have already seen preservation treatment efforts undertaken. These roadhouses and their work are:

- Copper Center Lodge – a recognized state historical site, that was kept meticulously until destroyed by fire in 2012. It had been deemed as eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Preservation, and a nomination had been submitted, but the lodge had never been officially listed.

- Gakona Roadhouse – is an operating roadhouse on the Tok Cutoff. The cluster of buildings is listed on the NRHP as a historic district, and the two main roadhouses buildings (the 1905 roadhouse and the later 1929 roadhouse) buildings are themselves listed individually. While the older original roadhouse is being allowed to deteriorate naturally, the roadhouse from 1929 is being well-cared for and has interpretative panels in easy view.
- Meier’s Roadhouse – the only confirmed surviving building of the roadhouse is under review; it was once a small barn, but is now used as a church and lies in the direct right-of-way of the Richardson Highway.
- Rapids Roadhouse – The original roadhouse is being carefully preserved thanks to the interest and care of the owners. Work has been done to provide a permanent foundation footing, stabilize the walls and roof, and clear out debris from the interior. The ultimate goal as currently held is to create a small museum in the roadhouse to compliment the new lodge further up the hill.
- Rika’s Roadhouse – Rika’s was turned over to the State of Alaska in the 1970s and is currently part of the Alaska State Park system. When the state assumed ownership, effort was made to preserve the roadhouse and existing outbuildings, and ultimately the state created a museum, garden, gift shop, and restaurant out of the roadhouse complex. Care was taken to preserve the complex, as it had existed during its height of popularity.
- Sullivan’s Roadhouse – This roadhouse benefitted directly from preservation efforts. Originally located on a piece of land that became part of a military heavy artillery range, it was moved with the help of the U.S. Army to its current location

in Delta Junction. As the move was necessary to save the resource, it remains listed on the NRHP. Currently, it serves as a museum highlighting early transportation and hosts a weekly community farmer's market.

Multiple Property Nomination for the roadhouses under appropriate context

The roadhouses of the Richardson Highway are interconnected to the extent that in order to convey the full story and purpose of one roadhouse, it is vital to understand and convey the story of all the roadhouses together. First, they constituted a system of survival for travelers and area residents. Although in competition with one another in business, the realities of living in remote locations could mean the difference between life and death without close support. The roadhouse proprietors formed a community all their own and could be revered as celebrities and celebrated holidays and special occasions together. The long-term roadhouse proprietors usually owned more than one roadhouse, either in succession or at once, further tying the roadhouses together. Finally, from the perspective of distance and development, most of the roadhouses were located in a chain and developed around the same period in response to increases in travel over the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail during the gold rush period.

Taking into account the developmental similarities of the roadhouses, the shared owners and proprietors, and the interconnectedness of their locations on a single transportation route, it is important to treat the roadhouses as a single historical entity. As such, the roadhouse system should be considered eligible for listing to the NRHP by the use of the multiple property nomination. Through the use of this method of documentation and nomination, it is possible to create contextual statements encompassing the different developmental stages of the roadhouses. Combined with the individual registration forms, this will ensure the recognition of as many resources as possible, including later era roadhouses and those that currently exist only as

archaeological sites. In addition to recognition, the creation of a multiple property nomination will result in more roadhouse sites being nominated to the NRHP, and provide protection for these sites under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966. As these resources lie along active roads and are often in the direct path of road construction projects, recognition and evaluation is vital to protecting these resources under these laws. A multiple property nomination is already in existence for the surviving segments of trail, and makes provisions for bridges.²⁸⁶

A multiple property nomination is not a nomination in its own right but serves as the basis for evaluating related properties. It may be used to link thematically-related properties of eligible quality or establish registration requirements for future nominated properties.²⁸⁷ In the case of Alaska, a multiple property nomination for the Richardson Highway roadhouse resources would serve as an invaluable tool for documentation of other roadhouse systems. Individual roadhouses have been listed in the past, including roadhouses along the Richardson Highway. However, these are individual listings that often fail to acknowledge the interrelatedness of the roadhouse system.

A Multiple Property Nomination in this case would fall under the heading of Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway. The context would stress the relationship each roadhouse had with the others, both in the case of specific owners and roadhouses and across a broader context. The associated historic contexts would be:

- Gold rush period and early interior transportation, 1899-1917

²⁸⁶ Bleakley, *Valdez Trail National Register of Historic Places Multiple Nomination Form 10-900*, 1-8.

²⁸⁷ National Park Service *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Nomination Form* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1999), 2.

- Tourism and Pleasure Hunting in the Redevelopment of the Roadhouses, 1917-1939
- Military Defense Road Construction in Alaska, 1939-1945
- Pipeline Construction period, 1970s

Under a multiple property nomination, associated property types will need to be identified.

“A property type is a grouping of individual properties characterized by common physical and/or associative attributes. Physical attributes include style, structural type, size, scale, proportions, design, architectural details, method of construction, orientation, spatial arrangement or plan, materials, workmanship, artistry, and environmental relationships.”²⁸⁸ Associated property types can also be subdivided for ease of discussion and analysis. Each property type also requires a statement of significance as it relates to each historical context. The individual registration requirements for each property type will also need to be stated and applied as they relate to the National Register criteria, considerations, and areas of significance.²⁸⁹

The associated property types for this nomination consist of two types: roadhouse complex buildings, which will include the barns, storage sheds, and outhouses; and historical archaeological sites, locations where the roadhouses have disintegrated. For the built roadhouse complexes where buildings remain, these property types can then be subdivided into three categories – log cabin construction, wood frame, and prefabricated construction. These categories are largely sequential in the historical context, and so will provide further reinforcement for the historical contexts. During the gold rush era, most roadhouses were initially constructed of log. Several were constructed of milled wood, usually incorporated from other construction projects such as military buildings or railroad construction. During the period

²⁸⁸ National Park Service *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Nomination Form*, 14.

²⁸⁹ National Park Service *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Nomination Form*, 16.

of tourism development, the log buildings were occasionally replaced with wood frame buildings as the materials became more readily available. Prefabricated buildings came into use during the later period of tourism development and the World War II period, and again during the period of pipeline construction during the 1970s.

Those roadhouses where the main building is no longer in existence and the roadhouse site itself largely abandoned will be classified as historical archaeological sites. The remains of roadhouse activities are still present and are worth investigating. The detritus that is left behind serves to illustrate the historical narrative the individual roadhouse, and can help shed light on the lifestyles of those frequented and operated the roadhouses throughout the period of use.

Finally, for a National Register nomination, an explanation of the methods used to identify and create a nomination is required. The explanation includes: a discussion of the survey methods and data collection; the method by which historic contexts were determined; the basis for classification of significant property types; and the requirements for deriving integrity for the member properties.

Finally, the individual nomination forms for each property is required. For the roadhouses, this requires including the existing nominations and the creation of forms and DOEs for the remaining identified roadhouses and sites.

In order to be listed to the NRHP, a DOE is required, and is based on a description and evaluation of a property; a statement of significance; a selected list of sources; and maps, photographs, or other illustrations. Consideration is given to both the criteria of significance and integrity of the site condition. The evaluation should consider the historic context of the property, including its relation to other known historic properties. The NRHP outlines the criteria (A-D) for determining the eligibility for a historic property as follows:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and

- (a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (c) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.²⁹⁰

Certain classes of cultural resources that are not ordinarily eligible for the NRHP, but may be determined eligible under certain circumstances include cemeteries, birthplaces or graves of important people, religious properties, moved structures, reconstructed buildings, commemorative properties or properties achieving significance within the last fifty years.

Inclusion in other preservation efforts – Richardson Highway

In addition to a multiple property nomination, further recognition and real protection for these resources can be had through the inclusion of the properties in the proposed nomination and preservation of the Richardson Highway. The State of Alaska Department of Transportation is currently working closely with the Federal Highways Administration, the Alaska SHPO, and

²⁹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, (Washington, D.C.: Interagency Resource Division, 1997), 44-45.

the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to develop clearly defined criteria for evaluating historic roads and trails. This undertaking is largely resulting from the lack of guidance on the issue from a national level combined with the coming-of-age of many historic routes in Alaska. Modern Alaska transportation routes often evolve from historic trails and routes, and the necessity of recognizing the historic significance of various routes has become a priority for the concerned parties in the state.

There are two vehicles under which the nomination and preservation of the Richardson Highway will include the roadhouses. The first method is to incorporate the roadhouses directly into the treatment of the road itself. According to the National Preservation Institute, there are several classifications for these roads, including street, boulevard, lane, parkway, turnpike and highway. A road is defined as “a longer transportation route generally running through the open country and often connecting more distant locations”²⁹¹ while a highway is defined as “a principle or long distance road.”²⁹² There are also several components of all roads that accompany the types. These are:

- The Road
 - Travelway
 - Pavement
 - Alignment
 - Subsurface
 - Crown
 - Curb

²⁹¹ Dan Marriott, *Preservation Planning and Policy Development for Historic Roads* (Alexandria, Virginia: National Preservation Institute, May 2015), 9.

²⁹² Marriott, *Preservation Planning and Policy Development for Historic Roads*, 10.

- Gutter
- Shoulder
- Structures
- The Roadside
 - Right-of-way
 - Clear zones
 - Swale
 - Barrier
 - Lighting
 - Signs
 - Sidewalks
 - Paths
 - Tree lawn
 - Street trees
 - Utilities
 - Structures
 - Service areas
 - Waysides and overlooks
- The Setting
 - Roadside architecture
 - Landscape features
 - Character
 - Streetscape

- Cultural landscape
- Viewshed
- Foreground, middle ground, background²⁹³

Utilizing these road components, the roadhouses would fall under the classification of service areas and roadside architecture. Service areas are defined as “areas including highway maintenance yards, rest areas or driver/auto plazas providing fuel, food, and information.”²⁹⁴ The roadhouses have served in this capacity since their initial construction. The roadhouses have often served as staging areas for road construction and maintenance, especially during the gold rush period. During this period, the ARC camps were often based at or near roadhouses, as they were the population centers for the dispersed population along the road. In more modern times, the roadhouse locations are utilized for housing for construction workers and staging yards for the equipment. This use is most evident in the use of Sourdough Roadhouse during the summer of 2011. The roadhouses also serve as rest areas for travelers. During earlier periods, the roadhouses provided shelter and food as a matter of traveler survival. In modern times, the operating roadhouses continue to offer rest areas, and usually include some form of rest facilities, food, fuel, and even limited emergency vehicle maintenance. The roadhouses also often serve as modern information hubs, as well, with information of road conditions for those who require it. Those roadhouses no longer in use are usually located on stretches of now-abandoned roadways, allowing travelers to rest in wilderness areas accessible by vehicle.

Roadside architecture is defined as “road-related features including structures and spaces of businesses that are integral to the use of the road. Structures may include gas stations, motor

²⁹³ Marriott, *Preservation Planning and Policy Development for Historic Roads*, 10-17.

²⁹⁴ Marriott, *Preservation Planning and Policy Development for Historic Roads*, 14.

courts, drive-ins, diners, or taverns.”²⁹⁵ The roadhouses have in the past and currently do serve all of these functions.

As important components of a historic road, the roadhouses should be considered in any preservation plan for the Richardson Highway. Inclusion of these elements would mean greater protection for the roadhouses as contributing features to the road. While a discussion will need to be had as to the exact contributing features of the road, the roadhouses have always been a major feature and should be treated as such.

The second vehicle for preservation of the roadhouses in conjunction with the recognition and preservation of the Richardson Highway would be to recognize the route as a designated historic cultural landscape. Often, the reaction of the people to their environment can often be read in the styles and placements of their built environment. This is especially true in the case of the Richardson Highway, the route of which was determined by the terrain it crosses. The various features, such as the roadhouses, were placed accordingly and often constructed with materials taken from the surrounding landscape. The NRHP makes provisions for designation of a historic landscape, and this includes historic transportation routes. The route of the Richardson Highway showcases the movement of people through a volatile landscape, and is significant on a national level for its part in providing access to the gold rush areas of Interior Alaska.

Once designated as a historical landscape, it will be possible to create a treatment plan based on *Preservation Brief 36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes* and incorporating aspects taken from conservation management of rural areas in other countries. According to the brief, a cultural landscape is defined as “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person

²⁹⁵ Marriott, *Preservation Planning and Policy Development for Historic Roads*, 15.

or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.” These landscapes include, historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and ethnographic landscapes.²⁹⁶ A historic designed landscape is categorized as a landscape that has been laid out or engineered by a landscape architect, master gardener, architect, or horticulturalist. In short, an area that has been adapted to aesthetic use by human intervention. A historic vernacular landscape is more general, defined as “a landscape that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped that landscape.”²⁹⁷ A historic site landscape is a historic site, such as a battlefield or the properties of influential presidents. Finally, an ethnographic landscape one that contains heritage resources for associated groups of people, such as religious sacred sites and massive geological structures.

In the case of the roadhouses along the Richardson Highway, treatment under this option would involve treating the transportation route as a historic vernacular landscape. The road is an excellent example of the impact and adaptation of the environment in response to human activities. The road follows traditional cultural routes in certain areas, and the road grew organically as it followed the easiest routes through difficult terrain. As the population in Alaska grew in response to economic opportunities, settlements developed along the roadway, usually centered in areas where a roadhouse previously existed. The roadhouses themselves served as jumping off points for further exploration, settlement, and prospecting activities throughout the adjacent terrain. Designating the road as an historic landscape would include documenting all road features, including route, view shed, and roadside amenities such as the roadhouses.

²⁹⁶ Charles A. Birnbaum, “Preservation Bulletin 36: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes” in *The Preservation of Historic Architecture*, compiled by the US Department of the Interior (Guilford, Connecticut: The Lyons Press, 2004), 433.

²⁹⁷ Birnbaum, “Preservation Bulletin 36: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes”, 434.

In the U.S., cultural landscape definitions are much more restricted in terms of definition than some in England. By the English definition, a historic landscape includes the identification of the sense of place that comes from the landscape. A sense of place comes from two different aspects, the physical aspect and the human factor. The physical aspect pertains to the landscape itself: the appearance, the climate, etc. The human factor pertains to the way in which people have used the landscape: where they have placed their settlements, how they used the land for survival, how the physical aspects influenced the human factors. All of this combines to create a sense of place that people tend to take pride in. Understanding this sense of place is important to creating a conservation and management plan that does not disrupt this idea, unless the disruption is desired by the people who live in it.²⁹⁸ When the human factor is taken into account, it brings the local population into the planning and implementation process. People can be fiercely protective of where they live and gaining support for the plan can often be achieved by understanding how the people view their own environment. They also can be critical to helping to understand the landscape, as they are the ones who know it best. The downfall of this comes when a particular landowner is unaware of a resources sited on his land. In most cases, however, once the landowner is made aware of what it is that they have on their own land, they are usually eager to help protect and share it.

The inclusion of the current owners of the roadhouses and the land they occupy is of paramount importance to the preservation of existing roadhouses, especially as pertains to designation of a historic landscape. Cooperation on the part of the landowners is necessary in order to fully implement any preservation plan on this scale. An organization made up of preservation and historian professionals, landowners, wildlife conservation consultants, and other

²⁹⁸ Jane Grenville, *Managing the Historic Rural Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1999), summary.

concerned parties will need to be created to oversee all actions undertaken by a plan. This organization can be easily placed under the jurisdiction of the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology, which already has undertaken work to investigate historic trails within Alaska. In addition, the involvement of a nonprofit entity such as the Alaska Historical Society or the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation could ensure proper decorum and implementation of such a plan. According to the Alaska Historic Preservation Act, “privately owned state monuments or historic sites are eligible to receive state support for their maintenance, restoration, and rehabilitation if they are kept accessible to the general public and application for support is made in conformity with regulations adopted by the commissioner.”²⁹⁹ If brought under a single historical context with recognized state historic significance, those roadhouses in private ownership would then directly benefit from an infusion of state funding. Funding could then be used to implement rehabilitation efforts of existing roadhouses, the investigation and preservation of roadhouse archaeological sites, and the creation of a public education and outreach plan to promote the existence and significance of the roadhouses.

Creation of Roadhouse Land Bank

In the vein of including the local population in the planning and preservation process, the creation of a land bank for roadhouse properties is a desirable option for the setting aside of these significant properties. The land bank would take a similar form to one established in 1996 for the protection of Native subsistence lands. This land bank was “designed to protect undeveloped lands and promote cooperative land management among the various landowners. This was a

²⁹⁹ Alaska State Legislature, Alaska Historic Preservation Act, Sec. 41.35.040.

voluntary effort in which a Native corporation or anyone else could cooperate with other landowners to shield unimproved and undeveloped land from taxation.”³⁰⁰

For the purposes of the roadhouses, a land bank could be established under which property owners could place roadhouse properties under the protection of the land bank, shielding them from development and road construction activities. This method of protection could also be utilized for state owned land, with roadhouse properties currently in the possession of the state transferred into the roadhouse land bank for protection purposes. By placing properties in the land bank, private owners could then signal their participation in the overall roadhouse preservation scheme and make themselves eligible for funding in the preservation and promotion of the roadhouses. Under the terms of this land bank, it would be generally understood that the owners would be agreeing to not clear or demolish roadhouses in their ownership. The roadhouses would then be evaluated for the best course of action to be taken for each one. These would generally include the first three preservation treatments acceptable by the National Park Service – preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration. Reconstruction activities would only be undertaken as funding allows.

Physical Documentation, Preservation Work, and Reuse Options

Once a method of organization for the overseeing body is selected and properties have been placed in a land bank, funding can be sought and decisions made pertaining to the proposed treatments of each roadhouse. The initial course of action by the overseeing body will be to identify all those roadhouse sites with locations that are only approximately known. This project can coincide with a longer archaeological study of the roadhouse properties containing only archaeological remains. The project will require the services of an architectural historian or a

³⁰⁰ Naske, *Alaska*, 317.

historian with intimate knowledge of the Richardson Highway and roadhouses history as well as an archaeologist and archaeological technicians. These individuals will be best qualified to undertake the work involved.

Next, it will be necessary to assign treatment methods for the existing roadhouses in consultation with the roadhouse owners. This will involve discussion with the owners to determine individual goals for the properties and their standing structures. Adaptation of those goals and available treatment methods to ensure compliance with Secretary of the Interior Standards may be necessary, and must be part of an ongoing discussion with the property owners.

In assigning treatment methods for the various roadhouses, it will also be necessary to develop a system by which certain projects receive priority funding. Such a system will need to be developed in consultation with all concerned parties, but should make provisions for those roadhouses placed in immediate danger. An example of this is the remaining barn structure of Meier's Roadhouse, which is currently located directly in the road right-of-way. Energy should be placed in ensuring the continued existence of these structures without also impeding reasonable development. These considerations are listed as follows:

- Present deterioration of the historic roadhouse structures;
- Current, planned, and proposed road construction projects;
- Municipal development endangering the resources, in areas where structures are located inside an urban area; and
- Erosion and other encroachment issues of the natural landscape on the roadhouse structures.

Once appropriate treatments are devised and funding secured, it will be possible to move ahead with the physical treatments of the roadhouse structures themselves. It is anticipated that this process will span the course of several years, with funding sources renewing each year as state and national budgets allow. Additional funding can be found for the individual roadhouses through small business grants and low interest loans. Many of these programs available in Alaska are tailored specifically to rural properties and businesses and can be easily used for the improvement of a historic property for business purposes.

Tourism and Promotional Plan – Public Presentation and Site interpretation

Initial educational outreach should be aimed at informing landholders of the significance of their properties within the historic context. Many owners of roadhouse properties are aware of the existence and significance of the property they own, but some are not. Outreach is necessary to ensure that all roadhouse properties are brought under the larger umbrella of the Richardson Highway roadhouses.

Once the roadhouse properties are secured and preservation work is underway, it will be possible to proceed with promotional and tourism plans for the roadhouses and the Richardson Highway itself. The increase of tourism along the highway is of vital importance for the survival of the roadhouses. Those still in existence rely on tourism and game hunting and fishing activities for their economic survival. Currently, there is little organized tourism along the Richardson Highway, as most of the larger tour operators have shifted their focus to the Parks Highway, the Alaska Railroad, and the urban tourism hubs of Fairbanks and Anchorage. There are self-described adventure tours, which take visitors to such destinations as Chitina and McCarthy and extended bike excursions out from Valdez along the highway, and these are precisely the kinds of tourism ventures that could best be used to promote the roadhouses.

The initial step in creating a tourism-marketing plan is to identify the resources contained within the impact area. These can include cultural resources, natural resources, events, etc. The next step is to evaluate these resources, determining what exactly makes these resources special and why tourists should decide to visit these. The resource evaluation also includes inventorying any supporting resources that might be necessary, such as lodgings, transportation, food, etc. and whether improvements need to be made to these resources to support an increase in activity. Evaluating the system as a whole includes performing a SWOT analysis to identify any weak points in the resources and system in general. This includes building community profiles.

Identifying the target audience for the strategy is the next step. This involves analyzing who exactly the tourist is that visits these areas and who exactly do the areas want to come and visit. People take vacations and plan for destinations based on their interests, but it also is not advisable to advertise to the wrong crowd. Targeting a group of outdoor enthusiasts for advertising a five-star resort is probably not the best fit.

Next, it is important to ensure that the local community is in support of the plan. In the National Trust publication *Getting Started: How to Succeed in Heritage Tourism*, the importance of this concept is stressed. Whether or not the local residents actually want tourism or an increase in tourism can make a plan succeed or fail based on the interactions between the tourism and the resident. A hostile resident population can make the experience a miserable one for the tourist and they are likely to not further promote the area.

Once the community is on board with the plan, marketing can begin by determining the proper methods for reaching the target audience. This can be anything from newspaper ads to magazine articles to national advertisements at tourism conferences. How a target audience is reached depends the habits of that particular audience.

Creating sustainable tourism is important for any marketing plan, but it can also be the most difficult. Tourism can bring much-needed economic boom to a given area, but it can also be negative. Too massive of an increase in tourism can lead to the deterioration of sensitive resources, the importing of mass-produced goods into a market that can only support local goods, inflation of prices due to the fluctuating tourist seasons, and the outsourcing of labor away from the local community as tour groups import their own employees from other areas.

When developing a tourism plan for the Richardson Highway and the roadhouse system, it is important to recognize that it is a very large area with a diverse population. Some tourist activities do exist along the route, however these are largely clustered in areas like Valdez, Delta Junction, and Fairbanks. The large tour companies focus largely on Valdez, where the cruise ships come in to dock for a day at most, and Fairbanks, where visitors are treated to gold panning at historic dredge sites, before spending more time further west in Denali National Park and the shopping mecca of Anchorage. The recent trend, according to the grounds keeper and historian at Rika's Landing Roadhouse State Historic Park has been to bypass the site entirely, with the buses driving from Fairbanks to Delta Junction, where they are treated to ice cream and a visit to the end of the Alaska Highway, before returning to Fairbanks.³⁰¹

While the few clusters of civilization along the Richardson Highway generally offer tourist amenities such as lodging and food, these range in their conditions from the ultra-luxurious to barebones aging establishments. The distances between the resources, the conditions of the road, the hostility of the local population to those who aren't tolerant of their lifestyles, and the lack of any tourist cluster between Fairbanks and Valdez are all factors that make it difficult to market the area to the broad spectrum of tourists who come to see Denali for a day and then return

³⁰¹ Interview with Irene Mead, July 2012.

home. The history of the route, the people along the way, and the activities that come with the wild landscape the route crosses, however, would appeal to an entirely different tourist market, that of the history enthusiast and the outdoor adventurer.

Finally, an educational program should be adopted to promote the history and significance of both the Richardson Highway and the roadhouses themselves. Such a program should include informational signage put in place along the road to mark the locations of the roadhouses, such as was installed for the Alaska Gold Rush Centennial celebrations that took place in the early 2000s. The signage could be incorporated as part of mitigation measures between the Alaska DOT&PF and the Alaska SHPO to ensure the documentation of the highway and roadhouse histories and locations. The educational program would also include a promotional unit for the state school districts, and could be easily expanded statewide to incorporate local trail and roadhouse systems. A model is already in place for the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance, which sponsors workshops for teachers each summer to provide state teachers with materials for education of school-aged children.

CONCLUSION

For more than a century, roadhouses throughout Alaska have served as life-saving refuges from the Alaska climate. Operating as more than that, however, they have been gathering places for Alaskans to come together across a dangerous and remote expanse of territory. From serving as shelters from storms and supply depots for early travelers to providing meals and mechanical services to modern-day travelers, roadhouses continue to operate across Alaska for the mutual benefit of all Alaskans. The roadhouses can be used to help map early transportation routes across areas where trails have been rendered unrecognizable by the overgrowth of vegetation. Roadhouses also embody the record of survival of people living in remote communities, and can be valuable tools for researching historic events in otherwise nameless landscapes.

Although surveyed and documented in both 1974 and 1984, many changes have occurred along the Richardson Highway in the intervening 32 years, making new documentation and preservation of these roadhouses that much more important. Road construction projects and the gradual realignment of the highway mean that some roadhouses have been removed during clearing process while others have been made inaccessible by vehicles. The surviving roadhouses that continue to operate often face dire financial threats and the loss of integrity due to careless alterations. The roadhouses that have not survived in the commercial sense and were abandoned are often in danger of destruction by neglect and vandalism. All of these roadhouses, however, are in danger of being forgotten entirely, their importance during the gold rush period and the role they played in building Alaska lost to neglect and time.

Due to the fact that the roadhouses are isolated along nearly 400 miles of highway across two mountains ranges and river drainages, a concerted effort will need to be made to preserve both the physical aspect of the roadhouses and the historic record they represent. This will

involve cooperation by federal, state, and local governments, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and the private citizens who own and operate surviving roadhouses. Research and fieldwork will need to be undertaken to identify and document those roadhouses that are deteriorating, and will require the cooperation of multiple professional entities such as historians, archaeologists, historic architects, and historic preservation specialists. Only by compiling as much information as possible by all concerned parties and disseminating the information to the public will ensure that the roadhouses are not forgotten. Education of the general public in the form of travel guides, roadside informational pullout, and increased tourism from appropriate groups will help to raise awareness in other parts of the country, and could bring financial benefit to those people who own and operate roadhouses statewide.

Further work will need to be undertaken to more thoroughly and accurately locate and document these historic resources. This work is intended to serve as a basis for future study, and was accomplished utilizing limited time and funding. Further research will help to identify further roadhouse systems across Alaska, and will be beneficial to developing historic contexts for use in the evaluation of these resources.

Roadhouses hold a distinctive place in the history of Alaska, and those that survive are testament to the tenacity and determination of the first American explorers and pioneers in Alaska. Although many at first came to Alaska in search of freedom from the constraints of a more civilized society, the roadhouses themselves often formed the centers of community life across rural Alaska. These roadhouses became beacons of civilization in a beautiful, wild, and unforgiving landscape that is Alaska.

APPENDIX A: INVENTORY OF RICHARDSON HIGHWAY ROADHOUSES

Camp Comfort Roadhouse



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Figure 48. View of Camp Comfort, January 16, 1905. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Camp Comfort Roadhouse is thought to have been the first stop on the trail, nine miles north of Valdez. It was first mentioned in a study of the Copper River Valley in 1898 as Camp Comfort. Early on, under the ownership of W. A. Smith, Camp Comfort consisted of “a two-story rough spruce log structure with $\frac{1}{2}$ pitch shingle roof.”³⁰² In March of 1902, the roadhouse was purchased by Oscar Fish and placed in the management of Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Roberts. The Roberts were able to purchase the property at an unknown date, making improvements and

³⁰² Walter T. Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway* (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Historical Commission, 1984) 5.

homesteading the property complete with patent. In 1907, the Roberts built a new roadhouse further towards the mountain to protect it from flooding and erosion by the Lowe River. This new roadhouse was partially constructed using railroad intended for a failed railroad plan in the region.³⁰³ A travel guide from 1910 describes the roadhouse as “a new structure, built from finished lumber, and nestled among the trees, well protected from the winds and snowstorms. Good meals are served and a comfortable bed can be had.”³⁰⁴ In 1914, it was purchased by Mrs. Lizzie Magnusson, who in 1912 had been involved in a scandal at Wortman’s Roadhouse further north involving the alleged kidnaping of her daughter by a religious group from San Francisco.³⁰⁵ It can be presumed that she used the settlement for the ensuing legal case to purchase Camp Comfort. An account of a journey made over the trail, published in 1915, claims that the roadhouse was “owned by a woman whose only name so far as I knew was Blue Skin.”³⁰⁶ By this time, the roadhouse business was declining, and the roadhouse closed in 1918.³⁰⁷ A travel guide from 1929 notes the spot, saying that “although now deserted, it serves as a reminder of the time when a day’s travel was limited by the distance a man could mush.”³⁰⁸

The roadhouse site was in existence as late as 1974, with “at least two two-story log buildings with shingle roofs” still standing.³⁰⁹ The study conducted in 1984 did not record any remaining structures. The growth of the urban area surrounding contemporary Valdez would suggest that this site may have been cleared, but due to time constraints, attempts were not made for this study to locate any remains.

³⁰³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 5.

³⁰⁴ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 23.

³⁰⁵ “Alaska woman would recover her daughter,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, September 24, 1912.

³⁰⁶ John Bufvers, *Valdez Travel Days* (1917), 3.

³⁰⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 5.

³⁰⁸ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways* (Alaska: Richardson Highway Transportation Company, 1929), 4.

³⁰⁹ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 12.



Figure 49. New Camp Comfort Roadhouse, February 16, 1908. Mary Whalen Photograph Collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Second Class Roadhouse

Little information exists regarding this roadhouse. It was located at the mouth of Keystone Canyon, and may have also been referred to as Keystone Roadhouse, which was listed at the same mile marker.³¹⁰ The roadhouse is listed as being 14 miles from Valdez, and was opened in 1904 by Mr. T. M. Daniels. It operated mostly as a food stop, since “most travelers wished to travel on to Wortman’s at 18 Mile for the night, giving them an early start in the morning to cross Thompson Pass.” The roadhouse was closed in 1905 when Daniels moved to more profitable roadhouse elsewhere,³¹¹ and it is not recorded any source following the closure. No effort was made to locate the roadhouse due to lack of information and time constraints.

³¹⁰ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 12.

³¹¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 6.

Wortman's Roadhouse

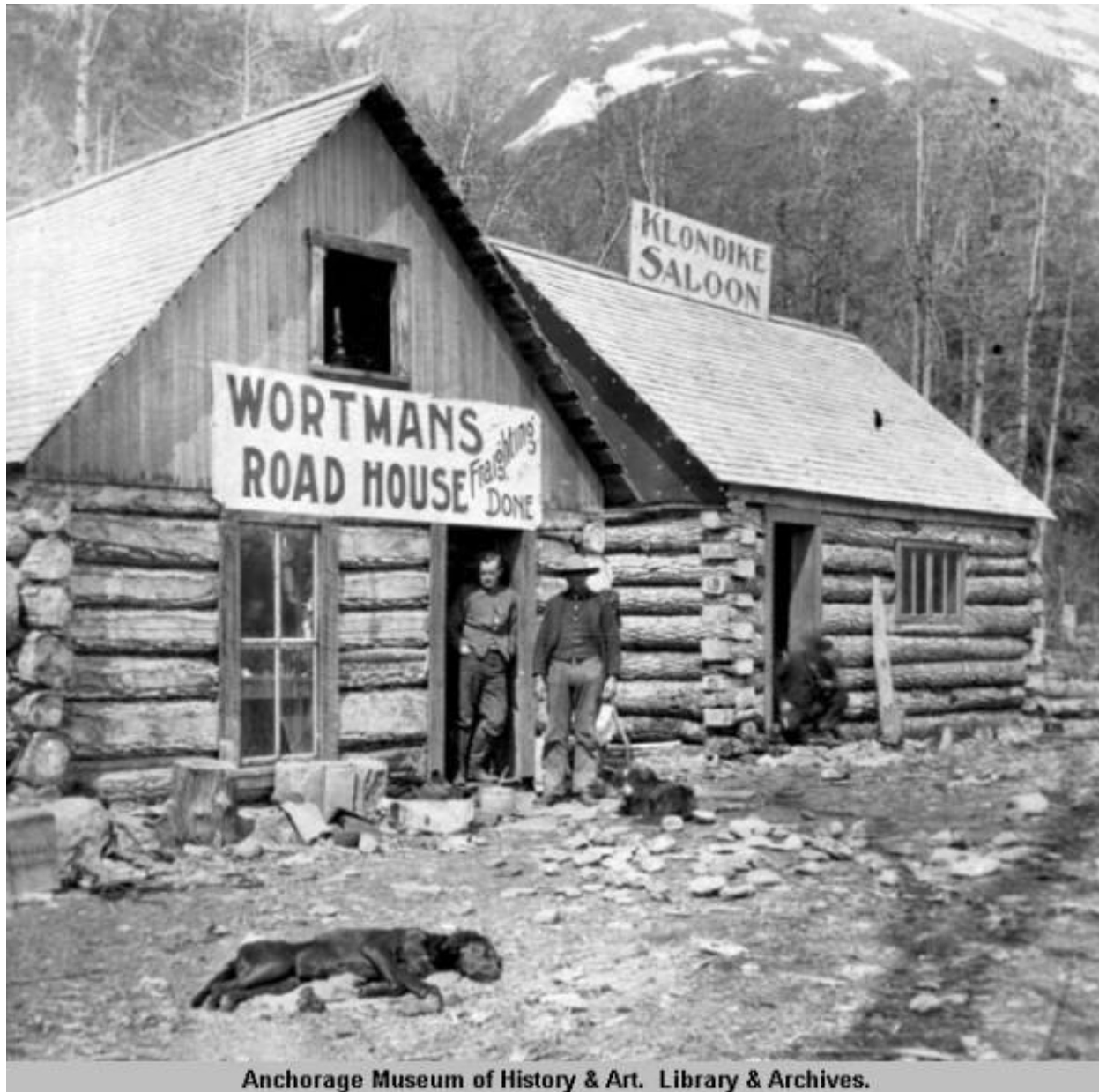


Figure 50. Wortman's Roadhouse, undated. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Wortman's Roadhouse was one of the most important roadhouses along the trail, as it sat at the base of Thompson Pass 19 or 20 miles north of Valdez. Most travelers tried to make Wortman's in the first day as to have an early start up the pass the next morning. This was also the transfer point where freight loads were lightened so the sleds could be pulled over the pass.

The roadhouse was originally constructed by Bill Wortman at an unrecorded date, although later ads claim that it was the first roadhouse built on the trail. In 1902, Wortman formed a partnership with Pontus Magnusson, and was able to add onto the roadhouse by constructing barns and dog kennels. In 1904, Wortman sold his share to Magnusson, who then sold the roadhouse to Mrs. E. E. (Nelly) Doty in 1905. Mrs. Doty was also the owner of the Ptarmigan Drop Roadhouse further north, and leased Ptarmigan Drop while in possession of Wortman's. The interlude was short lived, however, as by 1906 he was back in possession of the roadhouse.

In 1907, not long after Magnusson had married Lizzie Rieman (Magnusson), the roadhouse burned to the ground. Magnusson immediately rebuilt the roadhouse, using wood salvaged from the then-abandoned Wilson's Roadhouse on the opposite bank of neighboring Sheep Creek as well as lumber that had been intended for the proposed railroad through Keystone Pass. When completed, the roadhouse had accommodations for 100 people and 100 head of stock.³¹² It was reported as having spring beds and excellent rooms, a general store, and a line of jewelry for sale.³¹³

In 1912, a scandal erupted involving Mrs. Lizzie Magnusson and her daughter, Marjorie. According to news articles, the daughter had been forcibly removed from the roadhouse by police, who then turned her over to the Sisters of Visitation in San Francisco. The police and religious house claimed that Marjorie "was taken in charge in order to save her from the life which she is said to have been compelled to lead at the roadhouse in the Far North." Mrs. Magnusson filed a lawsuit against the religious house for damages associated with the kidnapping and alienation of affection. Testimony was given in court that she "entertained the

³¹² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 7.

³¹³ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 25.

guests with dice shaking” while the mother served at the bar.³¹⁴ The case was quickly settled, with Mrs. Magnusson “awarded \$23,033 in damages” associated with the alienation of the affections of her daughter. Marjorie was allowed to remain in San Francisco, while her mother returned to Alaska.³¹⁵

This case may have been a strain between the Magnussons, because they separated in 1913. Mrs. Magnusson purchased Camp Comfort Roadhouse, possibly with funds from the court case, and Mr. Magnusson sold Wortman’s to Pete Cashman.³¹⁶ Cashman invested in what he thought would be a valuable service, purchasing several passenger and freight trucks in 1913 to convey travelers and freight over Thompson Pass.³¹⁷ Whether or not this investment paid off is unknown, and the roadhouse closed from lack of business in 1919.³¹⁸ It was still standing in 1929, and a travel guide at the time referred to it as deserted, but “a reminder of days long passed.”³¹⁹

Whether this roadhouse remains today is unknown. In 1940, it was reported that the roadhouse was still standing, although a portion of the roof had collapsed. Due to time constraints, no effort was made to locate this roadhouse. Effort should be made in the future.

³¹⁴ “Alaska woman would recover her daughter,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, September 24, 1912.

³¹⁵ “Mrs. Magnusson gets judgement,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 26, 1912.

³¹⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 7.

³¹⁷ “New auto trucks bought for trail,” *Alaska Citizen*, May 12, 1913.

³¹⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 7.

³¹⁹ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 5.

White's Roadhouse, Wilson's Roadhouse

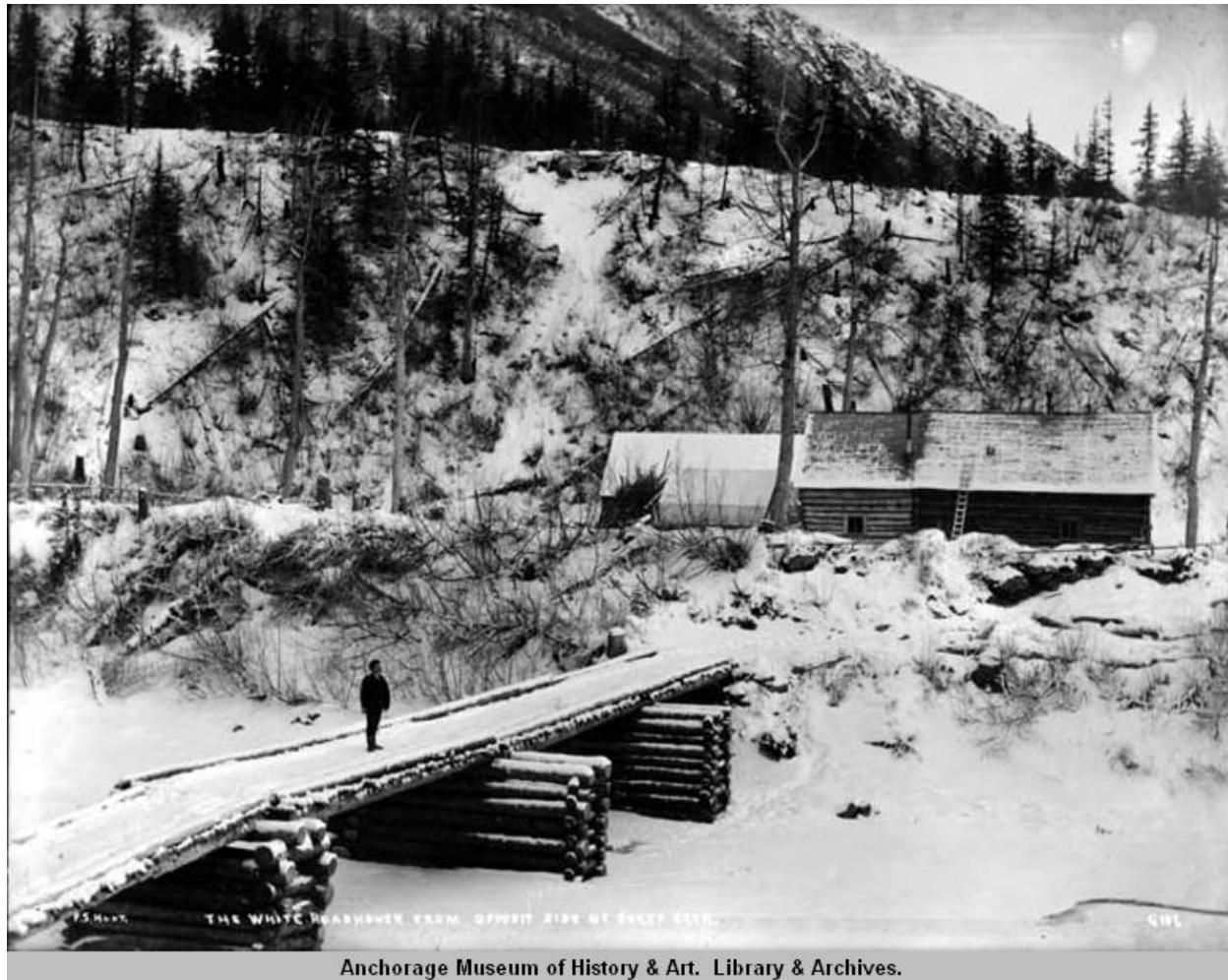


Figure 51. White's Roadhouse with bridge across Sheep Creek, undated. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

In 1903, a trio of men named Wilson, Davison, and Little established a roadhouse on the banks of a creek referred to alternately as Glacier Creek and Sheep Creek, just 1600ft beyond Wortman's Roadhouse. It was a two-story log cabin with a shingled shed roof, with a frame-construction barn constructed at the site at a later date. The roadhouse was purchased by Walter L. White in 1904, and the name changed to White's Roadhouse. In 1905, it was sold twice, first to T. M. Daniels, who also operated the Second Class Roadhouse, and then to Mrs. E. E. Dotty, who owned Wortman's Roadhouse and consolidated the two adjacent sites into one property.

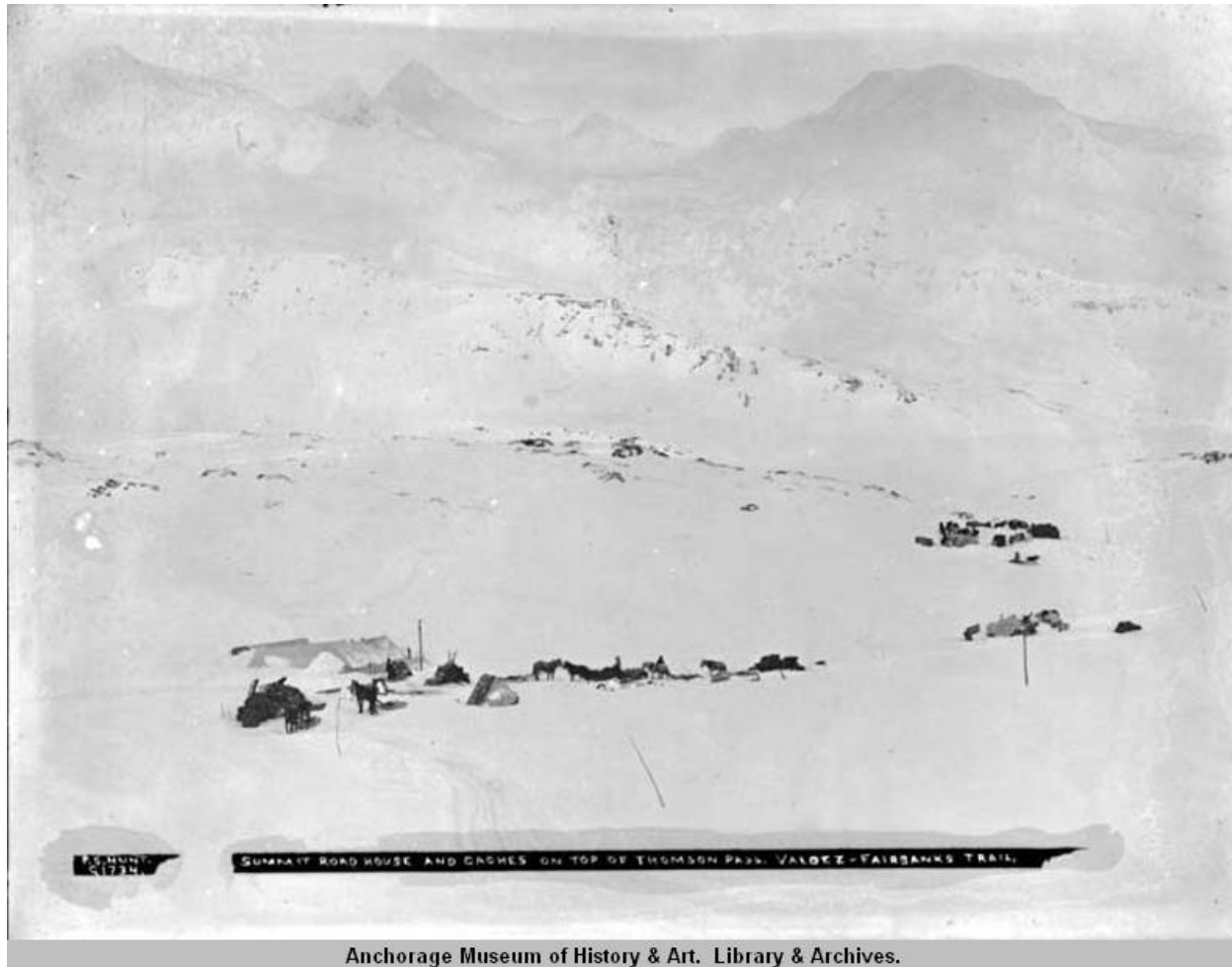
When Magnusson took over operation of Wortman's, he used White's for storage, and then in 1907 dismantled the buildings and used the lumber to construct the new Wortman's Roadhouse.³²⁰

Because the site is so closely tied to Wortman's Roadhouse and the lumber was recycled to construct the later Wortman's, these two roadhouses could almost be treated in tandem.

Locating Wortman's would mean locating Wilson's, as well.

³²⁰ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 8.

Robert's Roadhouse, Kennedy Roadhouse, Summit Roadhouse



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Figure 52. View of Summit Roadhouse and caches at summit of Thompson Pass, Valdez-Fairbanks Trail, Alaska. Crary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Some confusion exists relating to the names and locations of these three roadhouses. They are listed in different locations or referred to as being the same roadhouse under different names depending on the source. It could have been anywhere from Mile 20.1 to Mile 26 of the present highway, and was established either by Mrs. J. P. Roberts or the Kennedy Stage. Regardless, sources agree that the roadhouse apparently sat somewhere near the summit of Thompson Pass, and was a combination of stone building and tent storage. Stone is plentiful at the summit of Thompson Pass, and given the ferocity of the storms and level of snowfall in the pass it would be

logical for a roadhouse to be sited at or near the summit to aid in the transportation of goods. All the sources say that the roadhouse itself was stone construction to some extent, and could be accessed from the roof, a necessity in the winter with snowfalls well over 12 feet a year. This type of system was not unusual for a roadhouse in Alaska; Yost's Roadhouse in Isabel Pass further north also had access from the roof.³²¹

The discrepancy between the sources makes using text as the sole indicator of location almost impossible and was not undertaken in the short amount of time available. The site undoubtedly exists, and a building of stone construction would be more resistant to erosion from the elements. Further investigation is necessary, and the most helpful sources may be the people who use the area for recreation.

³²¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 11.

Eureka Roadhouse

The Eureka Roadhouse was a short-lived roadhouse 30 miles north from Valdez on the west side of Ptarmigan Creek. It was reportedly built by the Valdez Transportation Company in 1905 for use as a station for changing horses. It was a two-story log cabin with a shingle roof, and had shelter available for livestock. It was operated by John E. Renny and also sold animal feed. It burned in 1906 and was not rebuilt,³²² likely owing to the fact that it was just one mile south of the better-established Ptarmigan Drop Roadhouse.

According to the study completed in 1984, “the site of this roadhouse may be seen from the Ptarmigan Creek Bridge at 30.7 Mile.”³²³ Today, however, nothing can be seen from the bridge.

³²² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 12.

³²³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 12.

Ptarmigan Drop Roadhouse

The Ptarmigan Drop Roadhouse, located just 31 miles north from Valdez, was one of the early roadhouses on the trail. It was constructed and opened in 1901 by Frank Maess, and the first customer recorded was Chas Garwood.³²⁴ It was located at the confluence of Ptarmigan Creek and the Tsaina River, on the west side of the present road, at the base of a sharp descent referred to as “the Drop.” The roadhouse consisted of a “single story rustic log cabin and lean-to,” to be replaced later by a two-story hewn log structure with lean-to. In 1902 it was sold to Mrs. E. E. (Nelly) Doty, who operated it until 1905 when she took possession of Wortman’s Roadhouse closer to Valdez. Rather than sell, she leased the roadhouse to a series of proprietors, and by 1913 it was being operated by Charles Nevilius and Mrs. Lena Pitcher.³²⁵ Nevilius later owned Rapids Roadhouse further north from 1924 to 1926, where he died. It may not have been a pleasant location, as a travel guide in 1910 referred to it only by location, “where travelers can get accommodations, if necessary, before going eight miles further to Beaver Dam.”³²⁶ In 1915, John Bufvers reported that “Mrs. Pitcher, the cook, had a reputation for serving the best meals on the trail and I will admit her cooking was very good.”³²⁷ By 1923, the roadhouse was listed only as a relief cabin and occasionally utilized by the ARC as crew quarters.³²⁸

Conversations with old-timers along the route and with those who know the road well indicate that remains of the roadhouse are still present. The pipeline runs through this area, and access might be had by use of an Alyeska maintenance service access road. At the time that

³²⁴ “Frank Maess obituary,” *Alaska Miner*, August 9, 1938.

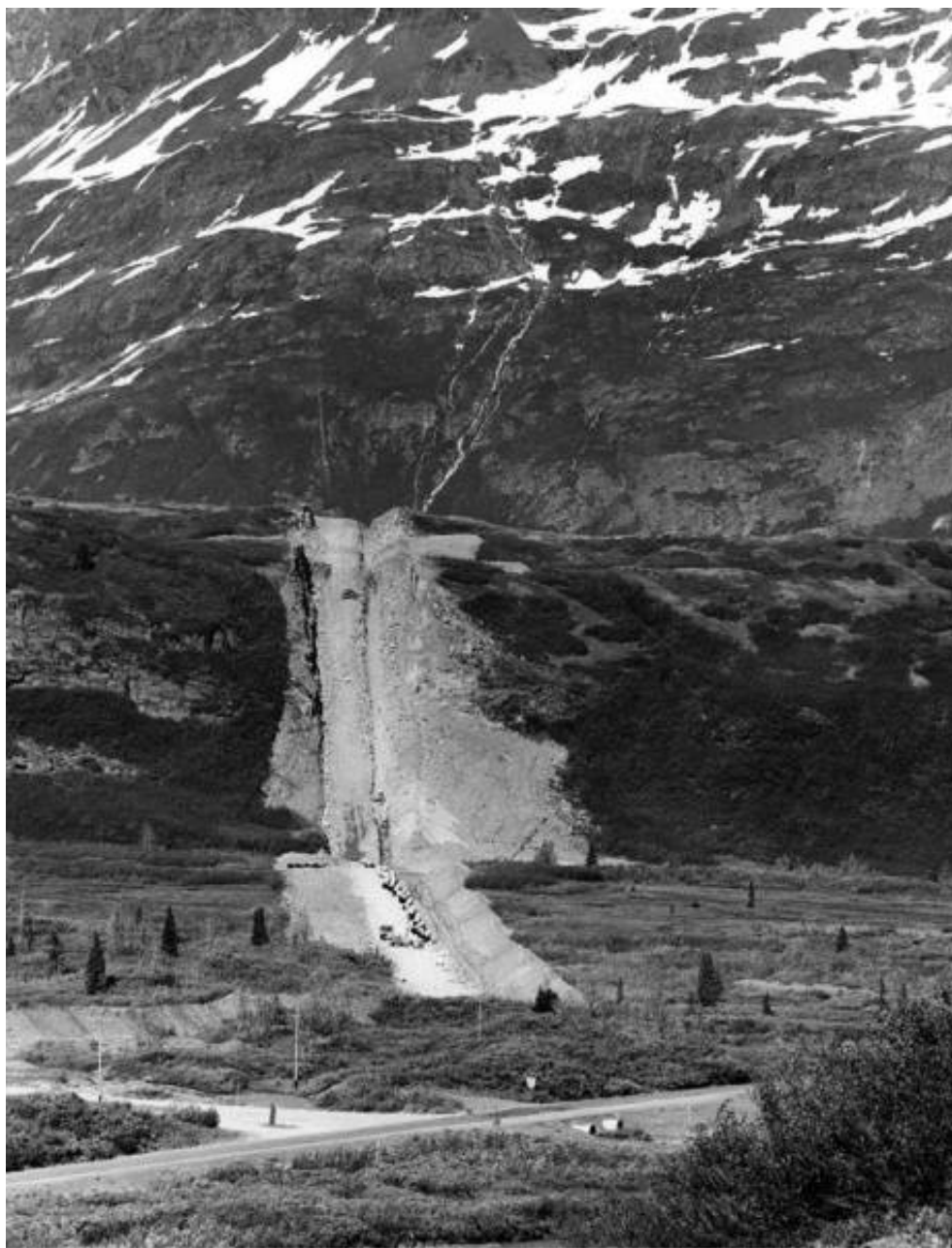
³²⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 13.

³²⁶ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 25.

³²⁷ Bufvers, *Valdez Trail Days*, 11.

³²⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 13.

fieldwork was undertaken, however, the service access road had been washed out due to flooding in the area. Investigation would need to be carried out to verify its existence and condition.



Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center. Library & Archives.

Figure 53. Trans Alaska Pipeline construction at Ptarmigan Drop, with the Richardson highway in the foreground. Steve McCutcheon Photograph, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Beaver Dam Roadhouse

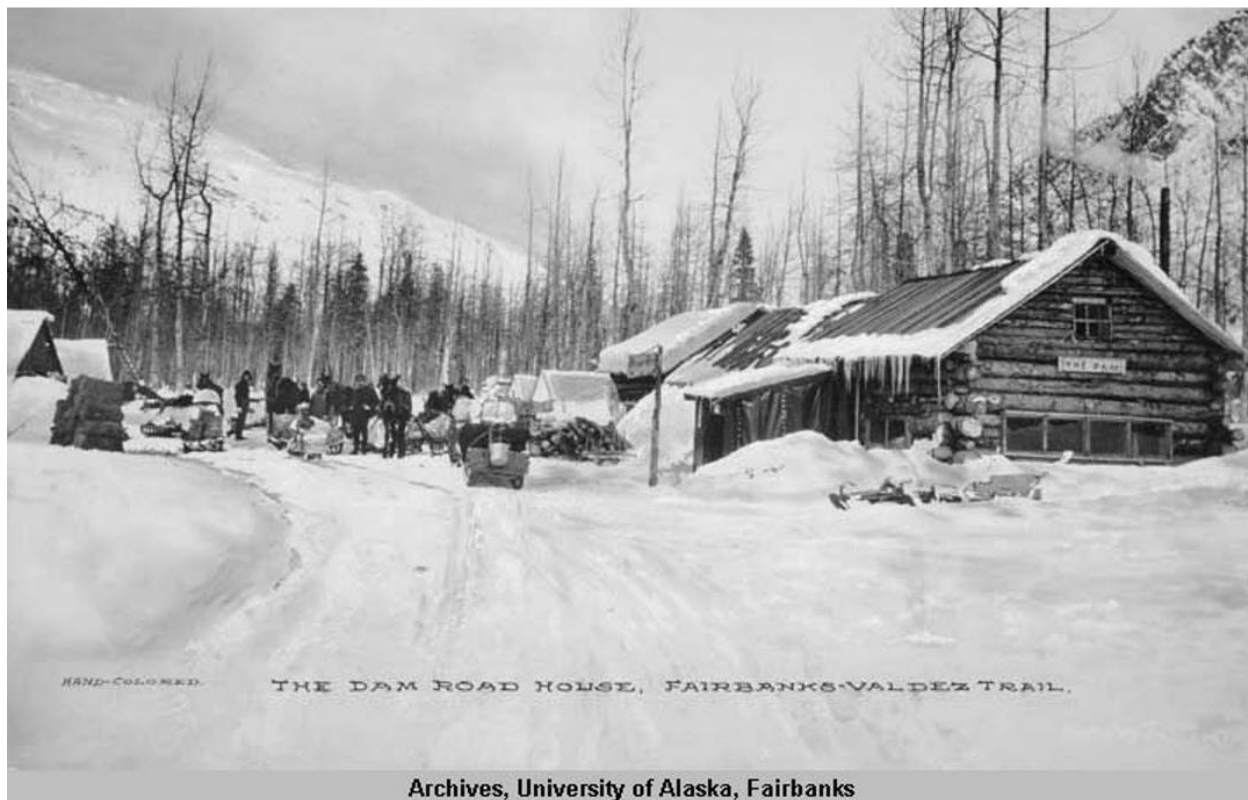


Figure 54. The Dam Roadhouse, undated. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The Beaver Dam Roadhouse opened in 1903 under the ownership of Len Thompson, 41 miles north of Valdez. It was “built on the old riverbed of the Tsaina River.”³²⁹ The roadhouse drew its name from the extensive work of beavers nearby; reportedly it was “an excellent example of the work of the beaver in building his house and dam.”³³⁰ It could accommodate 50 people and 35 head of stock.³³¹ It was taken over by the Valdez Transportation Company in 1905 for use as a stagecoach station. In 1906, it was sold to Robert R. Robinson and George Treat, who proceeded to make extensive improvements. By 1908, it was owned by Nels Jepson and was used by the Orr Stage Company. In 1910, it was referred to as very comfortable. The

³²⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 14.

³³⁰ *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, Alaska Road Commission, 1929, 7.

³³¹ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 13.

living area served as a meeting place of the old trailers who would gather around the stove and tell stories.³³² A brief mining boom in the area in 1910 kept the roadhouse going, and Jepson was appointed postmaster in 1911. Business declined soon after, however, and in 1918 Jepson closed and abandoned the roadhouse.³³³

The present road runs through the area where the roadhouse once stood, obliterating any sign of it.³³⁴

³³² Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 25.

³³³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 14.

³³⁴ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 14.

Ernestine Roadhouse



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Figure 55. Ernestine Roadhouse, undated. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Ernestine Roadhouse was located approximately 60 miles north of Valdez, near the location where Ernestine Creek flows into the Tiekel River. It was constructed in 1902 by George L. Davis and Johnny Nelson. In 1904 it was purchased by Ed Page, an old Alaskan from the Cook Inlet, and enlarged to hold 26 lodgers. Two barns were also added at that time, one in particular for use by the Orr Stage Line.³³⁵ A mining camp was recorded in the vicinity in 1908 by the USGS,³³⁶ and the roadhouse no doubt pulled business from the camp. In 1912, the

³³⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 17.

³³⁶ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 14.

roadhouse was purchased by Henry Miller, a miner, and his wife, who had been a cook at the nearby Ptarmigan Drop Roadhouse. Their daughter Pearl joined them in 1913. The roadhouse was closed by 1916, due to decreased travel along the route.³³⁷

No trace of the roadhouse could be found in the limited time allowed for this study, but remains could very possibly still exist. A photograph taken in 1984 shows the roadhouse still standing.³³⁸ Currently, a Department of Transportation maintenance station sits near this location, which is referred to as Ernestine Station. It is may possible that the roadhouse site was cleared to make way for road construction activities.

³³⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 17.

³³⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 18.

Glacier House, King's Roadhouse

King's Roadhouse was listed in distance tables produced by the Orr Stage Line in 1906 as lying 10 miles north of Ernestine³³⁹ and eight miles south of Tonsina.³⁴⁰ It was a two-story structure on the east side of the trail made of unpeeled logs with a sod roof later covered with canvas. The roadhouse was capable of holding 50 people and had separate accommodations for women. The barn was constructed using vertical logs and a sod roof. By 1910, under the operation of Mr. and Mrs. Braxton, it was referred to as Glacier House, the name rising from the tendency of the road in the area of glaciating in the winter. Following its closure in 1912,³⁴¹ it was used as a relief cabin. A fire started by careless mushers destroyed the building in 1915. An interesting reference in the article about its destruction notes, "it will be remembered that reports of depredations committed at the relief cabin were reported last winter."³⁴² No further information exists.

The exact location of the roadhouse remains unknown; attempts to locate the site based on references were unsuccessful.

³³⁹ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 14.

³⁴⁰ "Musher's blamed for burning of cabin," *Alaska Citizen*, March 15, 1915.

³⁴¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 14.

³⁴² "Musher's blamed for burning of cabin," *Alaska Citizen*, March 15, 1915.

Tacoma Roadhouse

The Tacoma Roadhouse opened in 1907, 55 miles north of Valdez, at what is now approximately Mile 58 of the Richardson Highway. It was a two-story hand-hewn log building constructed by J. Olson. In 1908, it was operated by Dick Windmiller, who later operated the Poplar Grove Roadhouse farther north on the trail. In 1910, it was operated by T. J. Huginin, but was abandoned soon after. It was used as a relief cabin by people traveling and trapping in the area. It was also used thereafter by “a large group of itinerant laborers who came to Alaska each year from the Seattle hiring halls to work in the mines in the Fairbanks area.” It was dismantled in 1943 by trapper Tommy Henderson, who used the salvageable logs to construct a small cabin on the site.³⁴³

The 1984 study stated that the cabin and site was being considered as a historic site and worth preserving. However, no further mention of the location can be found, and attempts to locate the cabin were unsuccessful. It is possible that the cabin was cleared for road maintenance or was destroyed by the river during flood years.

³⁴³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 16.

Wayside Inn

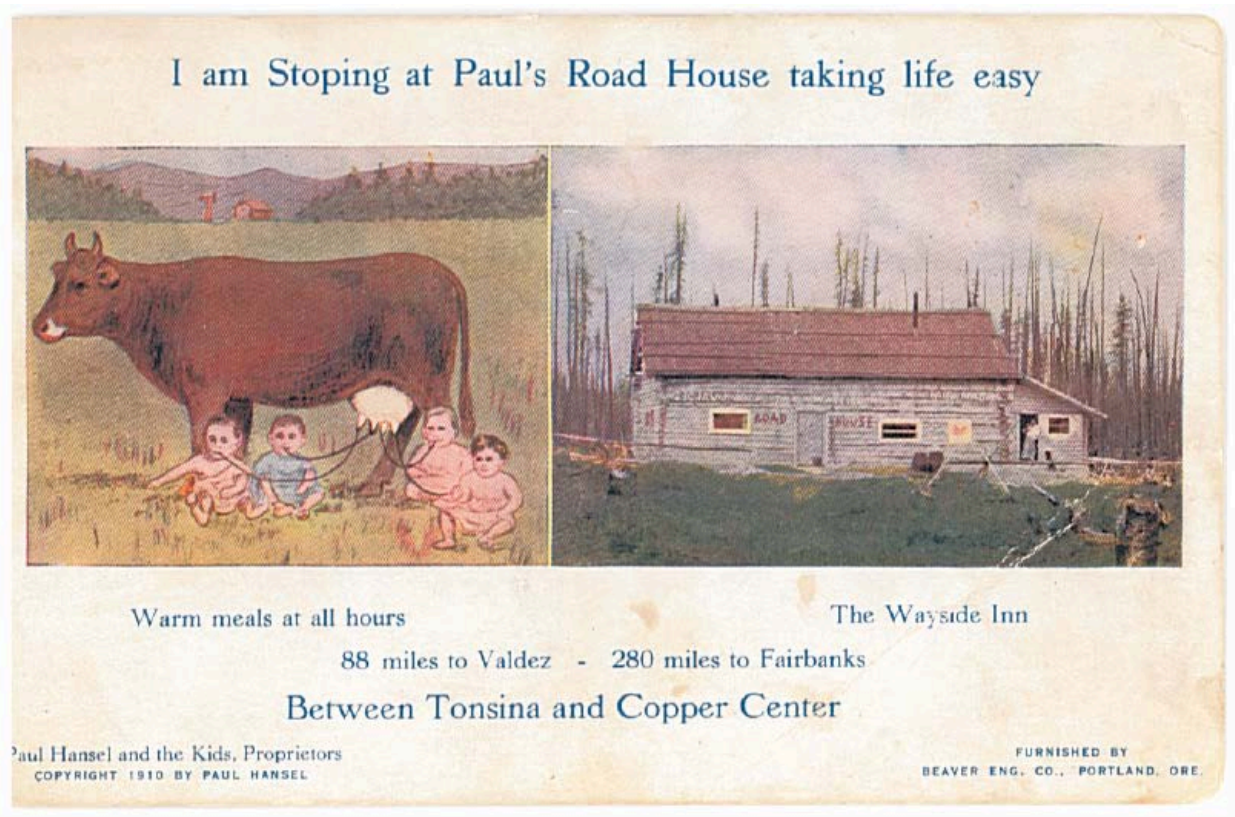


Figure 56. Post card from Wayside Inn, undated. Courtesy of Candy Waugaman.

The Wayside Inn was located 11 miles north of Tonsina, 89 miles north of Valdez, and was owned by Paul Hansel.³⁴⁴ It was a two-story log cabin with “bunk rooms upstairs and two smaller rooms for the ladies. The roof of the building was covered by spruce bark and hand split shakes.”³⁴⁵ A travel guide produced in 1910 describes it as “a good place to take life easy” with “warm meals ready all hours.” Hansel had children working at the roadhouse, and they were referred to affectionately as “the kids.”³⁴⁶

No other information exists for this roadhouse, although post cards advertising the establishment prove that it was a popular stop on the trail. Given the vague description available

³⁴⁴ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 14.

³⁴⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 24.

³⁴⁶ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 26.

of the location and limited time constraints, no attempt was made to locate the roadhouse for this study.



Figure 57. Wayside Inn, pre-1913. John Zug Album, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Willow Creek Roadhouse, Bingham's Roadhouse

Willow Creek Roadhouse was listed as being 89 miles north of Valdez,³⁴⁷ and appears in distance tables beginning in 1905 with F. J. Bingham listed as the proprietor. Originally, it was a small log cabin, but was replaced in 1909 with a larger two-story log building with an attached lean-to. Bingham turned over the roadhouse to Claude Stuart ca. 1915, preferring to establish a farm at the site instead, but by 1918 he was back operating the roadhouse. He is mentioned in later studies as using the roadhouse as his residence for many years.³⁴⁸

The location of the roadhouse was not investigated, due to limited information and time constraints. It is possible that the roadhouse may still be in existence along Willow Creek.

³⁴⁷ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 15.

³⁴⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 25.

McCreary's Roadhouse

McCreary's Roadhouse was the secondary roadhouse in Copper Center. By one account, it was constructed in 1901,³⁴⁹ but another states it was constructed in 1902 when John McCreary staked a homestead.³⁵⁰ Regardless, the roadhouse was in existence by 1909, when it was destroyed by fire.³⁵¹ It was quickly rebuilt, and in 1910 was recorded as being called Copper Center Hotel, and was "the only frame roadhouse between Valdez and Fairbanks." It reportedly cost \$15,000 to construct, but was equipped with modern bathroom facilities."³⁵² It had 21 private rooms, fine meals, and roomy barns and stables. The roadhouse was destroyed by fire again in December 1919 and not rebuilt, but as late as the 1980s at least one of the outbuildings was still standing.³⁵³

No exact location is given for the building that was supposedly still standing, except that it was one mile from Blix's. Mrs. McCreary was still living in Copper Center in 1974.³⁵⁴ Attempts to locate the outbuildings were unsuccessful, as the residents of Copper Center gave conflicting accounts of the building having been moved or torn down in the intervening years since the previous study.

³⁴⁹ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 81.

³⁵⁰ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 29.

³⁵¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 29.

³⁵² Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 26.

³⁵³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 29.

³⁵⁴ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 15.

Tazlina Roadhouse



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Figure 58. Men moving horses across the Tazlina River, near the Tazlina Roadhouse. Undated. McCrary-Henderson Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

The Tazlina roadhouse, located on the banks of the Tazlina River, was an important stop during the early years of the trail. The Tazlina River is a particularly violent river, and a bridge substantial enough to replace the ferry system was not installed until 1927. Even this bridge was eventually washed out by the river and replaced. As a result, stage lines kept barns on both sides of the river, and a roadhouse was located on north bank.³⁵⁵ It was first reported in 1902 as belonging to Bundy and Porter, who were operating the ferry system at that point. In 1903, Bundy was drowned while crossing the river on the ferry, and in 1906 the roadhouse was

³⁵⁵ "Tazlina Bridge open for travel," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, November 23, 1909.

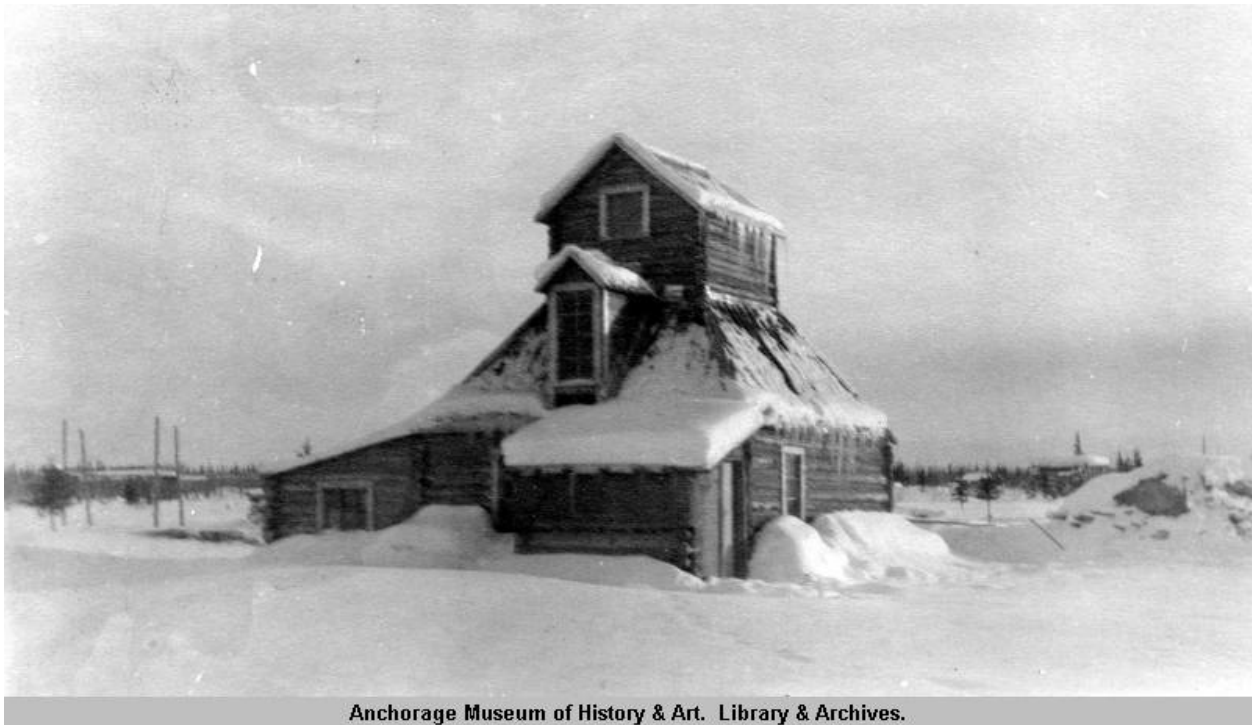
operated by “Tazlina Billy” Kliske, who was also a farmer.³⁵⁶ In 1913, it was operated by Archie Brown.³⁵⁷

According to the 1984 study, the roadhouse was located .5 miles downstream from the current bridge. The area is populated and known as Tazlina, Alaska, and a residential access road follows the river. While exploring the area, a cabin and barn were located that match the construction appearance of other known roadhouses along the route. The cabin appears to be in good condition and is actively used as a residence. The barn is showing signs of settling, and is in danger of collapse, and appears to be used for storage. No one was in residence at the time that this investigation was conducted, and further research is required to determine the possibility of the structure being the historic roadhouse.

³⁵⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 30.

³⁵⁷ “Says trail is very rough,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 29, 1913.

Dry Creek Roadhouse



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Figure 59. Dry Creek Roadhouse, showing the second-story entrance for access during periods of heavy snow. Will Streeter Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Dry Creek Roadhouse was located approximately 117 miles north of Valdez, on the west side of the road just south of Dry Creek. It was a two-story log cabin with a lean-to addition, reportedly built by George B. Rorer and Edwards in 1906.³⁵⁸ By 1910 it was being operated by Mr. and Mrs. J. Lawrence, who had also homesteaded the area.³⁵⁹ They were able to offer “fresh milk, butter, eggs, and chicken to travelers for \$1.00 per meal.”³⁶⁰ The roadhouse was leased to Mr. and Mrs. Smart in 1912,³⁶¹ and in 1913 was being operated by Doc Ladelaw.³⁶² Nelson McCrary purchased the site in 1914 with the intention of operating a fox farm and trading post at the site. In 1917, “Earland McCrary was listed as a fox breeder at Dry Creek,” and the

³⁵⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 33.

³⁵⁹ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 26.

³⁶⁰ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 16.

³⁶¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 33.

³⁶² *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 29, 1913.

roadhouse vanished from distance tables. By 1923, it was referred to instead as the residence of Doc Blaylock. During the Second World War, the area was cleared by the Army for the establishment of a camp.³⁶³

Given that the Army cleared the area during the 1940s, no attempt was made to locate any remains. However, there is a road pull off at Dry Creek, and a four-wheeler trail leads up the bank of the creek away from the road. It may be that some relics from the roadhouse and fox farm remain, but further investigation is needed.

³⁶³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 33.

Gulkana Roadhouse



Figure 60. Gulkana Roadhouse, pre-1917. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Gulkana Roadhouse was located approximately 128 miles north of Valdez, near a Native village of the same name where the trail crossed the Gulkana River. The location was also at the junction of various trails leading into the Valdez Creek Mining District. The roadhouse was originally established in 1903 as part of the Signal Corps line and operated as a store, trading post, and station for the Orr Stage Company. The stop was first mentioned in news items in 1904. It was a large two-story log building, and advertised as “the largest and best equipped on the trail between Valdez and Fairbanks, with thirty beds and eight private rooms.” In 1907, it

was purchased by Charles Levi Hoyt, a prospector who had participated in the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898 and stayed in the north. By 1909, Hoyt had been appointed postmaster, and he added a new lean-to at the rear of the roadhouse to serve as the post office.³⁶⁴ In 1916, he sold the roadhouse to Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith with the intent of establishing a fox farm near Whittier.³⁶⁵

Mrs. Griffith proved equal to the task of operating a roadhouse, and in addition to be an excellent cook, was reported to have completed “many extensive repairs and alterations until it is declared by patrons to be one of the best in all Alaska.”³⁶⁶ She was generous with her own money as well as the money of others; an article in Fairbanks in 1918 reported that she telegrammed the office there with orders to withdraw money from her accounts and the accounts of others staying at her roadhouse, with the purpose of donating it to a fund to help young Alaskan enlisted men pay for their journey to the states. The article also reported that she and other proprietors only charged enlisted men half the normal rate.³⁶⁷

Mrs. Griffith also provided shelter for the family of Fred Nichols, the owner of the Paxson and Our Home Roadhouses, after he was burned out of his holdings in 1924. Mrs. Griffith died at the Gulkana Roadhouse in October 1924.³⁶⁸ Mrs. Griffith may have been ready to sell at this point, because in 1925 Nichols had taken over operation of the roadhouse. At his death in 1926,³⁶⁹ the roadhouse passed to either Hans Ditman, reportedly the son-in-law of Mrs.

³⁶⁴ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 34.

³⁶⁵ “Gulkana roadhouse sold to Mrs. E. Griffith,” *Alaska Citizen*, May 5, 1916.

³⁶⁶ “Mrs. Griffith proves self some hostess,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 12 1917.

³⁶⁷ “Trail people help travel fund of men,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, February 15, 1918.

³⁶⁸ “Pioneer Alaska woman is dead,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 28, 1924.

³⁶⁹ “Fred Nichols, veteran of trails, dies Gulkana,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 14, 1926.

Griffith,³⁷⁰ or to Mrs. Homer Olts, who was operating the roadhouse in 1928.³⁷¹ The roadhouse was enlarged between 1928 and 1932 into a two-and-one-half story log building with 28 guest rooms and modern plumbing. From 1942-1945, the roadhouse was leased to the Public Roads Administration,³⁷² likely in conjunction with road construction activities along the Richardson Highway. The name was also changed to Gulkana Lodge at that time.



Figure 61. Gulkana Roadhouse, ca. 1944. A. C. Kuehl Photographs, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

³⁷⁰ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 34.

³⁷¹ "Crompton's feet frozen on trail; now in hospital," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, December 3, 1928.

³⁷² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 34.

After the end of the war, the roadhouse was purchased by O'Harra Bus Lines, and the name was changed again to Santa Clause Lodge, presumably to serve as a stop for buses on the Richardson Highway. A fire destroyed the roadhouse in 1948.³⁷³

By looking at photographs of the roadhouse, it is possible to determine that it was located on the north bank of the Gulkana River, on the west side of the trail. The east side of the road was and still is dominated by the native village of Gulkana. The remains of the old bridge across the Gulkana River are still present a few hundred yards to the east of the present road. From the vantage point of the old bridge, looking north across the river, it is possible to deduce that the site where the roadhouse once sat is now occupied by the current highway. Any trace of the roadhouse was either cleared or documented and removed prior to the construction of the road. Any casual investigation was discouraged by the presence of the native village and private land surrounding it, as the residents of this area are not welcoming to visitors.

³⁷³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 34.

Sourdough Roadhouse



Figure 62. Sourdough Roadhouse photograph, undated. Courtesy of Candy Waugaman.

Sourdough Roadhouse, on the north bank of Sourdough Creek just to the west of the route at Mile 147.5 of the Richardson Highway, was one of the more famous roadhouses in the state of Alaska. Comfortable with excellent meals, it was considered to be the last roadhouse operating in its original building. It was listed as a National Historic Landmark due to its age and architecture as well as its association with the vital connection of the Richardson itself.³⁷⁴

The roadhouse is rumored to have begun as a small cabin erected by area trapper John Hart in 1884. It opened as a roadhouse in either 1903 or 1906 and was known as Pollard's. It was a one-story log cabin with saddle notched corners and a gable sod roof. It was taken over by Mrs.

³⁷⁴ Alison K. Hoagland, *Buildings of Alaska* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 154.

Nellie Yaeger in 1908, and the name was changed to Sourdough Roadhouse.³⁷⁵ It was a station on the Orr Stage line, and offered beds and private apartments.³⁷⁶ In 1910, it appeared in travel guides as a very comfortable stop on the trail, with carpeted floors, sofas, rocking chairs, white curtained windows, and fine cooking.³⁷⁷ The stove was allegedly brought to the roadhouse by dog sled, to the cost of \$500 in delivery charges from Seattle.³⁷⁸ Several additions were added on to increase the amount of available space, and grew to include a bar and dining area in the original portion with kitchen, guest rooms, and proprietor's quarters occupying the various additions.³⁷⁹

Mrs. Yaeger operated the roadhouse until 1921, when the roadhouse was advertised as being for sale in the papers in Alaska. In 1922 it was announced that the roadhouse had been sold to Mrs. Hazel Waechter, Mrs. Yaeger's niece. One source states that the purpose was to remove Hazel from trouble in Fairbanks.³⁸⁰ Hazel continued to operate the roadhouse along the lines that her aunt had until she sold the property to Bill and Natalie Krause sometime after 1927. After that it was sold to Bud Laueson, who owned the roadhouse until the late 1980s when it was taken over by Marvelee and Jim Ruechel.³⁸¹

The roadhouse remained popular with Alaskans, making large stacks of sourdough pancakes, reportedly from the same sourdough starter that Mrs. Yaeger brought with her when she purchased the roadhouse. Then, in December 1992, sparks from the wood stove in the bar started a fire that consumed the roadhouse in just over two hours. The building was a complete

³⁷⁵ Hoagland, *Buildings of Alaska*, 154.

³⁷⁶ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 20.

³⁷⁷ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 27.

³⁷⁸ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 11.

³⁷⁹ Hoagland, *Buildings of Alaska*, 154.

³⁸⁰ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 29.

³⁸¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 47.

loss, although many of the outbuildings were spared.³⁸² A hole was dug and the remains of the roadhouse buried in it. The property was then sold to the present owners, who opened the new roadhouse in 1993, including salvaging what they could from the remains of the old roadhouse, including a few structural elements.³⁸³ According to the owners, one cabin on the property was once a barn outbuilding used by Ed Orr as a storage unit,³⁸⁴ although this has not been verified.



Figure 63. Reconstructed Sourdough Roadhouse. Photo by Casey Woster.

³⁸² Sandi McDaniel, "End of the Roadhouse," *Anchorage Daily News*, February 5, 1993.

³⁸³ Interview with the owners, conducted on June 30, 2012.

³⁸⁴ Ray Bonnell, "Sourdough Roadhouse, a stop for the weary," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 8, 2013.

Our Home Roadhouse

Our Home Roadhouse, on the banks of Haggard Creek 160 miles north of Valdez, was established in 1906 by a prospector on nearby Slate Creek named McGee. McGee turned the roadhouse over to his daughter, Mrs. L. M. Hicks, who changed the name of the roadhouse to Our Home. It was a “long low log structure with additions added through the years,” with stables for 26 horses. It fell into the possession of Mrs. Maude Birch by 1910,³⁸⁵ and by 1913 it was operated by Charles H. McCourt³⁸⁶ who owned it at least through 1915. By 1917, it was owned by Gabe Aspland.³⁸⁷ The roadhouse fell victim to suspected arson in 1924 under the ownership of Fred Nichols, the proprietor of Paxson Roadhouse and later Gulkana Roadhouse.³⁸⁸

The roadhouse site at Haggard Creek was also used by the Signal Corps as a telegraph station. The buildings associated with the telegraph station were supposedly dismantled in later years and taken to Glennallen to be put to new use.³⁸⁹ Area residents claim that the ruins of structures associated with the roadhouse are still in existence. Investigations of the site in conjunction with proposed road maintenance projects were undertaken in 2005 and 2008, coming to the determination that the projects would not threaten any remains. The site was determined not eligible for individual listing on the NRHP as a result of these investigations, but the state does acknowledge its existence and should recognize its importance as one roadhouse stop along a larger system.

³⁸⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 48.

³⁸⁶ “Says trail very rough,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 29, 1913.

³⁸⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 48.

³⁸⁸ “No mystery to one man,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, March 25, 1925.

³⁸⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 48.

Miller's Roadhouse

Miller's Roadhouse was originally built by Wilson Miller in 1904³⁹⁰ or 1906 and listed in distance tables in 1906 as McDavitts. It was an H-shaped, single story rustic log cabin,³⁹¹ with 16 private rooms and sleeping for 65, along with a well housed on the inside of the building.³⁹² It was advertised in 1909 as being 142 miles south of Fairbanks and 218 miles north of Valdez, at the junction of Phalen Creek with the Delta River, with good meals and beds.³⁹³ In January 1910, during one of the worst storm seasons seen on the trail, the bodies of at least 12 men were said to have been stored at Miller's.³⁹⁴ Mrs. Miller, the supposed wife of Wilson Miller, was found dead in the roadhouse in February 1910, although it does not list the cause of death.³⁹⁵

Some time after June 1910, possession of the roadhouse was assumed by John G. Bowman, who continued to run the roadhouse until 1917. Gus Bergstrom owned the roadhouse in 1917-18,³⁹⁶ and it was still in operation in 1920.³⁹⁷ It is listed as a relief cabin in 1923, used by trappers for shelter.³⁹⁸

Previous studies state that no trace of the roadhouse remains. However, conversations with residents of the area reveal that the roadhouse is in fact in existence, and is in use as a private residence. Due to time constraints and respect for the privacy of the residence, no attempt was made to locate the roadhouse.

³⁹⁰ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 22.

³⁹¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 55.

³⁹² Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 22.

³⁹³ "Miller's ad," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 12, 1909.

³⁹⁴ "Horrors of travel on Valdez trail," *Hot Springs Echo*, January 15, 1910.

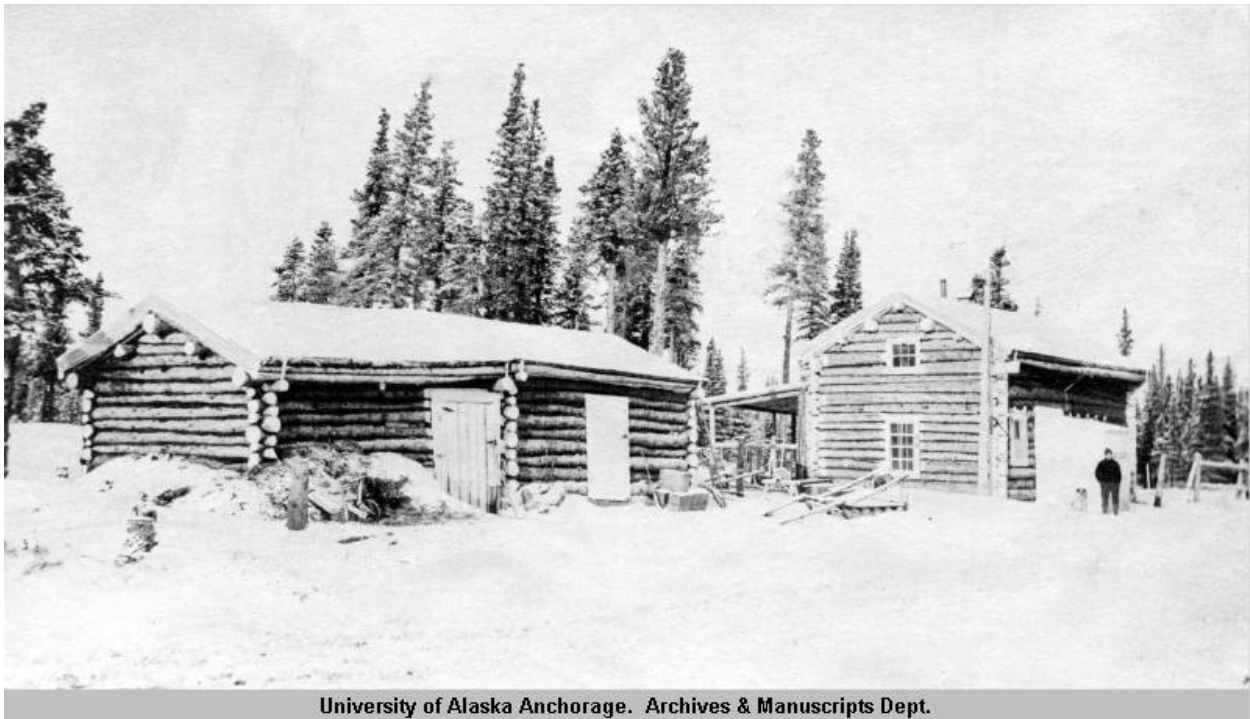
³⁹⁵ "Those who go down the trail in sleds," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, February 2, 1910.

³⁹⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 55.

³⁹⁷ "Trail bulletin," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, November 2, 1920.

³⁹⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 55.

Donnelly's Roadhouse



University of Alaska Anchorage. Archives & Manuscripts Dept.

Figure 64. Donnelly Roadhouse and Telegraph Station, undated, between 1910 and 1920. McKeown Family Photographs, University of Alaska Anchorage.

Like Gulkana Roadhouse, Donnelly's Roadhouse had a fortunate location. Built at the junction of the summer trail and the winter cut-off, the site ensured the roadhouse's use year-round. It was a single story log building with a sod roof, nestled "against the hill overlooking the Delta River." It had large horse barns and storage, operated as a stage station, and was also the base from which the stage horses were put out to summer grazing on the Delta Flats.³⁹⁹ E. P. Donnelly and R. E. Shanklin are listed as the proprietors in ads beginning in 1909, and advertised that the roadhouse had recently been renovated with new apartments for women. It also featured doghouses for mushers.⁴⁰⁰ The roadhouse was advertised in travel guides in 1910 as being an excellent stop, with good meals and much in use as a base for game hunting in the

³⁹⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 58.

⁴⁰⁰ "Donnelly's roadhouse ad," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 12, 1909.

area.⁴⁰¹ In 1911, J. T. Geoghan is listed as the proprietor in a news item dealing with a demented musher who had been creating trouble further north at Big Delta.⁴⁰² Tom Flannigan, who owned several other roadhouses during his time in the Interior, had taken over the roadhouse by 1913.⁴⁰³ In August 1916, the Delta River flooded its banks and began to tear away at the trail, and by mid-month all of the buildings associated with the roadhouse were reportedly washed away. Flannigan had sufficient time to clear the roadhouse, however, and was quickly at work rebuilding.⁴⁰⁴ Ownership had been taken over by Jim E. Stone by January 1920, when a shootout took place at the roadhouse. The event involved a Signal Corps officer who went on a shooting spree, although he failed to kill anyone before being mortally wounded himself.⁴⁰⁵ Hunting parties became the primary patrons of the roadhouse during the decline of traffic in the 1920s.⁴⁰⁶ The Delta River shifted course again in 1926, however, washing out the roadhouse again. It was not rebuilt until the modern Donnelly Inn was constructed in the area in 1956.⁴⁰⁷

The area that was once Donnelly's is now dominated by a large gravel quarry belonging to the Alyeska Pipeline Company. Extensive work to protect the road from flooding by the Delta River has also taken place, with the construction of a low flood dike. An interview with Irene Mead of the Delta Historic Society revealed that she believes a few of the outbuildings are still visible. There is a private residence in the vicinity, but the construction is too recent to have been associated with the roadhouse complex. There is a large volume of debris in the area, including very old abandoned cars and garbage that appears to be from an early period. No

⁴⁰¹ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 27.

⁴⁰² "Demented man walks in snow without shoes," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 6, 1911.

⁴⁰³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 58.

⁴⁰⁴ "Donnelly roadhouse being washed out," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, August 13, 1916.

⁴⁰⁵ "Miller reports Donnelly's case; gunman may die," *Nenana News*, January 10, 1920.

⁴⁰⁶ "New Yorker likes Alaska hunting," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 10, 1925.

⁴⁰⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 58.

structures were located, however, and further investigation by specialists will be required to correctly identify the site.

Gordon's Roadhouse

Gordon's Roadhouse was listed in mileage charts as being approximately 16 miles north of Donnelly's, but the exact location on the old trail or the current road to it is unknown. Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Gordon opened the establishment prior to 1909 when advertisements for the roadhouse first appeared in Fairbanks papers.⁴⁰⁸ A travel guide in 1910 claimed it was a popular hunting spot, and that Gordon "is the possessor of some the largest black bear skins seen in the territory. He is a famous hunter and a day spent with him in the hills is a great day's sport."⁴⁰⁹ One skin, brought to town in 1914, measured more than nine-and-a-half feet. Gordon sold his roadhouse to Henry "Butch" Stock in 1914, returning to the states with his wife, whose health was then failing.⁴¹⁰ Stock continued to run the roadhouse through the 1920s.⁴¹¹ When he married Miss Jennie K. Perry in 1917, the wedding was attended by many other roadhouse proprietors, including those from Donnelly's, McCarty's, and others.⁴¹²

Nothing is recorded about the closure of the roadhouse, although it would appear that it served primarily as a destination for big game hunters. Whether the roadhouse was on the winter or summer trail is not known, and location of the site based on the location of Donnelly's Roadhouse makes finding the site problematic, since that site is not precisely known.

⁴⁰⁸ "Gordon's roadhouse ad," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 12, 1909.

⁴⁰⁹ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 29.

⁴¹⁰ "Gordon brings big bear skin," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, May 31, 1914.

⁴¹¹ "First visit here in eighteen years," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 11, 1925.

⁴¹² "Roadhouse man is married," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 20, 1917.

Beale's Cache



Figure 65. Beale's Cache, undated. Courtesy of Candy Waugaman.

Beale's Cache, located 257 miles north of Valdez, was a short-lived roadhouse not substantially used by the stage companies. It was a single story cabin of unpeeled logs with tents for storage. It was located on the west side of Donnelly Dome, at an elevation of 1600ft.⁴¹³ The cabin may have been originally constructed by Charles Miller; he is recorded as being in possession in 1917-1918. Frank Glassie, the later owner of Rapids Roadhouse, reported helping Miller build a new cabin at the Cache in 1915.⁴¹⁴ In 1919, it was sold to John Hajukovich, one of the original owners of Rika's Roadhouse, and he was said to have used the building as a base for hunting parties in the Donnelly Dome area.⁴¹⁵ Glassie also reports that at one point the

⁴¹³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 59.

⁴¹⁴ Rearden, *Alaska's Wolf Man*, 22.

⁴¹⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 59.

roadhouse was owned by the well-known roadhouse man and trail character Henry “Butch” Stock,⁴¹⁶ but this cannot be verified. In a travel guide from 1929, it is recorded as deserted, but still used “as a jumping off point for hunters in going from the main road into the Jarvis Creek country for moose, sheep, and bear.”⁴¹⁷

Attempts to locate the roadhouse were unsuccessful. A portion of the old road is still accessible by four-wheel drive vehicle, leading to numerous fishing ponds and excellent blueberry picking. The area, however, is populated by high dense brush, and any trace of the cabin could not be located through the brush given the limited time constraints. Additionally, the road crosses into military land, marked only by trespassing signs along the dirt track and used by the military at Fort Greeley for maneuvers. Permission would be necessary for investigation on military land.

⁴¹⁶ Rearden, *Alaska’s Wolf Man*, 40.

⁴¹⁷ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 16.

Maxey's Roadhouse

Maxey's Roadhouse was in the vicinity of Big Delta, on the west bank of the Delta River across from the established community. It had been established at some point before 1909, and a government ferry was in operation at the roadhouse. Alonzo Maxey, the proprietor, began charging for use of the government ferry, which was supposed to be free of charge. The ARC Commissioner for the region, a man named Zug, ordered the ARC crew in the area to take the ferry back into their possession, with force, if necessary and hire a man to provide free ferry service. A news article in the Fairbanks Daily News Miner claimed that "the report of the dead and wounded has not yet arrived from the scene of the battle, and it may be necessary to send a troop of soldiers to the scene to capture or retake the Government's free ferry."⁴¹⁸ Following the violence, Maxey was allowed to continue to run his roadhouse until April 1913, when he was "judged to be insane by a jury in Fairbanks and taken to the Outside."⁴¹⁹ The insane at this point in Alaska's history were sent to Morning Side Asylum in Washington.

There is no further mention of the roadhouse, and access to the site would require use of boating equipment that was not available at the time that fieldwork was undertaken.

⁴¹⁸ "In the sacred name of our government," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 13, 1909.

⁴¹⁹ "Hearn is named Maxey guardian," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, April 27, 1913.

Richardson Roadhouse



Figure 66. Richardson Roadhouse, undated. Paul Greimann Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The community of Richardson was an ill-fated mining boomtown that first emerged as a collection of tents in 1902 located 272 miles north of Valdez and was surveyed as a town site in 1905.⁴²⁰ The town boasted several roadhouses by 1906, including the Tanana Hotel and Joe Henry's place, which was large enough for 100 horses and 50 dogs.⁴²¹ Located on the banks of a volatile part of the Tanana River, by 1909 the town was forced to move inland when the river

⁴²⁰ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 65.

⁴²¹ "Good quarters to be had at Richardson," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, November 19, 1906.

began to undercut the banks and consume buildings.⁴²² This move would be repeated several times before the community was eventually abandoned.

The most substantial roadhouse in the area was constructed by J. W. McClusky. The date for the construction of the roadhouse is in some dispute, with one study claiming a construction date of 1906⁴²³ and another being established in 1915.⁴²⁴ Another news item claims that the roadhouse had been established in 1914.⁴²⁵ Regardless, McClusky was able to construct a large, two-story log roadhouse on his homestead and was in operation by 1915. He also operated a farm and ranch on the property. When the river again began to wear away at the town in 1924, it also began to undercut the bank below his roadhouse, eventually washing it out.⁴²⁶ In response, McClusky began to construct a new roadhouse, which was also two stories and log, but which featured a flat roof and hot and cold running water. It was completed in 1925, with 40 private rooms and sweeping views over the Tanana River and the Alaska Range.⁴²⁷ The place was not a financial success, however, and in 1926 a public sale of the property was conducted as a result of mortgage foreclosure. It was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. P. L. Wazrich for a sum of \$1,000.⁴²⁸ They continued to operate the roadhouse into the 1930s, making substantial additions until it eventually could comfortably accommodate 90 people.⁴²⁹ In 1929, a travel guide referred to it as “the largest roadhouse on the trail, with accommodations for seventy people.”⁴³⁰

⁴²² “Rivers were never higher,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 7, 1909.

⁴²³ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 24.

⁴²⁴ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 65.

⁴²⁵ “Roadhouse man makes report,” *Alaska Citizen*, November 22, 1915.

⁴²⁶ “New roadhouse for Richardson,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, March 24, 1924.

⁴²⁷ “One beauty spot along the trail,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, July 14, 1925.

⁴²⁸ “Roadhouse is sold,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, December 3, 1926.

⁴²⁹ “Richardson hotel newly furnished,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 25, 1929.

⁴³⁰ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 17.

The roadhouse proceeded to pass through a series of hands with several outbuildings being constructed, including a garage and gas station. The roadhouse itself was eventually closed and dismantled by Art Anderson, who moved the pieces to Fairbanks with the intent of reconstructing and remodeling the roadhouse for use as apartments. This project was never completed. The gas station continued to operate under the name Richardson Roadhouse, eventually falling into disrepair until it fell victim to a fire on December 1, 1984.⁴³¹

The area that was once Richardson is now marked only by a roadside pullout and interpretive sign, installed as part of the 50th Anniversary of Statehood celebrations and commemoration in 2007. The area is populated, however, with private residences. Some buildings that are visible may be from the original Richardson era, but further investigation would be necessary in cooperation with the residents, who seem to discourage trespassing. Remains are supposedly accessible from a Department of Transportation gravel pit,⁴³² but at the time that fieldwork was undertaken a particularly aggressive moose in the area prevented investigation.

⁴³¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 65.

⁴³² Interview with Irene Mead, conducted July 21, 2012.

Birch Lake Roadhouse

The origins of the Birch Lake Roadhouse are not very clear. The establishment first appears in ARC distance tables in 1915 located 306.4 miles north of Valdez,⁴³³ and the first mention of it in news items comes in the form of reports that it had burned to the ground in 1916.⁴³⁴ A glowing editorial printed in 1921 describes how James Chisholm, “an engaging Scotsman,”⁴³⁵ discovered Birch Lake in 1911 while traveling from the Overland Roadhouse, which he owned at the time, to the community of Richardson. Chisholm apparently fell in love with the lake, and proceeded to singlehandedly build a roadhouse, with the prediction that it would one day become a popular outing destination for the residents of Fairbanks.⁴³⁶

Regardless of how the roadhouse came into existence, it is positive that Chisholm was in residence and operating the roadhouse at Mile 306.4 when it burned on November 22, 1916. Chisholm escaped the flames, but he was apparently unable to save any of his possessions, including his shoes. Barefoot, he walked through the snow to Dad Martin’s, a roadhouse two miles north, with temperatures colder than -40. His feet were badly frostbitten and he was quickly taken to the hospital in Fairbanks. “That his injuries are no worse he owes to his own endurance and pluck and the prompt action of the force at Dad Martin’s.”⁴³⁷

Not deterred by the experience, Chisholm was already ordering supplies and beginning to rebuild at the time that he was made a U.S. citizen in February 1917.⁴³⁸ By the early 1920s, he was advertising the roadhouse as the Birch Lake Summer Resort. Attractions included fishing,

⁴³³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 66d.

⁴³⁴ “Birth Lake Roadhouse burns,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 23, 1916.

⁴³⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 66d.

⁴³⁶ W. F. Thompson, “W. F. Thompson on Birth Lake, Richardson Highway,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 11, 1921.

⁴³⁷ “Chisholm’s roadhouse fire, Birch Lake,” *Alaska Citizen*, November 27, 1916.

⁴³⁸ *Alaska Citizen*, February 12, 1917.

camping, boating and swimming, and the accommodations ranged from a bunkhouse to private cabins.⁴³⁹ In September of 1921, Chisholm had the property surveyed and filed a patent with the Homestead office, and it was registered as the Chisholm Homestead. The homestead encompassed the majority of Birch Lake.⁴⁴⁰ The resort proved very popular, with people filling the accommodations through the 1920s and prompting Chisholm to constantly expand his operation.⁴⁴¹ He continued to operate into the 1930s, eventually catering to truck drivers on the Richardson Highway as well as vacationers.⁴⁴²

Birch Lake today is still a vacation destination, now an area crowded with vacation homes belonging to people from Fairbanks. The Army established a reserve of its own on the southeast end, for the purpose of recreation for troops and families stationed near Fairbanks and Delta Junction. The study conducted in 1984 places the remains of the large floor and one of the cabins still visible on the west side of the highway, “just a little north of the Lost Lake sign.”⁴⁴³ The road in the area has been improved since the 1980s. No remains could be located in the short amount of time allotted for this study.

⁴³⁹ “Birch Lake Summer Resort ad,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 16, 1921.

⁴⁴⁰ “Birch Lake a resort,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 8, 1921.

⁴⁴¹ “Sheldon returns, reports activity,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 26, 1924.

⁴⁴² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 66d.

⁴⁴³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 66d.

Dad Martin's Roadhouse



Figure 67. Dad Martin and Martin's Roadhouse in Delta. Undated. Edward R. McFarland Photographs, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

There is not a lot of information available for Dad Martin's Roadhouse. It is ignored completely in the two previous academic roadhouse studies. It does appear in advertisements for roadhouses along the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail beginning in 1909, however. It was situated approximately 61 ½ miles south of Fairbanks, and was run by two men named Martin and Therman.⁴⁴⁴ Dad Martin is often mentioned in news items as being in company with other, more well-known roadhouse men such as Jack Sullivan and Wilson Miller. After Martin's death in

⁴⁴⁴ "Dad Martin's ad," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 12, 1909.

July 1916, the roadhouse was purchased by Fred Miller, another well-known roadhouse man.⁴⁴⁵

The ownership was short lived, however, as a fire broke out in June 1917, destroying the roadhouse. It is noted in the article that no insurance had been carried on the roadhouse, making it a total loss for Miller.⁴⁴⁶

Given the placement of the roadhouse near the now-populated area of Birch Lake, and the destruction by fire at an early date, it is unlikely that any trace of the roadhouse remains.

Attempts to locate the site were not made.

⁴⁴⁵ “Fred Miller buys Martin’s roadhouse,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, July 18, 1916.

⁴⁴⁶ “Delta roadhouse burned,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 29, 1917.

Overland Roadhouse, Fox Farm Roadhouse, Silver Fox Roadhouse



Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Figure 68. Overland Roadhouse, undated. Edward R. McFarland Photographs, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The Overland Roadhouse was situated four miles south of Harding Lake, 53 or 54 miles south of Fairbanks. It was established prior to 1909 with Vincent and Matthews acting as proprietors. “It was a typical long low one-story building and could accommodate up to forty people.”⁴⁴⁷ By 1913, it was owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Burgess.⁴⁴⁸ Despite

⁴⁴⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 67.

⁴⁴⁸ “Says trail is very rough,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 29, 1913.

prospecting during the summer months,⁴⁴⁹ Burgess operated the roadhouse until it fell victim to fire in April 1917.⁴⁵⁰ That September, careless mushers sheltering in the roadhouse barn caused a fire that burned the barn to the ground. By this point, Burgess had given up the site and relocated into Fairbanks.⁴⁵¹

By 1922, Jack Taylor had homesteaded the site and constructed a new roadhouse to operate along side a prosperous fox farm. This prompted the change in name of the site to Fox Farm Roadhouse.⁴⁵² By 1928, the roadhouse had closed to overnight accommodations, serving meals and giving tours of the fox farm and breeding facilities to tourists.⁴⁵³ By the 1940s, the name had been changed to Silver Fox Roadhouse and was operated by Mrs. Dwight Fox. It was destroyed by fire in 1945. A rebuilt lodge opened at the site in 1949 under the operations of Harry and Edna Merriman, but this lodge was also consumed by fire sometime in the 1960s.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁴⁹ “New owner takes trail roadhouse,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, March 26, 1914.

⁴⁵⁰ “Roadhouse on trail burns, total loss,” *Alaska Citizen*, April 23, 1917.

⁴⁵¹ “Overland barn is burned up,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 17, 1917.

⁴⁵² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 67.

⁴⁵³ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 18.

⁴⁵⁴ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 67.



Figure 69. Silver Fox Roadhouse, undated photograph. Drane Family Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The location of the roadhouse is vague, and attempts to locate the roadhouse were not attempted. The road has been realigned in this area, and an increase in residential activity discouraged the exploration of private property without a precise location.

Munson's Roadhouse, Salchaket Roadhouse



Figure 70. Munson's Roadhouse, undated. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Munson's Roadhouse is one of the establishments that was actively advertised and written about in the local papers in Fairbanks, partly due to the popularity of William "Billy" Munson and his wife, Thora. Their comings and goings were frequently reported in Fairbanks newspapers. Munson arrived in the area and established a roadhouse very early on, reportedly beginning in 1904 at the mouth of the Salcha River, 40 miles south of Fairbanks. The original

building was a one-story log cabin that was later replaced by a larger, two-story log building⁴⁵⁵ with separate accommodations for ladies⁴⁵⁶ and a good bar.⁴⁵⁷ Ads in 1907 claimed that it was the greatest roadhouse in Alaska, and had heated barns and dog kennels.⁴⁵⁸ Munson is credited with giving the trail the nickname “Richardson’s Hobby,” saying in a news article that “if a man ever had a hobby, Major Richardson has one, and that is this trail.”⁴⁵⁹

By 1909, the roadhouse was associated with a small native settlement that had grown nearby. Munson reported to the papers in Fairbanks that he had been able to teach the residents how to farm, and that they had cleaned him out of seeds.⁴⁶⁰ Munson also kept a pet moose at the roadhouse, which he raised from a calf and was supposedly tame. In 1913, business owners in Fairbanks offered \$110 for the moose, intending to use it as the start of a zoo in a small park along the Chena River in the central business section of town.⁴⁶¹ The idea of a moose becoming the basis for a zoo in an area where the creatures freely roam is comical, but it illustrates the fact that Fairbanks was growing in prominence, and Munson was respected by the business leaders.

⁴⁵⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 70.

⁴⁵⁶ “Billy Munson’s place is headquarters for mushers,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 18, 1908.

⁴⁵⁷ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 25.

⁴⁵⁸ “Salchaket roadhouse ad,” *Tanana Tribune*, September 28, 1907.

⁴⁵⁹ “Munson gets in from Salchaket,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 15, 1908.

⁴⁶⁰ “Natives make fine gardens,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 14, 1909.

⁴⁶¹ “Plan to secure Munson’s moose for waterfront,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, May 30, 1913.



Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Figure 71. Munson feeding a four-month-old moose calf. Undated. Edward R. McFarland Photographs, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

In June 1913, Munson was reported arriving in Fairbanks with the purpose of departing to the states due to a growing illness.⁴⁶² His death from tuberculosis in Pasadena, California was reported in August 1913, and ownership of the roadhouse passed to Mrs. Munson.⁴⁶³

In September 1914, the Salcha River began to flood its banks and shift course, and the roadhouse was washed a short distance down stream. Mrs. Munson had been given adequate warning, however, and was able to empty the roadhouse of its contents. Before the river had

⁴⁶² "Munsons going to the south," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, June 15, 1913.

⁴⁶³ "Well known roadhouse man dies," *Alaska Citizen*, August 4, 1913.

finished carrying off the old log structure, she had already begun construction of a new roadhouse further from the riverbank.⁴⁶⁴ This new roadhouse was larger and more aesthetically pleasing than the original, and was “equipped with hot and cold water, an electric light plant, baths, and every convenience that could be expected of any first rate hostelry.”⁴⁶⁵ She was installed in the new roadhouse by Christmas 1914, and was able to give a potlatch Christmas dinner for more than 30 people, including resident natives, the telegraph operators, and “all of the sourdoughs in the district.”⁴⁶⁶

In May 1915, Mrs. Munson sold the roadhouse to Charles Bertrand and George Hillar, who had been in Alaska for more than eighteen years and were familiar with the hostelry trade,⁴⁶⁷ for a price of \$7,500.⁴⁶⁸ The sale was presumably in anticipation of a second marriage, as she was married to a Mr. Ed Rust in December.⁴⁶⁹ A forest fire threatened the roadhouse later in the month and consumed an outlying barn, but the roadhouse was ultimately spared.⁴⁷⁰ Business continued uneventfully until 1918, when the roadhouse was flooded by an ice jam on the Salcha River.⁴⁷¹ Bertrand and Hillar continued to improve the roadhouse property after the flood, renovating the roadhouse and constructing a pavilion with a large wooden dance floor in July 1918.⁴⁷² Hillar also began construction of an automobile road to a large lake that lay four miles beyond Munson’s, where “good fishing is abundant.”⁴⁷³ Given the location of the roadhouse on the Salcha River, it can be assumed this lake is what is now known as Harding Lake, named for

⁴⁶⁴ “Munson’s place in danger again,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, September 18, 1914.

⁴⁶⁵ “Mrs. Munson hostess at Christmas dinner,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, December 29, 1914.

⁴⁶⁶ “Mrs. Munson entertains,” *Alaska Citizen*, January 4, 1915.

⁴⁶⁷ “Roadhouse is in new hands,” *Fairbanks Daily times*, May 7, 1915.

⁴⁶⁸ “Munson roadhouse changes owners,” *Alaska Citizen*, 5/10/1915

⁴⁶⁹ “Mrs. Munson and Ed Rust wedded,” *Alaska Citizen*, December 6, 1915.

⁴⁷⁰ “Munson roadhouse safe from harm,” *Alaska Citizen*, May 17, 1915.

⁴⁷¹ “Water through a roadhouse,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 11, 1918.

⁴⁷² “Fairbanks has summer resort,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, July 16, 1918.

⁴⁷³ “Roadhouse man making visit,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, August 26, 1918.

President Harding and an extremely popular weekend recreational destination for Fairbanks residents in the summer.

In July 1919, Hillar was married at the roadhouse to the cook, Miss Petrea Madison,⁴⁷⁴ and Bertram sold his interests in the roadhouse in order to return to the states “to seek relief from rheumatism.”⁴⁷⁵ Hillar continued to run and improve the roadhouse along with a growing family,⁴⁷⁶ until April 1925, when a fire destroyed the roadhouse. The total loss was estimated at \$20,000, with only \$8,000 covered by insurance. Hillar announced his intention to begin rebuilding immediately.⁴⁷⁷ Unfortunately, a flood on the Salcha River destroyed his building supplies in May.⁴⁷⁸ He set up a tent in order to sell meals to passing motorists,⁴⁷⁹ and in October 1925 leased the nearby abandoned telegraph station from the Signal Corps as a more permanent base for his operations.⁴⁸⁰

The roadhouse was never rebuilt, and in a travel guide from 1929 the site is listed as simply an abandoned telegraph station, used as headquarters for a road maintenance crew. The modern Salchaket Roadhouse today stands some distance from the Salcha River, and is a modern gas station and bar catering to Salcha residents and people spending time at Harding Lake. It is unknown if the location today is associated with the historic roadhouse, and the land surrounding it is in private possession.

⁴⁷⁴ “Roadhouse man takes wife at way station,” *Nenana News*, July 23, 1919.

⁴⁷⁵ “Bertram sells share in Munson’s property,” *Nenana News*, August 4, 1919.

⁴⁷⁶ “Baby girl to brighten Munson’s post,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, December 31, 1921.

⁴⁷⁷ “Munson’s burned to the ground,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 16, 1925.

⁴⁷⁸ “George Hillar is hard luck kid,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 9, 1925.

⁴⁷⁹ “May eat now at Munson’s,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 23, 1925.

⁴⁸⁰ “George Hillar in former Salcha telegraph station,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 27, 1925.

Pile Driver Roadhouse, Thirtymile Roadhouse



Figure 72. Pile Driver Roadhouse, undated. Edward R. McFarland Photographs, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Pile Driver Roadhouse is first listed 30 miles south of Fairbanks in distance tables as early as 1904, although at that point it was referred to as Chena Slough Roadhouse. It appears as Pile Driver in 1906, and the proprietor at that time, John Morgan, moved the establishment from its original location at the mouth of the slough two miles upstream so that it would be on the new telegraph line.⁴⁸¹ By 1908, the roadhouse was being operated by Pete Michels and S. McNiece,

⁴⁸¹ "Moved onto the line," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, June 23, 1906.

and was by then starting to be referred to as Thirtymile Roadhouse. The roadhouse was enlarged by 1910, and had good beds for 35 people as well as private accommodations for women. John Morgan returned to the roadhouse at some point prior to 1910,⁴⁸² and ran the roadhouse successfully until 1915 when he committed suicide in Cordova by jumping in front of a train. Ownership passed to his son, John Morgan, Jr. who had been operating the roadhouse for some months.⁴⁸³ Morgan, Jr. operated the roadhouse until 1916, when it was listed as being for sale as part of the estate of John Morgan, Sr.⁴⁸⁴ It was again listed as being for sale, fully equipped, in 1917. Mr. and Mrs. R. E. Kennedy purchased the roadhouse, but closed it again for good in 1918, stating that there was “no longer a chance to make a living with the roadhouse.”⁴⁸⁵

This was not the end of the roadhouse life, however. When influenza broke out in 1918 at various points along the trail, including Copper Center, Gulkana, and Gakona, officials in Fairbanks quickly utilized the old Pile Driver Roadhouse as a quarantine station for travelers coming into the area.⁴⁸⁶ The majority of the people caught within the quarantine were stage drivers. The conditions can be gauged by news articles to be comfortable, complete with a phonograph and a cook, “so they eat regularly and well.”⁴⁸⁷ The quarantine was lifted in January 1919.⁴⁸⁸ The roadhouse was again listed for sale in 1920, and described as the “best bargain in the Valley!”⁴⁸⁹ but there is no further mention of it. By 1923, it had been dropped from all distance tables.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸² “Says trail is very rough,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 29, 1913.

⁴⁸³ “Local roadhouse man is suicide,” *Alaska Citizen*, November 22, 1915.

⁴⁸⁴ “Pile Driver roadhouse ad,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, May 6, 1916.

⁴⁸⁵ “Pile Driver is closed down,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 24, 1918.

⁴⁸⁶ “First colony in quarantine,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, November 8, 1918.

⁴⁸⁷ “Quarantine not half bad,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, November 18, 1918.

⁴⁸⁸ “Changes made in mail runs,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, January 27, 1919.

⁴⁸⁹ “Classified ads,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, March 16, 1920.

⁴⁹⁰ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 72.

Exploration along the Pile Driver Slough led to the discovery of a log cabin north of the Richardson Highway on the south bank of the slough that appears to be of similar log construction to other confirmed roadhouses along the route. It also appears to have the appropriate dimensions to be capable of housing 35 people in dormitory fashion. The building, however, is a private residence with strong warnings against trespassing. The site will need to be further investigated and the owners contacted to obtain permission to search further.

Byler's Roadhouse, Bergman's Roadhouse, 18-Mile roadhouse



Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Figure 73. Byler's Roadhouse, undated. Albert Johnson Photograph Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

This roadhouse, known throughout its life by several names, was located 18 miles southeast of Fairbanks. It is listed as the first station on the Orr Stage Line in 1906-07, “on the left side of the road, on the right bank of the Tanana River.”⁴⁹¹ The actual description of the roadhouse is somewhat vague; in one account it is described as “two attached log houses, one for men and the other for women”⁴⁹² while another account describes it as “a sturdy log structure with roomy

⁴⁹¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 73.

⁴⁹² Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 26.

cottonwood stables.”⁴⁹³ It was originally constructed by John Byler, who advertised “clean beds, good cooking, and all the comforts of home.”⁴⁹⁴ Bundy described it in 1910 as “one of the oldest establishments on the trail” and “a popular stopping place for the traveling public.”⁴⁹⁵

The roadhouse changed hands at some point after 1910, and by 1912 William Bergman is referred to as the proprietor. He subsequently changed the name to Bergman’s.⁴⁹⁶ In the somewhat lean travel years of the mid-1910s, Bergman established a 16-acre farm at the site, and reported securing good prices for his crops in 1917.⁴⁹⁷ His health began to fail, however, and his death in hospital in the states was reported in Fairbanks in November of 1917.⁴⁹⁸ It is probable that his widow continued operating the roadhouse, as she is referred to as being in town from her roadhouse in September of 1918. This is also the first time that the roadhouse is referred to as 18-Mile Roadhouse.⁴⁹⁹

Ownership of the roadhouse changed at some point between 1918 and 1922, when the Sullivans took over operations, having abandoned their own roadhouse on the now-defunct winter cut-off trail.⁵⁰⁰ The Sullivans gave the roadhouse a complete renovation in 1923 in anticipation of a busy travel season, with the road being in good condition for automobile traffic as far as 18-Mile.⁵⁰¹ Their residence occupation of the property did not last long. By April of

⁴⁹³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 73.

⁴⁹⁴ “Byler’s ad,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 12, 1909

⁴⁹⁵ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 31.

⁴⁹⁶ “Hunters return from trail,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, September 12, 1912.

⁴⁹⁷ “Eighteen Mile roadhouse proprietor prepares big farm,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 16, 1917.

⁴⁹⁸ “News of death of roadhouse man received,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, November 21, 1917.

⁴⁹⁹ “Personal mention,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 5, 1918.

⁵⁰⁰ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 73.

⁵⁰¹ “Eighteen Mile roadhouse renovation,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 21, 1923.

1924, Jack Sullivan was in the hospital in Anchorage,⁵⁰² and his death of cancer was reported in May.⁵⁰³ Mrs. Sullivan followed him in death within a matter of months.

The roadhouse was opened again by June, however, with Mrs. Frank Turner having purchased the roadhouse from the Sullivan estate. She advertised it as being “neat, clean, and restful. Dinner parties arranged on short notice.”⁵⁰⁴ By summer of 1925, the roadhouse had become popular for its chicken dinners and easy accessibility by automobile at times when the road further south was thick with mud.⁵⁰⁵ In October 1925, the roadhouse was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Claude Stewart,⁵⁰⁶ but by April of 1927 it was in the possession of George Mutchler.⁵⁰⁷ The chicken dinners remained popular, and a travel guide produced by the ARC in 1929 described it as “one of the few places along the trail to which the word roadhouse as used in the states, really applies; here we may dine and dance.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰² “Jack Sullivan prepares for major operation,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 16, 1924.

⁵⁰³ “Jack Sullivan, Eighteen Mile roadhouse, dead,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 22, 1924.

⁵⁰⁴ “Eighteen Mile roadhouse ad,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 20, 1924.

⁵⁰⁵ “Where everything is beautiful,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 12, 1925.

⁵⁰⁶ “18-Mile Roadhouse changes hands,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 15, 1925.

⁵⁰⁷ “Eighteen Mile roadhouse ad,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, April 25, 1927.

⁵⁰⁸ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 19.

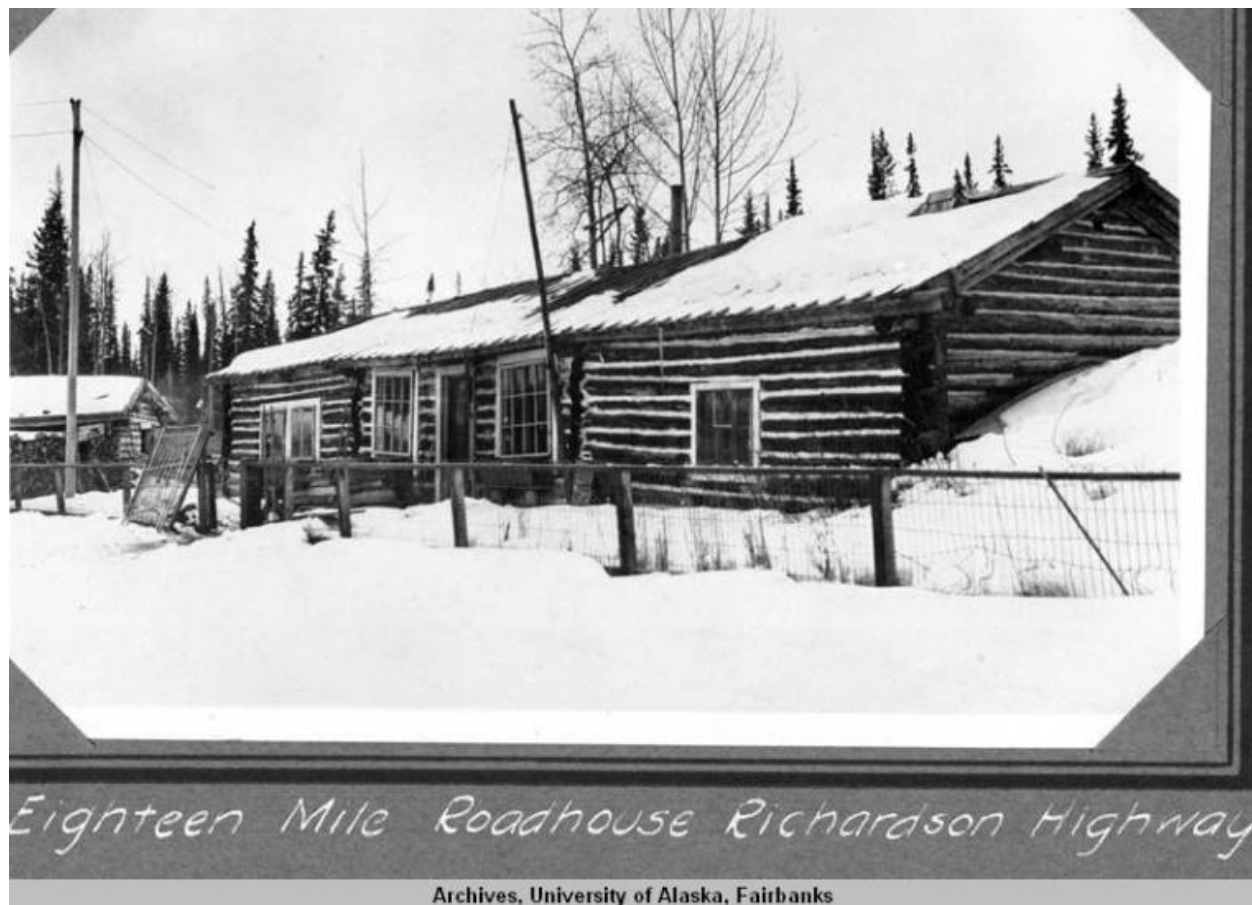


Figure 74. Eighteen Mile Roadhouse, undated, post-1925. Walter Hodge Papers, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The fate of the roadhouse is not recorded beyond this point. The location, however, is approximately one mile outside of the Flood Control Project near North Pole, Alaska, so it is possible that the site has been subjected to flood waters diverted from the Chena and Tanana Rivers. Additionally, military land associated with the Elmondorf Air Force Base abuts the flood control project, so permission would be necessary to enter these grounds. Attempts to locate the site were not made, given the complications associated with this area.

Johnson's Roadhouse or Sixteenmile Roadhouse

Johnson's Roadhouse was an establishment sixteen miles south of Fairbanks along the realigned old trail owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. J. Johnson.⁵⁰⁹ According to a travel guide from 1910, the Johnsons had opened the roadhouse four years prior, putting an establishment date at sometime in 1905 or 1906. The roadhouse had the capacity to house 35 people and served fresh vegetables grown from the Johnson garden.⁵¹⁰

By October of 1911, Tom Flannigan was in possession of the roadhouse and it was referred to in subsequent news articles as the Sixteenmile Roadhouse.⁵¹¹ Mrs. Johnson appears to have stayed in residence, as she is referred to as "Mrs. Johnson of Sixteenmile" in several news articles until 1912, when she departed Alaska to spend time with a son in southwest Washington.⁵¹² The Flannigans' residence at the roadhouse was short lived. A fire in March of 1912 destroyed all the wall coverings, although the blaze was extinguished before it could do any more damage.⁵¹³ After the fire, the Flannigans put time and energy into renovating the place, including installing a new roof and replacing the furniture.⁵¹⁴ A fire reported in Fairbanks on February 2, 1913 reduced the roadhouse to ashes. Nothing was saved from the blaze, and the loss amounted to an estimated \$3,000 for Flannigan.⁵¹⁵

Following this fire, the roadhouse is not mentioned in any other source. It is probable that the roadhouse was never rebuilt, and since Flannigan was mentioned in connection with several other roadhouses over the years, it is plausible that he abandoned this site in favor of another.

⁵⁰⁹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 74.

⁵¹⁰ Bundy, *The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail*, 29.

⁵¹¹ "16-Mile roadhouse man orders winter supplies," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 11, 1911.

⁵¹² "Mrs. Johnson plans trip to the states," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, August 25, 1912.

⁵¹³ "Small blaze alarms roadhouse occupants," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, March 12, 1912.

⁵¹⁴ "Make alterations to 16-mile house," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, May 21, 1912.

⁵¹⁵ "Fire destroys 16-mile house," *Alaska Citizen*, February 10, 1913.

There is some confusion as to the exact location of the roadhouse; one study lists it as being eighteen miles from Fairbanks, but the name implies that it was sixteen miles out. Regardless, this area today is populated with independently owned farms nestled against a large flood control project. It is possible that no trace of the site remains.

Ninemile Roadhouse



Figure 75. Ninemile Roadhouse, undated. Ira and Walter Wood Photograph collection, ca. 1911-1929, Alaska State Library, Historical Collections.

Ninemile Roadhouse is first listed in distance tables nine miles south of Fairbanks beginning in 1904, and alternately referred to as Murry's Roadhouse, White's Roadhouse, and Eightmile Roadhouse. In a study completed in 1984, ownership of the roadhouse included J. R. Moose in 1910, Dick Whittington from 1911 to 1916, and William St. Louis in 1918.⁵¹⁶ The dates are somewhat troublesome, however. A news article from April 1915 states that William St. Louis purchased the roadhouse from Julius Miller, who was then convicted for murder in July.⁵¹⁷ Additionally, a homestead location is recorded by Marion B. Carey in 1911, "which includes the Ninemile Roadhouse."⁵¹⁸ In 1916, the roadhouse and accompanying ranch, which

⁵¹⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 76.

⁵¹⁷ "To turn roadhouse into summer resort," *Alaska Citizen*, April 12, 1915.

⁵¹⁸ "Homestead includes Nine-mile roadhouse," *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 26, 1911.

were in “good shape and completely furnished,” were put up for sale.⁵¹⁹ In 1914, it was the location of a welcoming party for Delegate Wickersham, who was returning to Alaska after two years spent in Washington, DC.⁵²⁰ William St. Louis was in possession of the roadhouse from at least 1919. He ran an ad for the sale of the “roadhouse, ranch, three horses and everything on the place” in 1922,⁵²¹ but was still in possession of the property when he again listed it for sale in 1924.⁵²² In 1927, it had come into the possession of Mrs. Georgie Hagen, who announced plans to reopen the place in June.⁵²³ The business did not last, however, and in 1928 the roadhouse was listed as a private residence.⁵²⁴

The location of the roadhouse, 8 or 9 miles south of Fairbanks, places this property squarely in land that is now heavily populated. It is unclear if the roadhouse is still in existence, and if it is, whether it is in use. Further investigation would be necessary to determine its location and existence, using deeds and property titles. The investigation was not undertaken for the purpose of this study.

⁵¹⁹ “Want ads,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, September 10, 1916.

⁵²⁰ “As Jim comes marching home,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, October 24, 1914.

⁵²¹ “Want ads,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, September 1, 1922.

⁵²² “Classified ads,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, May 7, 1924.

⁵²³ “Nine-Mile roadhouse will open tomorrow,” *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 6, 1927.

⁵²⁴ Richardson Highway Transportation Company, *A Travelogue of the Richardson and Steese Highways*, 19.

Additional Roadhouses

In addition to this list, there were several other roadhouses that only existed for a small amount of time or were used primarily as relief shelters. Extremely little information exists for these roadhouses, and the locations are often lost. They largely remain in evidence in newspaper ads from the time period. These roadhouses include:

- Keystone Roadhouse – Keystone Roadhouse is only listed in the study in 1974 as being 13 miles north of Valdez on the Old Trail, located near the mouth of Keystone Canyon.⁵²⁵
- Simpson’s Roadhouse – This roadhouse was listed as being 111 miles north of Valdez and was also referred to as Brown’s Roadhouse in the 1984 study. It was located at the junction of a trail leading to the goldfields discovered in the Nelchina district in 1912. Roadhouse operations were short lived, and the property later became a homestead for G. E. Simpson.⁵²⁶
- McMullen’s Roadhouse – McMullen’s was situated at Mile 183 or 184, between Meier’s and Paxson’s⁵²⁷ and was also referred to as Roosevelt Roadhouse. It was established by the Valdez Transportation Company in 1904 on an old winter trail between Gakona and Delta, and consisted only of a large tent. Operations ceased in 1906.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 12.

⁵²⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 32.

⁵²⁷ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 21.

⁵²⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 44.

- Timberline Roadhouse – Originally built by Paxson in 1906, the location of Timberline Roadhouse is unknown. It consisted of a small cabin and two tents, and was Paxson’s first roadhouse establishment.⁵²⁹
- Gillespie’s Roadhouse – Gillespie’s Roadhouse was also referred to as Chippewa Roadhouse and was located at Mile 106 on the Old Trail. It was established 1904 by the Valdez Transportation Company for use by the mail carriers. The name changed from to Gillespie’s Roadhouse when operations were taken over by John Gillespie. The roadhouse ceased operations in 1906 when the ARC shifted the route further west.⁵³⁰ The roadhouse is mentioned in the 1984 study, but not in the study completed in 1974.
- Abbot’s Roadhouse – Located at Mile 168, Abbot’s Roadhouse is mentioned in mileage charts in 1910 as being six miles north of Our Home Roadhouse. The roadhouse is mentioned in the 1984 study only.⁵³¹
- McKinley’s Roadhouse – McKinley’s Roadhouse was located near Mile 212 or 215, depending on the source, and was also referred to as Casey’s Cache. It was established in 1901 by freighter James Casey, who transported goods to the Rainy Creek and Eureka Creek mining districts. It was referred to as Casey’s Roadhouse in December 1904, and mentioned by Wickersham in 1905 as consisting of four tents. The establishment disappears from distance tables after 1910.⁵³²
- Nigger Bill’s – The location of Nigger Bill’s is unknown; various sources list it as 35 or 33 miles north of Casey’s Cache or as being near Mile 250. It is also mentioned by

⁵²⁹ Smith, *Alaska’s Historic Roadhouses*, 21.

⁵³⁰ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 43.

⁵³¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 49.

⁵³² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 54.

Wickersham in March 1905 as a sturdy log cabin built by area prospectors and operated by Henry Stock. The Colgrove Roadhouse is also listed in this general vicinity in 1904.⁵³³

- Bradley's Roadhouse – This roadhouse was listed as being 23 miles south of Bennett's Roadhouse in Big Delta in the Valdez News in 1904. However, the Valdez Commercial Company lists the roadhouse as being only one mile south of Bennett's,⁵³⁴ and no other reference could be found.
- Tenderfoot Roadhouse – Tenderfoot Roadhouse was located at approximately Mile 290 at the mouth of the Tenderfoot Creek and was established in 1912. A USGS report in 1918 reports that the roadhouse was the site of a mining camp.⁵³⁵ An interview with Irene Mead reported that the log foundation of the building remained,⁵³⁶ however, the location is on private mining land.
- Joe Henry's – Joe Henry's was located at approximately Mile 294 and was listed in distance tables in 1904-1906. It is assumed that the roadhouse was destroyed by the shifting route of the Tanana River sometime after 1906.⁵³⁷
- Dolan's Roadhouse – Dolan's Roadhouse was listed in mileage charts in 1904 and 1905 sixteen miles south of Fairbanks,⁵³⁸ but disappears from the charts after 1905.
- Washburn House – The location of Washburn House is unknown. The establishment was mentioned by Bundy in 1910 only.⁵³⁹

⁵³³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 57.

⁵³⁴ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 57.

⁵³⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 62.

⁵³⁶ Interview with Irene Mead, July 2012.

⁵³⁷ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 63.

⁵³⁸ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 75.

⁵³⁹ Smith, Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 24.

- Clark's Roadhouse – Clark's Roadhouse was listed as being 44 miles south of Fairbanks, but was mentioned only as being on the Richardson Road in the study completed in 1974.⁵⁴⁰

In addition to lesser-used roadhouses, there were several roadhouse established after the primary gold rush period. These properties were largely established for recreational purposes, including fishing, hunting, hiking, and recreational backcountry exploration. These include the following:

- Kendall Cache – Located at Mile 57, this example was originally constructed in 1952 by Stanley Kolb, the rest stop consisted of a gas station, lunch stop, and a bunkhouse for truckers and was originally called 57 Mile Roadhouse. In 1965, the establishment was purchased by Dave and Neva Kenall who added a new building with lunch counter and gift shop and renamed it Kendall Cache. In 1977, it was purchased by Dave and Nancy McCahans and renamed Tiekel River Lodge.⁵⁴¹ It was sold again in the early 2000s and purchased by a couple from Valdez with an understanding of the history of the highway and commitment to the roadhouse lifestyle.
- Summit Lake Lodge – Located at Mile 195 on the east shore of Summit Lake, the Summit Lake Lodge was originally constructed in the 1930s by Slim Moore and Doc Calvin Krite as the Moochigan Lodge. In 1952, Moore changed the name to Summit Lake Lodge. In 1962, Moore sold the lodge to Dave Lanni, but it was destroyed by fire in 1964. A more modern lodge soon replaced it, and operations

⁵⁴⁰ Smith, *Alaska's Historic Roadhouses*, 25.

⁵⁴¹ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 15c.

were taken over by Buzz Jackovich and John Walner in 1984.⁵⁴² The property burned for a final time in the 1990s. Summit Lake is an ideal location for fishing and hunting activities, and a small community of recreational and retirement cabins now exist just uphill from the lodge location.

- Hansen’s Roadhouse – Also called “Bert and Mary’s”, this roadhouse was opposite Rika’s Roadhouse on the north bank of the Tanana River. It was begun in 1939 for use as a recreational hunting lodge, offering fishing and hunting trips up the Tanana River, led by licensed big game hunting guide Bert Hansen.⁵⁴³ As Rika was not known to be an exceptional cook, many people were soon staying at Rika’s and eating at Bert and Mary’s. The Hansen’s moved to Rapids Roadhouse in 1958. The roadhouse is now the private residence of Irene Mead, the daughter of Bert and Mary. According to Irene Mead, many of the materials for the roadhouse were originally salvaged from an abandoned steam wheeler grounded sometime in the 1910s on the north bank of the Tanana near the roadhouse location.⁵⁴⁴
- Silver Fox Lodge – Established in 1949 by Harry and Edna Merriman on the location of the original Silver Fox Roadhouse this lodge was later destroyed by fire.⁵⁴⁵
- Aurora Lodge – Located at Mile 323 on the north bank of the Salcha River, the Aurora Lodge was constructed in 1946 by Vic Johnson and Roy Fox. The lodge

⁵⁴² Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 52b.

⁵⁴³ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 62e.

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Irene Mead, July 2012.

⁵⁴⁵ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 67b.

underwent several building campaigns, expanding with modern conveniences. The structure was destroyed by fire in January 1978, and was later rebuilt.⁵⁴⁶

Additional hotels and lodges have grown up over the course of the past few decades, including a large Princess Hotel establishment in the Copper River Valley and hotels in North Pole and Delta Junction.

⁵⁴⁶ Phillips, *Roadhouses of the Richardson Highway*, 71a.

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