United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form

___New Submission ___Amended Submission ___NHL Nomination

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

The Settlement and Economic Development of Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

B. Associated Historic Context(s)

(Identify theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)
The New Deal Colony Settlement of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley in Alaska, 1934-1940

C. Form Prepared by

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organization Matanuska-Susitna Borough date 9/30/90

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D. Certification

(Continuation sheets may be used for additional certifying officials.)
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form as been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper of the National Register Date

WRITTEN NARRATIVE

Provide the following information on continuation sheets in the sequence listed below. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Fill in the page numbers in the column on the right.

E. Statement of Historic Context(s)

Organization of Multiple Property Documentation Form

The Multiple Property Documentation Form identifies one historic context -- The "New Deal" colony settlement in Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Valley, and the development of three distinct, but related, property types, which are significantly associated with the context. The property types are Community Center Buildings/Infrastructure, Farm Houses and Farmsteads. The context statement outlines general historic developments related to the theme. Discussions of property types include a description of physical characteristics, an evaluation of significance, and a template of registration requirements for each property type.

Background

The 1930s found the U.S. in the depths of the "Great Depression". Especially hard hit were those rural areas of the Great Lakes states that were already depressed due to a decline of the mining and logging industries. In an attempt to help alleviate this problem the New Deal Administration of Franklin Roosevelt initiated 99 resettlement projects involving the relocation of nearly 11,000 families. The Alaska project was unique because it required the creation of a complete community in a largely unsettled region.

Introduction

While nearly 100 "New Deal" Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) projects were established in the U.S. during the 1930s to relieve economic conditions among depression stricken farmers, none captured the public's attention quite like the colony that was established in Alaska's Matanuska Valley. Planned in large part by David Williams, an architect employed by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the project was launched on a tremendous wave of optimism. The Colony, however, suffered from poor planning, political patronage and personnel problems. It became an expensive political liability and required an investigation by the Roosevelt Administration. However, the enterprise succeeded in establishing commercial agriculture in the Matanuska-Susitna valley and in creating a town (Palmer) that still survives. Of all the resettlement projects, the Matanuska Colony has more structures that survive. Though it hardly appeared so at the time, the Matanuska enterprise eventually drew recognition as one of the principal achievements of the FERA community building program.

E. Statement of Historic Context(s)

Development of the Palmer Colony 1934-1940

The idea for an Alaskan colony came, in large part, from David Williams, a New Deal architect in the Washington, D.C. office of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Williams began to establish his reputation in 1916, for creative and innovative architecture. In that year, he went to work as a civil engineer for Gulf Oil in Tampico, Mexico. While in this position, he designed a simple, foolproof system of pre-fabrication that was adopted by the oil companies and used world-wide. The interest in prefabrication was a constant theme in Williams' work, and one that gained him both national and international recognition as an expert in the field. After working in Mexico for four years Williams took a couple of years off and traveled throughout Europe sketching and studying architecture. Returning to Dallas, Texas in 1924, he opened The Studio, his combination home and office that became the focal point for cultural and artistic development in Dallas and the sounding board for countless aspiring artists and architects between the 1924-33 period. It was during this time that Williams developed an indigenous architecture for the Southwestern United States that gave birth to the "Ranch House" design. In 1936 Williams became the Deputy Administrator and Chief Architect for the New Deal's National Youth Administration (NYA). When NYA became the Defense Training Program, Williams planned prefabricated work-centers throughout the United States for the organization's use.

In 1942 the White House called on Williams to help solve the need for temporary housing around important defense plants. Williams responded with his "Mulitmax" prefabricated house. A total of 1,200 of these two-bedroom homes were built in Beaumont, Texas at a cost of $885 per unit. Thousands more were built on the West Coast by industrialist Henry Kaiser. In 1943, Williams was dispatched to Managua, Nicaragua under the auspices of the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, which was directed by Nelson Rockefeller. For two years Williams served as Director of Agricultural Rehabilitation, in charge of building camps and training workers to supply essential materials, such as rubber, balsa and other items for the war effort.

The United Nation's, Rural Relief Agency (UNRRA), next tapped Williams' expertise. He was hired to oversee the restoration of dikes at Kaifeng, China which the Chinese had destroyed hoping to forestall a Japanese invasion. Millions of Chinese worked on this massive project. The United Nations, in 1947, sent Williams to Venezuela to plan and design communities for resettling thousands of World War II refugees, with an agricultural background, from Central Europe.

In 1949, Williams returned to the United States and became the chief architect for the United States Public Health Service's Hospital Planning Program. A position he held until 1951, when he joined the Research Division of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, in charge of Tropical and Arctic Housing. After holding this position for about a year Williams retired to his adopted home of Lafayette, Lousiana where he continued to devote his time to the study and advancement of architecture.

It was in 1933 that Williams conceived of his first large scale community building project in the United States. The Woodlake Cooperative Agricultural Community in East Texas was intended to take depression-displaced farm families out of "Hoover Villages" in Dallas and Houston and put them back on the land. Administered by Lawrence Westbrook, who in 1935 became director of FERA's Division of Rural Rehabilitation, the project was termed a great success by supporters of the New Deal. The Roosevelt Administration was so impressed with the project that Williams was called to Washington, D.C. in 1934 to work with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration planning agricultural communities for displaced farm families. It was in this capacity that Williams was placed in charge of the Matanuska Valley Colony project.

As early as 1934, the Division of Rural Rehabilitation had received requests from individuals for aid in colonizing Alaska. Williams found the concept intriguing and conducted research on the practicality of such a venture. He discovered that Alaska had almost no commercial agriculture. One of the principal reasons for the territory's $7,000,000 annual deficit was the cost of importing foodstuffs. Consequently, any locally produced agricultural products would find a ready market in the railbelt area between Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Alaska was a vastly underpopulated territory that might provide a "safety valve" for overpopulated, depressed rural areas of the U.S. In 1934, Williams issued a report on the possibilities of Alaska colonization. FERA received favorable responses regarding the idea and sent Assistant Administrator Jacob Baker to Alaska to inspect the recommended site. Baker was shown around by Colonel Otte F. Ohlson, General Manager of the Alaska Railroad. Persuaded of the feasibility of Alaskan colonization Baker returned to Washington, D.C. very enthusiastic about the proposed settlement. He publicly guessed that in time the valley could support 2,500 families and he thought that if a project for government sponsored settlement were approved a start could be made with 500 families. Between August and December 1934, Williams made further preparations for the development of the project. He requested information from the University of Minnesota and the Arctic Institute of North America, set guidelines for the colony project, and interviewed Alaskan construction experts. On November 15, 1934, Williams held meetings with the

Housing and Home Finance Agency, the U.S. Public Health Service, the Alaska Department of Health, and the University of Minnesota. By December 13, 1934, the University of Minnesota indicated that a definite proposal for selecting Minnesotans was in place.

Williams, back in Washington for the New Year, was impressed with the positive response to the idea of the Alaska colony. He requested additional information from the Interior and Agriculture Departments before completing plans for the project. A memo was sent to Harry Hopkins, FERA Administrator, outlining the colony proposal. Hopkins related the information to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the President requested a conference with Williams.

Roosevelt and Williams met in February 1935. The president was fascinated with the resettlement idea and asked three principal questions regarding the proposed colony: could Alaska support a larger population, would the colony have any military value and could the colonists withstand Alaska's winters? When the answers were affirmative, the President ordered the FERA to initiate the project. Following up on his endorsement of the colony, FDR, by Executive Order 6957, closed to homestead entry eleven townships in the Matanuska Valley to reserve them for the colony. David Williams was directed to finalize the plans for the settlement.

Williams coordinated planning with the Interior Department, which hoped to encourage immigration to the territory, and other related agencies. Conferences were held with the Interdepartmental Committee on Alaska. Final plans for cooperation were formulated by March 1, 1935. FERA was to finance and direct the project, and the Interior Department would provide support functions. Specifically, Interior was to: procure all supplies and equipment, provide information on Alaskan conditions, and furnish a ship, the steamer North Star, for transportation of temporary workers and supplies. The Rural Rehabilitation Division of FERA would be the administrator of the colony, responsible for formulating all construction plans, as well as, selecting and transporting the families chosen as colonists.

Construction plans were prepared according to Williams' directions. Buildings were to be indigenous, i.e., native log and wood frame. Site plans called for low profile homes that would conform to the topography of the Matanuska Valley. A new building technique, prefabrication, was used. Logs would be pre-cut and ready to put together for houses, barns and outbuildings. The original colony plan called for 208 tracts of land. Of these, 134 would be forty plus acres, 66 would be eighty plus acres and 8 would be sixty plus acres, and 12 additional sites of varying acreage were reserved for future community

use. An effort was made to purchase already cleared land from homesteaders. However, not all were willing to sell. As a result the vast majority of the tracts were uncleared wilderness. The master plan called for clearing 22 acres per site in the first five years of occupancy.

Homesites were concentrated near the community center, which would provide the essential administrative, economic, and social services that would be needed by the new agricultural settlement. The colony would need storage, processing, and marketing facilities; stores, school, community hall, staff offices and housing, cannery, creamery and other related facilities. FERA's philosophy, as expressed by Williams, envisioned a "well-rounded community, self-sufficient agriculturally, with small allied industries and processing plants." The entire project would be governed by a "Settlement Agreement" which specified the responsibilities of both the settlers and the government.

Each selected colony family was given a charge account and allowed to charge pre-departure expenses for furniture, tools, and household equipment. The Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation (ARRC) was incorporated on April 12, 1935, as a nonprofit entity created by the Rural Rehabilitation Division of FERA to administer the project in Alaska. ARRC agreed to pay the transportation costs of the colonists to the colony, and up to 2,000 pounds of freight per family. Colonists would be housed in tents until their homes were completed. Each family would be able to buy a homestead of at least forty acres, ranging in price from $5.00 per acre for unimproved land to an unspecified amount for cleared or already developed acreage. Payment to the corporation would be over a thirty year mortgage at three percent interest, with interest to begin accumulating in 1938 and payments to start in 1940.

The Corporation would provide machinery, livestock, and equipment via sale, lease, rent, or a per use charge. Until they were self sufficient, colonists would get subsistence items at cost, charged to their accounts that they would repay. It was estimated that these expenses would amount to about $3,500 per family by the time they achieved self-reliance (a figure that proved to be much too low). In addition, the ARRC would provide educational, recreational, and health services; supervision of the colony, and consultation to the colonists. Colonists were required to agree to abide by all Corporation rules in conjunction with crop production, processing and marketing, distribution and other measures for the welfare of the community. This emphasis on communal cooperation prompted some critics of New Deal programs to accuse the administration of Socialism and of designing a Communistic community on the order of the Soviet Union's state farms.

Colonists chosen for the project came from among families in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin (and one from Oklahoma). Officials in the FERA felt these people would do well because the climate of the Great Lakes states was comparable to the Matanuska Valley. In addition, large areas of the Lakes states had acute rural relief problems due to the exhaustion of mining and timber resources and the loss of associated jobs. The colonists were persons of European stock; primarily Scandinavians, Germans, English, Scots and Irish. The qualities most sought were: need, farming experience, useful occupational skills, relative youth, good health, a family of four to six children, evidence of the pioneer spirit and a desire to live on the land. Indeed, problems in the selection process were responsible for a number of later troubles. Social workers in the three states found it difficult to separate those equipped for pioneering from the dreamers.

Seizing on the romance of pioneering, the media provided extensive coverage on the colonists. Newspaper editorials commented that "the eyes of the world" were upon the colonists. Overseas press coverage included an article in the Spanish language edition of Time, Tiempo. Will Rogers visited the colony in 1935, the day before his fatal plane crash. A Broadway play, titled "200 Were Chose", had a five-week run. Paramount Pictures would later make a movie, "The New Horizon", based on the colony. Entertained by big city mayors and interviewed by journalists while traveling from the Lakes states to California for their departure, the colonists became overnight celebrities.

Part of the colonists' appeal to America was a result of the then strong Agrarian/Frontier myth. Many Americans believed that a simple agrarian existence was more virtuous than other types of labor. And the Great Depression, still going strong, presented a powerful case against free market industrialization. Perhaps Alaska, in spite of Fredrick Jackson Turner's pronouncement that the frontier was closed, could provide a safety valve for the population.

In contrast to the hoopla surrounding the colonists was the near obscurity with which the 400 California WPA workers left San Francisco on April 23, 1935, for the voyage to Alaska. The Colony was a work relief project for unemployed craftsmen and laborers in California as well as a new beginning for the 204 families chosen. WPA workers were to set up the temporary tent camps that would be home to the colonists until their permanent homes were built. Besides erecting the tent camps, the WPA workers were also to prepare logs and construct houses, barns, highways, and community buildings. Unfortunately, the workers reached Seward on May 5th, only one day before the colonists were scheduled to arrive. Compounding the problem was the fact that the Alaska Railroad lacked the capacity to move both workers and freight at the same time. When colonists arrived in

Seward, the WPA workers did not have tents set up in Palmer, no land cleared or roads built. The colonists lived on board ship for a few days while the transient workers erected the tent homes.

Finally, on May 10, 1935, the first colonists (from Minnesota) made it to Palmer. And by May 27th, all the colonists and their families were safely encamped in Palmer. On the 23rd of May, a lottery was held to select homestead tracts. A total of 204 tracts were selected, and after a little trading of parcels among the colonists, most people were pleased with their draw. In June and July the colonists moved, with their tents, to camps closer to their building tracts. For a few weeks things seemed to be progressing smoothly. It was, however, the calm before the storm.

Due to problems of coordination and supply, WPA workers were unable to process enough logs for house construction. Shipping problems in Seattle, including a Longshoreman's strike, compounded the situation. Further complicating things were the actions of on-site political appointees who began making changes in Williams' house plans. The alterations required additional materials, frustrated prefabrication plans, and produced further delays. Some of the colonists vented their anger at the delays on June 16, 1935, by sending telegrams to President Roosevelt, Alaska Governor John W. Troy, the Senators from the three Lakes states, and to Huey Long. The complaints stated that house and barn construction was at a stand still, wells were not being dug, roads were not being built, commissary prices were too high, medical care insufficient and political appointees a problem.

Back in Washington, D.C. presidential friend and advisor Louis Howe worried that the controversy would hurt FDR's image, urged that an investigative team be formed and dispatched to Palmer. In the interim, FERA troubleshooter Eugene Carr was sent to the colony to straighten out personnel problems and expedite construction. On July 12, 1935, the investigators arrived in Palmer. The team was headed by Samuel Richard, corporation president and personal friend of the President. Other members included David Williams, Colonel Leroy P. Hunt, Special Assistant Attorney General Daniel E. McGrath and Navy Physician R.J. Davis. In their twelve days at the project, the investigative team accomplished a great deal. The Board of Directors of ARRC was reorganized with a Palmer headquarters and local members. The ARRC began the active direction of the Colony, replacing the long distance administration of FERA officials in Washington, D.C. As of July 1, 1935, Williams made a construction survey which revealed that there were enough logs to construct 59 of the 134 houses remaining to be built. Because of a log shortage, 75 houses would be of frame construction. To expedite building, Williams ordered 225

additional WPA workers hired from California as well as 85 local carpenters and foremen employed. Attorney General McGrath set up a colonial police force, which along with a U.S. Deputy Marshall, Justice of the Peace, and a U.S. Commissioner was responsible for law enforcement. Doctor Davis expanded the medical staff. The colony was a better functioning operation after the changes.

Despite the problems, before the 1935 season ended the workers had completed work on the warehouse, trading post, and generating plant. Work had begun on a school, a gymnasium, and the creamery/cannery. October 30, 1935 witnessed the last of the colonists houses being constructed. The ARRC had also drilled 149 wells and constructed 106 barns on individual farmsteads.

During 1936, the remainder of the settlement's community center buildings were finished. A large dormitory, intended as a residence for the colony's unmarried school teachers and nurses, was completed, and a new hospital. Finally, the ARRC built twelve staff houses to provide residences for the various ARRC personnel, including a two-story home with attached garage (the only colony house with a garage) that served as the ARRC manager's residence. The ARRC also erected a 94.5 foot tall, 73,500 gallon capacity, water tower and installed sewer, water, and steam lines (for heating) to the community center buildings. With the completion of construction in the core area, by the end of 1936, the physical development of the colony was basically complete. Farm development, in 1936, proceeded with mixed results. Land clearing took much longer than anticipated. By the end of the year only 275 additional acres were ready for cultivation. Other activities associated with the establishment of agriculture progressed more smoothly. Construction of the warehouse, cannery, and creamery was completed; providing the processing facilities need for the crops being grown.

Inspite of these accomplishments not all of the colonists found the situation acceptable. Some of the colonists began planning to leave almost immediately upon their arrival in the valley. By the end of July 1935, only two months after establishment of the colony, twenty-six families had left. During the period of significance, 1935-1940, a total of 124 families left the colony. The reasons given for leaving varied. At least twenty-six families left because of ill health, twenty-four because they were not suited to farming or were asked by the ARRC managers, to leave, and forty-seven because they were dissatisfied with the general performance and management of the colony. During the same period, however, eighty replacement families were selected for the colony. Consequently, the colony population averaged about 160 families, totaling approximately 800 people. In an effort to ameliorate some of the colonist's complaints the Matanuska Valley Civic

Association (originally created in 1935, it had withered away as the colonists scattered to their separate tracts) was revived in 1937, and new members were elected in May from among the colonists. Although the Association lacked any actual authority, it was a means of involving the colonists in decisions affecting the colony. One of those decisions was what to do about the increasing individual indebtedness of the colonists.

While a few of the more enterprising, thrifty, and lucky colonists had moved to a pay-as-you-go routine, the majority were still running up large debts at the colony trading post. By 1937, the average indebtedness equaled $9,694.50 for individual colonists. This problem hampered the settlement's ability to generate capital and put itself on a paying basis. The ARRC authorized an initial adjustment of these debts to an $8,000 maximum. Special WPA Council, H.M. Colvin, evaluated the colonists debt situation, in 1937, and effected another adjustment that set a new $5,000 maximum.

From 1937 to 1940, the colonists concentrated on developing their farms and assuming more direct control of the management of the colony. The ARRC embarked on a variety of programs between 1937-1940 designed to encourage farm development. The Work Credit Program, begun in early 1937, was one of the most popular ideas; more than 95% of the colonists participated. It allowed the colonists to be paid in cash for all phases of farm improvement, including: clearing land, completion of fences, construction of well houses and outbuildings. That year colonists cleared nearly 1,500 acres. In November of 1937, the Security and Development Program was implemented. This program placed a greater emphasis on land clearing. Colonists were paid higher wages under this program than they were under the earlier one. By the time this program ended in December 1938, another 1,100 acres of land had been cleared, bringing to almost 3,000 the total acreage ready for cropping. In 1939 a third, and final, land clearing program, the "Thirty Acre Program" began. Under this program, by the end of 1940, over 4,300 acres were ready for cultivation. During this period the Matanuska Valley Farmer's Cooperative Association, formed in 1936, became more active in managing the colony. By 1938, the ARRC had turned over most of the management functions of the colony to the Association. The transition was completed in January 1940, when the MVFCA purchased the community center properties, effectively ending ARRC's role as administrator of the colony.

The change in administration did not solve all the Colony's problems.There was still land clearing to be done, community service improvements to be made and, of course, still unhappiness with the management over various issues. These problems were much like the troubles encountered in other New Deal resettlement projects. The Dyess Colony in Arkansas, was planned for 750 families, but was reduced to 500 before occupancy. And, of that number, slightly over half withdrew from the colony in the first two years for a

ariety of reasons. At the Arizona Casa Grande project, a cooperative farm community, he settlers had better houses and higher wages than the local standard. They also had rowing equities in the successful group-operated farm. Yet they quarreled, accused the anagement of incompetence, wrote letters of complaint that echoed those from the atanuska Colony, and hastily liquidated the project when Federal Security Administration anagement was withdrawn.

By comparison, the Matanuska Colony was a great success. In 1930, there had been no town of Palmer and the population of the entire valley was only 876 people. With the coming of the colony, the district population grew to 2400 by 1939 and the new town of Palmer had 244 residents. By 1960, Palmer had 1,181 people and the whole district had a population of almost 5,200. By Alaskan standards of community growth, Palmer had become a town of considerable importance. The Matanuska Colony project exceeded its budget, but so did the other ninety-eight New Deal resettlement projects. The Colony was originally projected to cost around one million dollars. A final ARRC audit put the cost at $4.7 million, approximately $30,000 per family. Other comparable projects averaged between $14,000 to $16,000 in costs per family. It is worth noting that all the colonists who stayed did pay of their loans from the federal government. The Matanuska Colony was a more expensive undertaking because government officials felt compelled to provide community facilities and social support not envisioned in the original plan. Indeed, three-fifths of the colony's cost was for roads, community facilities, public improvements, and non-residential buildings. Also more costly than anticipated was the cost of carving farms out of the forested areas of the valley.

F. Associated Property Type(s)

I. Name of Property Type: Community Center Buildings/Structures 

II. Description

In 1935, Palmer was a tent city with virtually no community services. Architects in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration drafted a model plan for a Community Center that included buildings to provide for the commercial and social needs of a cooperative agricultural community. The area selected for the community center was cleared land in proximity to the Alaska Railroad siding referred to as Palmer. Aside from its closeness to the railroad, the location was central in the valley, just west of the Matanuska River, which allowed the farmsteads to be evenly dispersed around the community center (see attachment #1). The spatial arrangement called for a large open green 150 yds x 250 yds to provide a visual and physical focus. Anchoring the south side of the green was the teacher/staff dormitory; on the east, the school and gymnasium; and on the north, the administration building, trading center and beauty and barber shop. The west side remained open. At the far end on the west side the railroad tracks and the Palmer Depot created a boundary of sorts. To support agricultural development, the ARRC built a warehouse/creamery/cannery, and chicken hatchery on the north side of the square in proximity to the railroad depot. The colony's water tower and power plant were also constructed in this area. The community hospital was located on the south side of the quad, across the street from the teacher's dormitory. Dispersed over a two block area adjacent to the hospital were twelve single family staff houses.

The Community Center buildings shared many of the same building elements. All were frame construction and most had rectangular floor plans. Drop siding and cornerboards sheathed the structures. Gable roofs with similar slopes predominated, although the largest buildings--school, gymnasium, and dormitory--had hip roofs. Asphalt shingles or asphalt rolled roofing was used. The public buildings had 45 degree siding in their gables. The buildings were one to three stories and used a mixture of fixed and double-hung windows with multi-panes. A typical door, four sections of drop siding used vertically and a four-pane window, was used throughout the various buildings. Repetition of these details created a visual coherency and became elements of style for these buildings.
Growth of public and privately owned services paralleled that of the colony. Whereas the Community Center was east of the railroad tracks in Palmer, most of the private establishments were west of the tracks, with the exception of the new railroad depot

built in the fall of 1935 and the churches constructed in 1936-37. The depot was an important development for the community, both psychologically and commercially. The

Palmer Depot is a frame structure sheathed in shiplap siding. Its materials, mass, and fenestration are sympathetic with the Colony construction which maintains the visual continuity of the community center buildings. The depot is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NR 1978).

Another of the earliest, privately built, commercial buildings in Palmer was the Hyland Hotel (1935), built by Myles and Joanna Hyland. The hotel is a two-and-one-half story frame structure with a gable roof. A two-story addition, invisible from the front elevation, has been added to the rear of the building. Asbestos shingles cover the original drop siding. Lumber for the hotel came from an old dormitory at the Eska coal mine that was purchased, dismantled, and shipped to Palmer by the Colony's Lutheran congregation to be used in construction of their church. The Hylands bought the left over lumber for their hotel.

The churches provided an important addition to the social life of the community. The Lutheran church was frame construction, while the Presbyterian and Catholic churches were log construction. The Presbyterian church is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places (#NR1980). The Catholic church has been stuccoed and the Lutheran church has been moved from its original location to a site at the Alaska State Fair Grounds in Palmer, where it is part of the Colony Village Museum.

Because this expansion of private enterprise and construction was directly related to the development of the colony project, most buildings constructed within the core area during the period of significance (1935-1940) can be considered part of the colony project development.

III. Significance

Community Center buildings are significant under criteria A and C in the areas of settlement, social history, government and politics, agriculture, community planning, and commerce. These buildings/structures are significant under criteria "A" on the national level in the areas of settlement, social history, government and politics because they are closely associated with the New Deal's nationwide rehabilitation resettlement program designed to relieve rural poverty during the 1930's depression. The buildings at Palmer are among the few structures that survive on-site, and with extremely few intrusions,

from among the ninety-nine community resettlement projects constructed by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in the 1930's.

Community Center buildings are also significant under criteria "A" on the local and state level in the areas of settlement, agriculture and commerce. The completion of the school in 1936 and the first graduating class in the fall of that year (one student) created a psychological air of permanence in the settlement. The staff houses provided residences for the colony's manager, school superintendent, doctor and other ARRC personnel. Construction of the cannery/creamery and warehouse, in conjunction with the establishment of the Matanuska Valley Farmers Cooperative Association in 1936, put commercial agriculture on a sure footing. These two events were pivotal in the economic development of the colony. Over the next few years, the MVFCA gained additional prominence in the colony. By 1938, the ARRC had turned over most of the management functions of the colony to the Co-op. Other commercial ventures, such as the Hyland Hotel, also strengthened the feeling of permanence in the community and began to broaden the economic base beyond agriculture. Finally, under criteria "A", some of the buildings possess local significance in the area of government and politics because they housed the offices of the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, the on-site administrators/managers of the New Deal colony project.

Under criteria "C", the public community center buildings, as a group, are significant as an example of early community planning and of a building technique that used elements of prefabrication in construction. David Williams, the FERA architect in charge of the project, was responsible for design of the farmsteads, as well as the community center buildings, and was a pioneer in the use of community planning and prefabrication. Much of the same process of construction that was used in building the farmsteads was also used in the Community Center construction. Lumber for the various buildings was pre-cut and ready for assembly when transported to the building site. Roof gables were often assembled at the carpentry shop, then moved to the construction site for installation. These techniques saved valuable time and speeded construction. The need for haste in construction, however, did not over shadow another important aspect of William's career, community planning.

The buildings within the Community Center were arranged, and remain, in a configuration that illustrates several positive planning concepts. First, the focus of this group of structures is the large open public space/square. The grass covered square is laid out similarly to the traditional quadrangle. The School/Borough building faces out onto the square from the west. The Dormitory faces the square from the south and the Trading Post faces the square from the north. The importance of the quadrangle space can be sensed by

standing in the center of it and facing east. The Borough building is viewed with the magnificent backdrop of Pioneer Peak beyond. The square is the center of the community and anchors the community with its setting.

The Community Center layout also is a good example of segregation of building uses. Clustered around the square, on two sides, are the community buildings: The Colony School (originally), the Colony Trading Post, the Colony Shops, the Beauty, Barber and Cobbler Shops, and the Colony Administration Building. To the north and across East Dahlia Avenue are the more industrial buildings: The Creamery, the Warehouse, the Water Tower and the Chicken Hatchery. The residential buildings are located to the south of the Square. The Dormitory is located immediately to the south side of the Square, with the staff housing further to the south. This segregation of the community makes it easy to understand. The Community buildings are located in the center where they are readily accessible. Placing the Community buildings in the center also provides a barrier between the quiet residential area and the nosier and dirtier industrial area.

The Community Center arrangement, in addition, illustrates a positive use of building scale. The larger buildings are located around the square and the buildings reduce in size as they are located farther away from the Community Center. Larger buildings usually cannote important civic buildings and smaller sized buildings are more comfortable for homes.

Finally, the buildings of the community Center were built with a flexible but limited palette of architectural materials and styles. The buildings are square, rectangular, or L-shaped in plan. The roofs are mostly gabled, some are hipped and one is pyramidal. Horizontal drop siding with corner boards and diagonal 45 degree gable siding is the typical sheathing for the buildings. By using common shapes and materials, a sense of continuity is created. The provision for some flexibility in the shapes and materials used allows for small statements of individuality which provides character to a community.
All of these principles, working together, created a community with a logical organization, comfortable building scale and a sense of unity.

These characteristics are still apparent today. With the exception of the hospital and power house, which were destroyed by fire, and the original Lutheran church, which was moved off site in 1975, and three staff houses, all of the public community center buildings are still extant and on their original sites. The buildings as a group possess

a remarkable degree of integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association; and to a lesser extent, integrity of materials and workmanship.

Only one non-historic building (the Palmer Public Library) has been constructed on the original quadrangle. The library occupies a small area at the far west end of the green. It is a low profile building and does not detract from the overall feeling created by the community center buildings anchoring the quad on the other three sides. Street plans, pedestrian walks and open space conform to the original site plan. Trees have matured in the quad, and to some extent alter the visual look of the area, but to a very minor degree. If the colonists and the project managers were assembled on site, they would have not trouble recognizing the community center buildings.

IV. Registration Requirements

For all Community Center resources, it must be shown that there is a strong association between the resource and the development of the Matanuska Colony Project between 1935-1940. The Colony resources are eligible under criteria "A" and "C".

Under criteria "A", eligible community center buildings are most likely to be found in districts. They often represent the only remaining structures of the original community. These resources should retain strong integrity of setting, feeling, association and location. Integrity of design, materials and workmanship may be compromised, but not enough to significantly change the historic appearance of the building. A district nomination may include some buildings that have been moved as long as the district as a whole retains its essential integrity.

Under criterion "C", the resource must be a good example of a type or period of construction, express a particular theme in the work of a master, or possess high artistic value (in the Colony's case this refers to community planning). Community Center resources located in a district need not be individually eligible, but together should depict the type of community center buildings erected when the colony was established and reflect their original association to one another. For those few properties that are good examples of building type, any alterations should be minor. The essential integrity of design, materials and workmanship should remain.

I **Name of Property Type:** Farmsteads

II **Description**

There were 204 farmsteads established, in 1935, in the Matanuska Valley. Several of the original colony farmsteads are still intact, although with varying degrees of architectural and spatial integrity. Approximately ten of these farms are still owned by original colonists. In several instances colony farms under subsequent owners expanded by incorporating adjoining farmsteads to increase their acreage from the original 40, 60, or 80 acres to the more realistic size of 160-200 acres. The farm complexes were designed to include a farmhouse, barn, and usually one or more of the following: chicken house, brooder coop, outhouse, well house or shed. Not every farm possessed all of these structures. An eligible farmstead should include at least the original house and barn. One of these farmsteads, the Rebarchek Farm (NR 1977), is already on the National Register.

House - Most colony farm houses were one-and-one-half stories, although a few were single-level construction. The houses were log, frame, or a combination of both, and had either rectangular or L-shaped floor plans with gable roofs and ranged in size from 900 to 1500 square feet. Frame houses had drop siding and cornerboards. The same doors and multi-pane windows as those used on Community Center buildings were used in all of the houses. This duplication of building elements created buildings of similar appearance and promoted speedy construction and lowered costs. Unique to the building process was the extensive use of prefabrication. House logs were pre-cut and marked for assembly prior to being moved to the construction site.

Barns - Several barns were designed but the standard one was 32' x 32' with a gambrel roof. The roof ridge projected over the hay mow track and had flared, open eaves. An open cupola provided venting through the center of the ridge. One-and-one-half stories in height, the lower floor of the barn was log and the upper floor was frame. The mid-section, or "pony wall", was usually made of board and batten or of vertical planks while drop siding sheathed the hay loft. A large square door, either hinged or on sliding track, provided entry to the hay loft, while double doors provided ground floor entrance. Fixed glass, multi-pane windows were used throughout.

Three other barn designs were also erected. A one-and-one-half story "stock barn" with a barrel roof line appeared to be a smaller version of the gambrel-roofed one. The first floor was log, the upper story frame, and it measured 28 by 32 feet. The first floor had

several single doors and windows identical to those used in the other barns. Another much smaller barn, measuring 16 by 20 feet, of frame construction was also built. This smaller structure had a shed roof with open eaves and drop siding with cornerboards. Several wall vents and a single roof vent provided circulation for the small building. No examples of either of these barns has yet been located in the surveyed area.

The third type of barn was called a "stallion barn". One-and-one-half stories with a rectangular floor plan, the barn measured 30' x 25'. The lower level was log with lapped corners, the upper level was frame. It had a low gambrel roof with frame gables. The standard fixed multi-paned windows, double and single doors and square hay loft door were used. This type of barn was built specifically to stable one of three thoroughbred draft stallions owned by the ARRC. Only two barns of this type are known to have existed. Only one of these is still extant. The surviving example is located on the original colony farmstead where it was constructed.

Outbuildings (chicken house, outhouses, well house, sheds) - These buildings were usually made of log, or sometimes log and frame. Typical storage sheds were 16' x 20', with either a shed or gable roof. If they contained windows, they were the standard multi-pane used throughout the colony farms. Toilets were pre-fab log and measured 4' x 5' with a shed roof. Chicken coops measured 16' x 20' and were often two stories. The bottom level was log, usually with square notched corners. A bank of four six-paned fixed windows were used in the front facade and 12/12 fixed windows on the sides. The upper story was frame, with corner boards and a shed roof. The upper story was typically used for storing feed. Well houses were also of pre-fab design,
6' x 8' x 8', constructed of log and with a gable roof.

III. Significance

The Matanuska Colony farmsteads are significant under criteria A and C in the areas of settlement, social history, agriculture and architecture and community planning. Under criteria "A" the farmsteads are significant under settlement, social history, and agriculture. The farmstead represented the foundation of the entire colony resettlement program. It was intended to turn this project into a self-sufficient agricultural community with small allied industries and processing plants. The actual construction of the farmsteads represented the Federal government's commitment to the resettlement program in the Matanuska Valley. The farms represented the beginning of a true commercial agriculture in the valley. Much of the tillable land in the valley today was originally cleared as a result of the colony project. Farmsteads, to fulfill their role,

required the ARRC to build the necessary complimentary industries, most notably; creamery, cannery, chicken hatchery and community warehouse. The ARRC also had to establish the needed marketing arrangements to further the commercial aspects of the project. Each of these developments in turn further assured the continuation of the colony project by the Federal government. The farmsteads are also significant under criteria "C" in the area of architecture and community planning. Those sites where logs were used for building the principle structures (house, barn, chicken-coop and outhouse) represent early examples of prefabrication. Logs for the buildings were pre-cut, marked and ready for assembly when they arrived on the building site. David Williams, the principle architect of the project, was a pioneer in the development and use of this particular building technique and it was a theme throughout his career. The farmsteads are also significant under the area of community planning. The entire colony project was designed to be an integrated community of farms and allied industries that would be mutually supportive. The farmsteads provided the raw materials needed by the cooperative to produce its products. The Cooperative in turn provided the farmers with the processing facilities and marketing arrangements needed to establish a viable, commercial agriculture. The location of the farms also demonstrate Williams' commitment to sound principals of community planning. The farmsteads were dispersed evenly around the community center, none were more than twelve miles away. This made the community center easily accessible to the colonists. Finally, Williams also emphasized the use of indigenous building materials (e.g., native logs) and homesite design that was compatible with the surrounding terrain. Consequently the farmsteads were composed of buildings, relatively small in mass, made from native log and wood frame that fit well in the mixed flat land and rolling hills of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

IV. Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing in the National Register, a farmstead must retain the farmhouse and barn. Ideally, fields should also be considered part of the farmstead. Often, however, historic fields have been intermingled with non-historic acreage. If historic fields are altered, or cannot be distinguished from non-historic fields, farmstead boundaries should circumscribe only the structural complex.

The farmstead as a whole should retain the original spatial relationship between the various built components, and the individual structures should retain sufficient integrity of massing, roof shape, design, decorative features and fenestration in order to convey their historic character. Many character-defining elements, such as cupolas, vents, window rows, stanchions and other specialized facilities are integral to the

function of farmstead structures, and eligible properties will retain these features. Alterations must be carefully evaluated to determine the impact to the significant character of the structures. Modifications to structures completed during the period of significance may reflect the evolution of farming technology and should be evaluated within that context. Extensively altered or gutted barns and outbuildings, or other lesser, solitary features such as root cellars, fences, etc., normally should not be considered for listing in the National Register if they stand alone. Generally, isolated structures and features have lost their integrity of association and setting due to the absence of other original farmstead elements.

In recent decades, metal roofing and siding have been applied to many barns and outbuildings. These kinds of structures are unheated and susceptible to weathering and decay, especially if the roof is deteriorated. Consequently, the life of many of these structures has been extended because of the addition of a modern metal roof. In years to come, as neglect and weathering continue to take a toll, roofing will be one of the most critical factors in the preservation of farm structures; therefore, it is recommended that metal roofing be considered a minor alteration having minimal effect on integrity. On the other hand, structures on which the walls, as well as roofs, have been sheathed in metal usually are extensively altered, and normally should be treated as if integrity was seriously impaired. Unless such alterations can be reversed, these properties should not be eligible for the National Register. Colonies barns were built directly on grade. This sometimes resulted in deterioration of the bottom course of logs. Concrete block and poured concrete foundations have been placed under some of these buildings. These foundations may also indicate an evolution of farming practice. In order to be a grade "A" dairy a barn needs a concrete floor to meet sanitation requirements. Therefore, it is recommended that such alterations be considered as having minimal impact on integrity.

Because location and setting are central to the character of historic farmsteads, moved properties normally are not eligible unless the property meets the criteria exceptions outlined by the National Register program. However, for subsidiary structures on a farmstead, it is not unusual to find structures, particularly of small size, moved within the farmstead complex and such a move should not jeopardize the integrity of the entire farmstead.

Modern additions to farmsteads, such as metal silos, pole barns, fertilizer tanks and feed storage bins reflect the evolution of farming technology and should be considered as having minimal adverse effect upon integrity unless their number, size and prominence overwhelm the farmstead's historic character. Modern houses, as substitutions for the

original one, however, significantly diminish the integrity of historic farmsteads. The application of stucco to the Colony houses was a common occurrence in 1950s Palmer. It sealed the exterior walls and provided an additional layer of insulation against the winter winds. The stucco, by itself, should not be considered a disqualifying modification unless a house is being nominated individually as an example of a property type.

Collapsed structures should not be considered as adversely affecting a farmstead's integrity unless the structure was a pivotal, character-defining element such as the main barn or house. Multiple razed or fa len buildings are likely to seriously compromise the integrity of any farmstead.

I. Name of Property Type: Farm Houses

II. Description

A key component of the New Deal's Rural Rehabilitation Administration's resettlement program was the provision of each family with a home. The archives of FERA architect David Williams indicated that nine house plans were originally designed for the Palmer colony. Five of these plans were presented for the colonists to choose from, with the majority selecting a one-and-one-half story model. In addition, some colonists were permitted to alter house plans to their liking, as long as the cost did not exceed the projected budget cost. Originally, all houses were to be log construction. A shortage of suitable logs resulted in only 125 homes constructed of at least partial log. Approximately 75 houses were of frame construction. No plan included a full basement or even a suitable foundation; instead, the houses were built directly on grade or, in a few cases, colonist dug their own basements. Consequently, several original structures have suffered deterioration of the bottom course of logs (due to years of water and soil saturation). Some of these houses have been placed on poured concrete and concrete block foundations to ensure their continued survival.

With the one exception all of the houses were one-and-one-half stories. The one-and-one-half story houses utilized different floor plans (either rectangular or L-shaped), but had the same general division of internal space. The ground floor of these units all had kitchen area, living room, storage space, one bedroom or bunkroom and space for a bathroom. None of the original houses were built with an indoor toilet - or even indoor plumbing - but the space was provided for future use. The second floor contained two bedrooms and storage space. The single level home had three bedrooms centered around a living room/kitchen area with a closet. Gable roofs were common. The frame houses were covered with drop siding and cornerboards. All the houses had double-hung 6/6 windows. A typical door, four sections of drop siding used vertically with a 4-pane window, was used throughout. This duplication of building materials gave all the homes a similar appearance, reduced cost and speeded construction.

III. Significance

The farm houses are significant under criteria A and C in the areas of settlement, social history, agriculture, architecture, and community planning. Under criteria A, the homes are significant under social history because of their immediate connection with the New Deal 1930s resettlement programs for poverty stricken rural residents from the Great

Lakes States. The people in this area had little hope of improving their situation during the Great Depression of the 1930's by remaining where they were. The farm houses were also significant in the area of agriculture. The farm houses were all originally part of a farmstead. The farmsteads were responsible for the development of commercial agriculture in the valley. The farm houses were also important under the area of settlement. Prior to the colony development the Matanuska-Susitna Valley was a largely underpopulated wilderness, with an occassional homestead. There was no town of Palmer before the colony settlement.

The colony houses are significant under criteria "C" in the areas of architecture and community planning. FERA architect David Williams was a pioneer in both the design and use of prefabricated housing elements and community planning. Logs and lumber for the colony homes were pre-cut before being transported to the building site for assembly. This allowed for speedier, less costly construction, both items of concern for the colonists and ARRC staff alike, with winter approaching and project costs escalating. Also under criteria "C" the farmsteads are eligible under community planning. The entire colony project was designed to be an integrated community of farms and allied industries that would be mutually supportive. The farmsteads provided the raw materials needed by the Matanuska Valley Farmers Cooperative Association to produce its products. The cooperative in turn provided the farmers with the processing facilities and marketing arrangements needed to establish a viable, commercial agriculture. The location of the farms also demonstrate Williams' awareness of community planning. The farmsteads were dispersed evenly around the community center, none were more than twelve miles away. This made the community center easily accessible to the colonists. Finally, Williams also emphasized the use of indigenous building materials (e.g., native logs) and homesite design that was compatible with the surrounding terrain. Consequently the farmsteads were composed of buildings, relatively small in mass, made from native log and wood frame that fit well in the mixed flat land and rolling hills of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

IV. Registration Requirements

Initially, all the colonists' houses were part of a farmsteads. However, over time, as circumstances changed and people sold off land, some of the best examples of farm house construction are no longer part of a farm. Nonetheless, as an example of farm house design and construction, they possess unquestionable integrity.

To be eligible under criteria "A", it must be shown that there is a strong association between the resource and the historic contexts identified in Section B of the nomination

form. The farm houses are closely associated with the New Deal's resettlement project in the Matanuska Valley for depression stricken farmers from the Great Lakes states.

To be eligible under criteria "C" the resource must be a good example of a type or period of construction, the work of an architect of national prominence and reputation, or high artistic value (in the Colony's case this refers to community planning). In this case, the house should maintain its integrity as constructed in 1935-36. Exterior walls should not be sheathed in any type of covering material and building fenestration should not be significantly altered. Some of these houses have been placed on poured concrete and concrete block foundations to ensure their continued survival. The addition of these foundations does not significantly compromise the structural integrity of the houses and should therefore be considered as a minimal alteration that does not effect the historic character of the buildings and one that protects and preserves longevity. The farm houses were designed by David Williams and are excellent examples of three constant themes in his work: the use of indigenous building materials, prefabrication, and community planning.

G. Geographical Data

Boundaries and Climate of the Matanuska-Susitna River Valleys

The geographic and political boundaries of the Matanuska and Susitna Valley located in south Central Alaska, are defined by the geological relief of the area. What is referred to as " the Valley " encompasses approximately 20,100 square miles within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Dominant rivers draining the region are the Matanuska, Knik, Susitna, Yentna, Chulitna and Talkeetna, with their extensive watersheds they make up the lowlands. The Susitna drainage to the west is vast, stretching northward and inland approximately some 293 miles to the crest of the Alaska Range in Central Alaska. Flowing into the valley from the east, the Matanuska River, (meaning muddied waters) separates two mountain ranges; the Talkeetnas which create the northern boundary and the Chugach mountains which form a rim around the eastern and southeastern edge. From the knik glacier, in the Chugach mountains, to the southeast, the knik River flows, meeting the Matanuska at the Knik Arm where both subsequently discharge into Cook Inlet (refer to relief map, see attachment 4). Occupying the coastal portion of the valley, the Inlet, determines much of the weather effecting the area.

The Matanuska-Susitna Climate, primarily influenced by the Japanese current, is generally considered mild and moist. Warm moisture laden winds sweep into the valley providing the

region with abundant precipitation. The area is tornado free and electrical storms are rare occurrences. Average Summer temperatures are 50-55% Fahrenheit and records show a growing season of over 100 days stretching from May into September. The Valley, with its midnight sun, has weeks with between fourteen and twenty hours of sunlight, providing long photoperiod days important for agriculture,

Early Contact with the Native Populations

The native Den'ina (Tanaina) people inhabiting this section of the country were semi-nomadic, following the yearly cycles of the fish migrations and caribou herds. Their territory encompassed approximately 41,000 square miles with winter villages located in strategic points along major waterways and lakeshores. During the Russian occupation they played the middleman role between the Russians and the interior Athabaskans providing the Russian American Company (RAC) with furs and skins. As a consequence of their contact with the Russians, the Tanaina population declined by approximately 50% by 1840 due to an epidemic of smallpox. Probably one of the first white people to enter the valley was Captain Vancouver in 1794. He succeeded Captain James Cook in navigating the Inlet and reportedly explored both the Matanuska and Susitna Rivers. Later he named the Inlet in honor of its white discoverer. Other penetrations into the Matanuska and Susitna valleys were made by several different Russian explorers. One such man was Peter Malakhov who, is said to have reached the upper recesses of the rivers in 1834, although little is known of his trip. Other expeditions by the Russians, in 1843, ran into difficulties with the currents on the Susitna. Maps drawn in 1845 demonstrated a general knowledge of the courses of both the Susitna and Matanuska Rivers.

The Russians were the first Caucasians to establish trade with the natives, however, their tenacious hold was limited strictly to the coastal areas of Cook Inlet and Kenai Peninsula. It is interesting to note that the Russians started several agricultural settlements in 1844 around the Cook Inlet. One of these settlements known as " Rossiskoe Selenie" (Russian Settlement), was located near what later became Tyonek, another was near Old Knik (Eklutna). Because of the temperate climate, the Inlet was specifically chosen for agriculture; the crops included potatoes, turnips, radishes, lettuce onions and garlic. A Russian Orthodox church was later built at Tyonek, after the sale of Alaska to the United States, which took place in 1867. Reportedly, there were approximately 150-200 natives, "all members of the church", living there at the turn of the Century.

Early American Settlement and Commerce

After the sale of Alaska to the United States there was a period of approximately 20 years of little change. The Alaska Commercial Trading Company bought out the Russian concerns and continued to operate in a similar style, with growth limited to opening up several more stations. A few prospectors and trappers passed through to the interior but the intensity of the mosquitoes daunted many. A man by the name of George Palmer set up a private trading post near the confluence of the Matanuska and knik Rivers between the years of 1875 and 1882. During those same years he operated the Old Knik Trading post, as an agent, for the Alaska Commercial Company. In 1882 he bought out the trading post at Old Knik, whereupon he closed his concern at Matanuska.

Once gold was discovered on the Kenai in, 1895, near Turnagain Arm, rapid changes occurred. The following year the Famous Klondike strike hurtled activity into high gear. Three thousand prospectors landed at Tyonek heading for the gold fields, some headed up the Susitna and Matanuska, while others rushed to the Turnagain Arm mines. Responding to the stampede, that same year, the Alaska Commercial Company founded the Susitna Station, near the confluence of the Yentna and Susitna Rivers, other stations were established at Point Hope and Sunrise on the Turnagain Arm.

The rivers that flow into the valley became natural causeways out of the low lands and into the mountains and interior. Taking the paths of least resistance the prospectors, miners, trappers, traders and speculators passed through the peripheral trading posts and up into the mining districts. Some of the trails they followed were age worn routes known to the Dena'ina natives; others were cut out of the wilderness following the major arteries and tributaries along the relatively flat lands to the interior. One such route was the famous Iditarod trail. Many new placer mines opened up along the tributaries of the major rivers, as the miners penetrated their depths.

Commerce and Government

On the heels of the prospectors came the geologists, railroad men, entrepreneurs and homesteaders. the Town of Knik having been washed out by the river at its former site, relocated across the Knik Arm in 1887, whereupon it became the prime supplier and outfitter for the prospectors.

United States Geological Surveys were conducted, in 1898, of the Susitna River by George Eldridge, the Yentna by J.E. Spurr, and the Matanuska by W.C. Mendenhall. Mendenhall was associated with Captain Edward Glenn's Army Department expedition which followed the Matanuska River in an attempt to find an "all American" route to the gold fields near Circle City, and the Klondike. Under Lt. J.C. Castner's Supervision the expedition went up the Matanuska Valley and then cut across the Copper River Basin to Fairbanks. The whole trip took approximately six months, and according to Castner, it was a miserable expedition. Some Klondike stampeders used Castner's trail before following the high ridges across the timber line and on to the mighty Yukon River where they joined the rest of the stampeders. Part of the trail however, took on a greater significance when gold was found in the Little Nelchina River area. Later it was to become the main thoroughfare from Anchorage to Fairbanks.

With the influx of freighters, miners and speculators the trading post at Knik burgeoned into a prosperous little town. By 1915 it boasted of a population of 250 permanent residents with 200-300 transients (many of the miners would winter in Knik when their mining equipment froze). It freighted equipment and supplies to most of the mining concerns. Regular wagon trails led out of knik to the various mining districts. The willow Creek trail serviced the willow Creek mines; the Iditarod Trail supplied the Kuskokwim region; other trails leading to Hatcher pass, and the Matanuska-Chickaloon-Nelchina were also used for freighting the much needed supplies to the prospectors, placer mines, quartz, and coal mining operations. On January 10, 1912 two freight sleds pulled by 33 dogs, with 2,600 pounds of gold from Iditarod came through Knik, on their way to Seward.

After the information was compiled from the geological surveys conducted, it was found that if the mineral wealth of the country was to be tapped, a reliable means of transportation was necessary. Rich coal deposits were found in the Matanuska Valley, and in the Nenana River country; copper was located in the Kennicott district and gold mines were numerous.

Following several aborted attempts by private investors to build a railroad, construction was abandoned by the private sector. The navy, anxious to have a supply of coal on the Pacific rim for its pacific fleet, became interested in the coal beds of the Matanuska valley, specifically the Chickaloon coal deposits.

In 1912 Alaska became a Territory. With increased interest in Alaska, the political climate seemed ready for a government run railroad. Under president Taft several

feasibility surveys took place to research the best routes. Although several routes were recommended, it was not until a changeover in the government, under the direction of President Woodrow Wilson that a final decision was made on April 10, 1915. The Alaska Engineering Commission (AEC) was put in charge of the construction of the railroad. The route decided upon, was to follow the previously built tracks across the Kenai Peninsula from Seward to Turnagain Arm. From there the rail was to traverse up the Susitna River valley then turn east following the Nenana and Tanana river basins to Fairbanks. A spur was to be built to the coal fields 40 miles up from the confluence of the Matanuska River, to the navy's new Chickaloon coal mine.

A tent city appeared over night at Ship Creek, in anticipation for work on the railroad. The headquarters for the construction of the railroad, was established there because of a protected harbor with fairly long ice free seasons, lasting from early spring until late fall. This became important for the shipment of construction materials to the central headquarters. It was not long before Ship Creek became a permanent town, later to be renamed Anchorage. Sometime thereafter, as the rails were being laid townsites sprang up along the railbelt, in many instances, at supply stations and construction bases. Towns like Matanuska, Moose Creek, Wasilla, Pittman, Houston, Willow Creek, Montana and Talkeetna became small out posts along the railbelt. Former trading posts such as Tyonek, New Knik, Susitna Station and McDougal all lost their importance as commercial outfitters.

Prior to 1914 the homesteaders were predominantly miners and freighters, however, between 1914 and 1918 a new influx of people came to the valley interested in homesteading and farming. Many preferred to homestead in previously cleared areas along the tracks. Others moved into the new towns, platted by the railroad. The valley started to be populated. Knik townspeople and businesses moved to Wasilla where they continued to flourish in commerce.

Post World War I

By 1925 the Navy's coal mine at Chickaloon had closed, however, several private mines were in operation near the town of Sutton. Jonesville was the most successful, continuing production for the next four decades. These mining townsites, and the new town of Anchorage began to provide markets for agricultural produce. The railroad provided accessibility. Potatoes became a cash crop during the 1915-17 period and farming was a self-supporting venture. To help with storage and marketing the valleys farmers, in 1915, formed the Matanuska Farmers Association. Seeing the potential for

agriculture in the region the United States Department of agriculture, in 1917, established an experimental farm near Matanuska, with M. J. Snodgrass as the manager. The station distributed information on soils, seeds, and land clearing techniques.

World War I caused a tremendous decline in the population of Alaska as young draftee's left the valley for the war. Wages were commensurate with those in the lower 48, therefore the incentive to stay no longer existed. Mines and railroad operations were badly hit with the 1918 flue, which crippled the work force in the mines and on the rails. Native populations became totally decimated by the influenza attack. Villages collapsed and became abandoned throughout the region, even the sizeable native populations at Knik, Tyonek and Matanuska Stations all collapsed. By the 1930's virtually the entire Susitna Valley was empty of the Dena'ina people. Those few who were left congregated at Eklutna (Old Knik) with their whole former way of living having been completely eroded. They became totally dependent on the white mans economy, with the railroad becoming their primary chance of employment.

By 1920 less than 200 settlers remained in the valley few of them were practicing farming. The decline in settlers and the resulting loss of freight traffic caused the Alaska Railroad concern. In an effort to bolster their business, the railroad in 1929 attempted to promote the Matanuska Valley for farming. Otto Ohlson the manager of the Railroad hired Mr. M. J. Snodgrass, from the experimental farm to interview all interested applicants. Out of several thousand applicants Snodgrass interviewed over 600 with 55 families ultimately moving to the Matanuska Valley.

As a result of these various impediments to growth, the Matanuska Valley, in 1934, was still largely unsettled. Between 1915 and the mid 1930s there had been over 500 entries for homesteads. Many of the claims were never proved up and had to be relinquished. In 1934 there were only 117 homesteaders still in the valley and about 700 total population. The town of Matanuska had 50 residents; Wasilla had 100; Knik had 2 white families and 10 native families; and the Palmer siding had 5 residents, three bachelors and one married couple. Land occupied by homesteaders in 1934 equalled approximately 23,000 acres (of which 600-800 were cleared), out of a total of over 250,000 acres in the valley. This small number of homesteads grew very little surplus produce for sale and almost all Alaska foodstuffs were shipped by boat from Seattle, Washington.

Agricultural Potential and Colony Settlement

Soils within the valley reflect the former presence of glaciers. They are made up of glacial till, which include sand, gravel, and silt with sandy loams predominating. The depth and grade of the soils vary according to geographic location. At the eastern end of the valley, between Matanuska and Susitna Rivers, is an alluvial plain consisting largely of silty and fine sandy sediments underlaid by thick deposits of gravel and stones. Large amounts of windblown material are constantly being deposited along the Matanuska and Knik Rivers, in some places it is as much as 10 feet thick, however, west of the two rivers, the mantle decreases rapidly, thinning out to 30 inches on down to 10 inches at Wasilla. West of Wasilla, in the Susitna floodplain, the loess mantle is thicker and consists mostly of poorly drained glacial outwash plains with muskegs, kettles, lakes, and small streams, however, it also embraces well-drained but shallow loess over gravely kames, eskers, and rolling to steep moraines.

Most of the Valleys best farmlands lie adjacent to and west of the Matanuska River. Much of the remaining areas are too poor for farming; the low areas are considered too wet to be tillable. Along the periphery of the valley, up the terraces and rolling hills extending north-northeast into the foothills well-drained sand and gravels predominate, with a silty coverage at varying depths. Although some farming is practiced, most of the area is considered too steep and rough for agriculture. The well-drained rolling hills are best suited for crops requiring shallow tillage such as oat and barley. At the extreme southern portion of the valley, south and west of the Old town of Matanuska, lie, what are called the "Duck Flats" which are composed of poorly drained soils that cover the tidal silts and clays. The area was known historically as the "Hay Flats" however, after a major earthquake in 1964 it dropped four feet and is now rendered useless for any kind of agriculture.

It is not surprising that a "New Deal" Government Community was built in Alaska to help farmers from depressed areas relocate and help populate the valley. The Experimental farm had proven that some produce, especially root crops, and plants in the cabbage family, could be grown without too much effort in the valley. Considering the climate to be comparable to that of the Upper Great Lakes, farmers from those northern areas were selected. Not only is the climate similar but the soils in the northern regions of the Great Lakes consist of glacial loess.

The Colony Project chose the eastern half of the valley for the relocation of depression stricken farmers from the Upper Great Lakes States. Palmer was created for its proximity to Anchorage, a major city, situated 37 miles to the southwest. Palmer's climate and soils were considered similar to the Upper Great Lakes. The Colony Center was built a little west of the Matanuska River, in the heart of the Valley's better farmlands. The valley was divided into 40 and 80 acre tracts. The 40 acre tracts were located on comparatively good soils, close to the Matanuska River, whereas, most of the 80 acre tracts were located a couple of miles west of the Matanuska River on the Upper terraces, where the top soils begin to thin out, and in lower swampy regions adjacent to, and encompassing several of the lakes which are numerous throughout the valley (refer to map of soils and corresponding Colony tracts; see attachment 3). After a trying start agriculture took hold in the valley. By the 1950s Dairy farming had become one of the chief agricultural enterprises, however, vegetable farming, on a commercial scale also gained importance.

Road Construction and Government in the Valley

With the colonists arrival in 1935, the town of Palmer grew; the Matanuska Valley Farmers Co-op Association was organized in 1936 to help iron out marketing problems. By 1937 a school and hospital were built for the new community. Private businesses started to build a commercial center across from the new Palmer Colony center on the opposite side of the railroad tracks. Soon after the Colonists arrived work was undertaken to expand the network of roads throughout the valley. A highway between the towns of Anchorage and Palmer was finally completed in 1936, after bridging the last hurdle, the Knik River. Colonists congregated at the bridge for the grand opening of their major artery to Anchorage.

Invasion by the Japanese, During World War II, of the Aleutian Islands, (the unprotected, northernmost outposts of the United States), caused another construction boom to occur. Reacting to their presence, the United States built Army bases in Fairbanks and Anchorage. Concerned over the vulnerability of shipping goods and equipment by sea, the army decided a hookup by road to the lower 48 was tantamount.

Highway construction started immediately. An emergency road, was drawn connecting Alaska to the lower 48 via Canada, with the Army Corps of Engineers in charge of the construction. It was called the ALCAN and connected with the Richardson Highway (Valdez-Fairbanks highway) at Tok, and was designated strictly for military use. Construction of the Glenn Highway, in 1941, coincided with the building of the ALCAN. A

million dollars from the War Department was given to the Alaska Road Commission for a thoroughfare connecting Anchorage with the ALCAN at Tok. Replacing the old packhorse trail up the Matanuska, the road was built 20 feet wide. Work was started, June 1941 from Palmer and Glennallen. A base camp and powder house was constructed at Sutton in the Matanuska Coal mining region. As military personnel came streaming in from the lower 48, many colonists (those not in military service) left their farms for the more lucrative jobs on the bases, and for the highway construction. To meet the new energy demands, an idled government mine was reopened at Eska. Creating more employment than could be filled, a military contingency was sent to cover the void.

Living in "Wanigans" 600 men worked in shifts round the clock during peak construction of the Glenn highway. Following the edges of the Matanuska valley they dynamited and jackhammered their way through dense mountain rock. Occasionally men were lowered over the sides in slings where they slowly carved the rock away with jackhammers. Construction on footings or spurs for the bridges was carried out during the winter, while the streams were both frozen and low. Because of the danger of sabotage, army guards were posted on all bridges as far as Chickaloon (past Chickaloon the country was considered wild).
Crushed granite and gravel with a coal fill was used for the roadbed. This proved very slippery when wet and extremely dusty and dirty when dry. Completed in 1945, the road was narrow, bumpy and unbelievably rough. Once the road was completed it provided incentives for businesses to develop along the highway. By 1953 the road was improved and paved from Anchorage to Glennallen.

From 1946 until 1971 the Glenn Highway served as the main traffic route to Fairbanks from Anchorage. With the completion of the Parks Highway in 1971 a more direct route to Fairbanks was realized, which also opened up some of the railroad towns such as Houston, Talkeetna, and the coal mining town of Healy.

In the mid-1970s another boom brought prosperity to the valley, large oil reserves were discovered in the Arctic. Once again the need for transportation caused another flurry of construction not only for roadways, but also for the building of an oil pipeline which was to traverse the wilderness of Alaska from Prudhoe Bay, in the Arctic, to the port of Valdez, situated in south central Alaska. From the port the oil was to be shipped to the Lower 48. With the discovery of oil the Matanuska-Susitna Valley population exploded peaking in 1987 with a population of over 38,000. Oil prices bottomed out, soon thereafter causing a grand exodus.

The Matanuska valley, today is still considered the top agricultural region of Alaska, however, many of the Colony tracts have given way to fashionable subdivisions. With 47% of the working population commuting to Anchorage, the valley has become a bedroom community for its big City Neighbor. As the valley tries to diversify its economy, tourism, mining, and small industry are becoming its new economic base.

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

In 1986 the Cultural Resources Division made an overall inventory of known historic sites in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. It was found that the Colony farms were being impacted from an increase in subdivision activity owing to the influx of population generated by the oil boom.

The local community became concerned about the potential loss of some of the central buildings that had serviced the 1935 colonists. The colonists were part of a "New Deal" rural rehabilitation project that transferred over 200 families from the Great Lakes states to the Matanuska valley, where a complete town and outlying farmsteads were built to encourage settlement in Alaska. The idea was to defray the costs of the welfare rolls, encourage settlement, and create self sufficiency on the part of the farmers.

The old Colony Central School had been slated for destruction but was saved by the local government. The Borough rehabilitated the building and claimed it for the Borough government seat. However, the colonist's Matanuska Maid buildings formerly associated with the valley dairy production, were in jeopardy of destruction.

A group of Palmer townspeople rallied and became involved with the preservation of the community. They voted for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to become a Certified Local Government, thereby enabling it to be a recipient of federal preservation grants.

In 1987 the Cultural Resources Division of the Borough received a Federal grant, through the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO), to evaluate the Historic sites in Palmer, Alaska. Several Historic contexts were identified namely; homesteading, mining, trapping, rail transportation, farming and the Government Colony venture. This helped to focus the research into workable components.

A document was written outlining and defining the major themes and chronological developments of the valley in a brief overview.

Structures already on the National Register of Historic Places were notated and placed in their corresponding contexts. Both the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) listings and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's (MSB) listings of historic sites were researched and compiled. Other previous research reports and documentations concerning the history of the area were studied before field surveys were conducted.

Upon completion of a field survey an inventory of historic buildings in the Palmer area was drawn up. Preliminary descriptions of the structures were made, five of which dated prior to the Colonists arrival in 1935. The Colony central complex structures were described and a few of the farms close to the downtown Palmer area were also inventoried and classified. The 1988 report ended by recommending that the Colony central structures and staff houses in Palmer, be nominated as a historic district to the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1989 The Borough Cultural Resources Division received a Federal grant to prepare a Multiple Property Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for the 1935 Colony structures. Further research was conducted into the work of David Williams, the chief planner and architect involved with the Colony project. Also additional research into the colony context was performed resulting in an in depth study.

Another field survey was conducted taking in all the remaining colony structures, specifically the outlying farms. Once the survey was completed, a process of elimination took place with the staff presenting and documenting the best examples of colony structures extant today. The staff also included both typical structures built in accordance to David Williams specifications, and aberrant or atypical structures, built by the Colonists themselves.

Within the Multiple Property Nomination the staff recommended that a Historic District be nominated to the National register which would include Central Structures and staff houses.

It is hoped that in the future the Cultural Resources Division of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough may research and include the mining, homesteading, and farming contexts as well as the development of the railroads, roads and trails, which took place during the early settlement of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, prior to the Colonists arrival.

At this time it was deemed important to preserve and protect the 1935 colony structures, since they are subject to being impacted by development.

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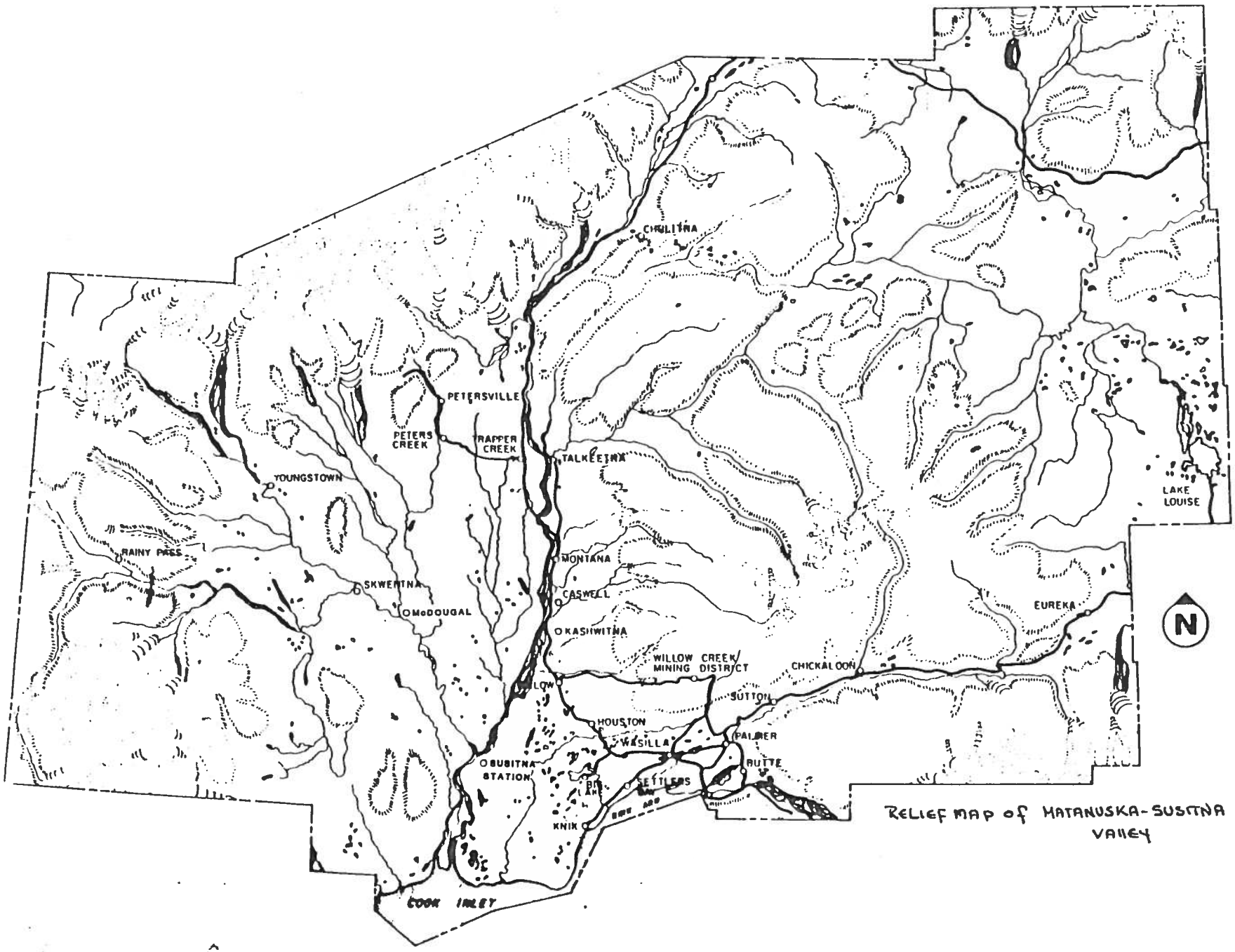
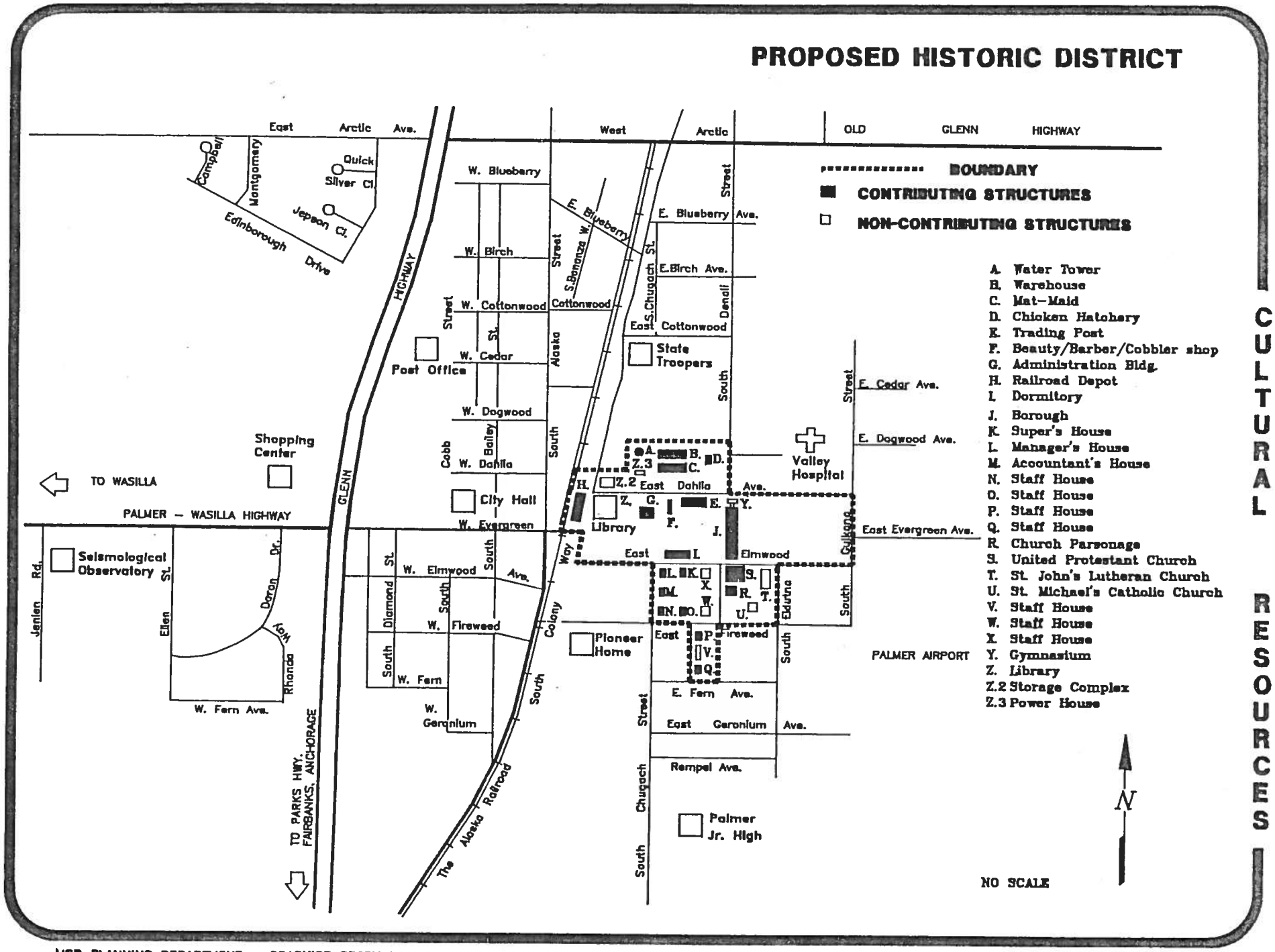
THE SETTLEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Attachment 4



RELIEF MAP of MATANUSKA-SUSITNA VALLEY

NO SCALE



MSB PLANNING DEPARTMENT – GRAPHICS SECTION

SEPTEMBER 1990

CULTURAL RESOURCES

HISTORIC
MATANUSKA - SUSITNA PRESERVATION COMMISSION
~~HISTORIC SITES ADVISORY COMMITTEE~~
VOTING RECORD FOR NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATIONS

DATE: 9/28/90

It is moved that Matanuska Colony Multiple Property Nomination. (does)/(~~does not~~) qualify for the National Register of Historic Places under one or more of the following criteria (36 CFR 60.6):

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION. The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of State and local importance that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and;

A. X 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. X 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.

*(Certain properties not eligible under these criteria may qualify through certain exceptions.)

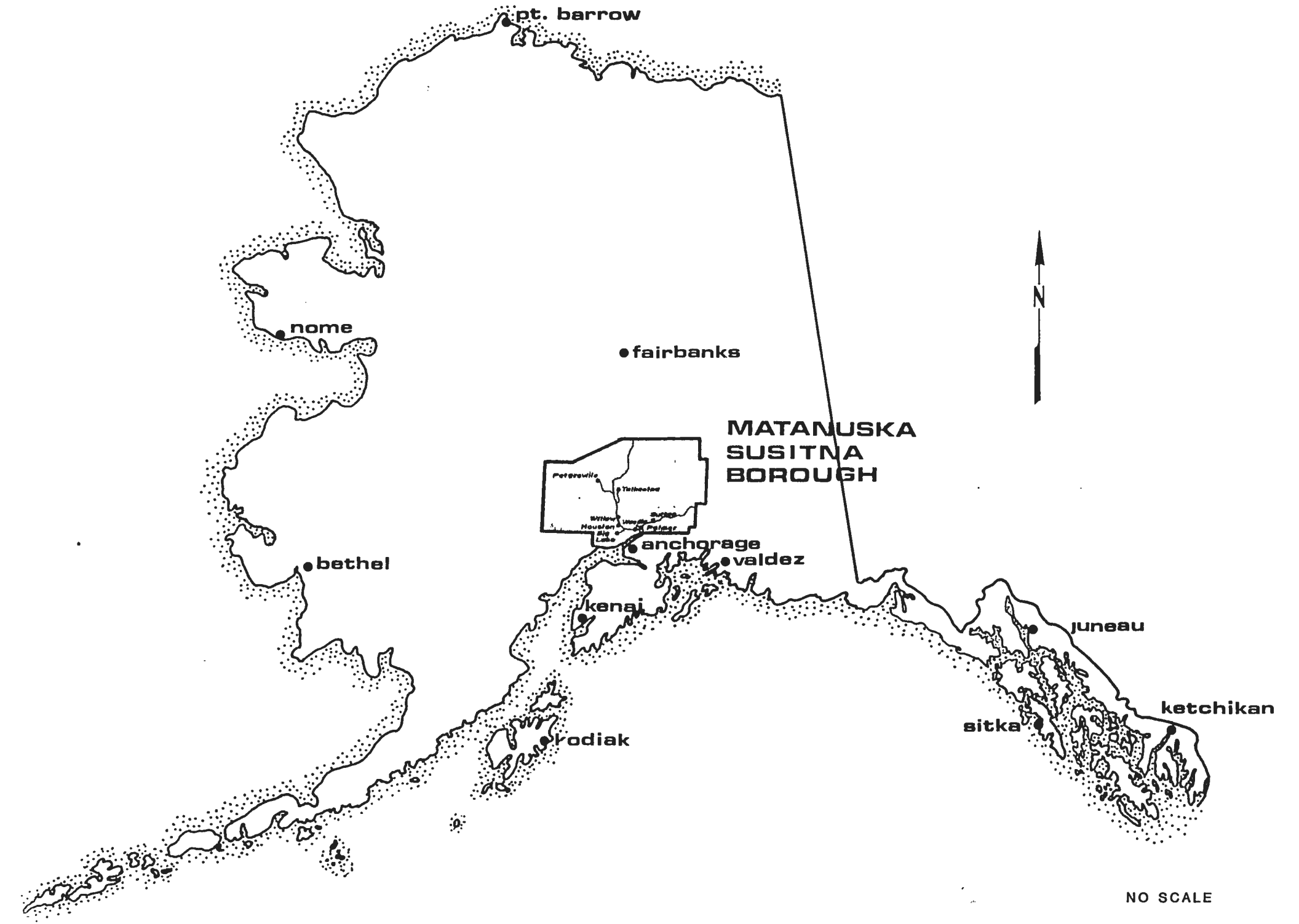
Level of significance: National_____/State_____/Local_____

Moved by: Kimberly Finkle Seconded by: Lee Goodman

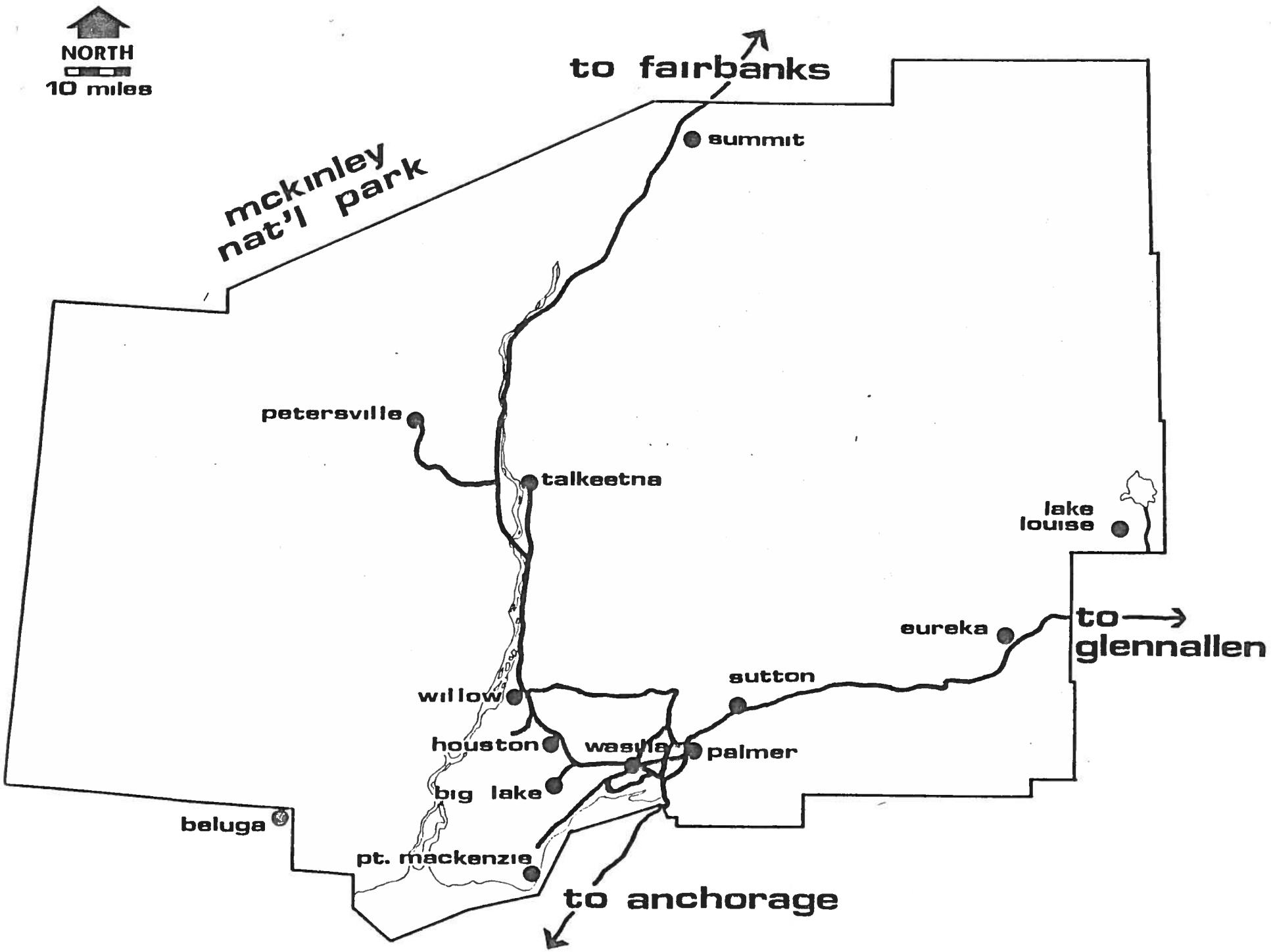
Vote on Motion:

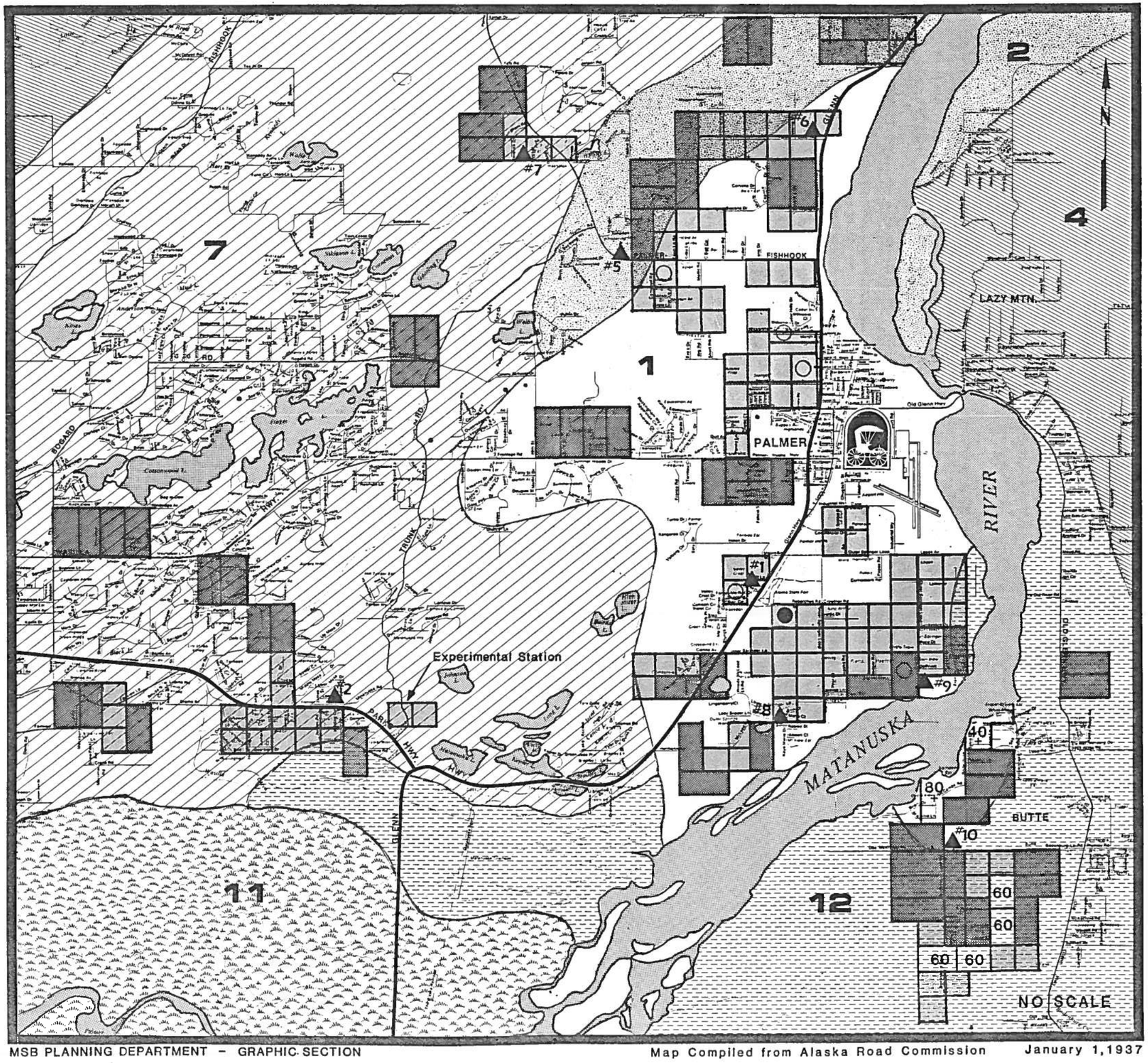
IN FAVOR	OPPOSED	ABSTAIN	RESULT
Kimberly M Finkle			PASSED 5
Lee Goodman			REJECTED 0
[illegible signature]			TABLED –
Dorothy Ager			
Robert L. Tucker			

THE SETTLEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Attachment 1



THE SETTLEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH Attachment 2





MSB PLANNING DEPARTMENT - GRAPHIC SECTION

Map Compiled from Alaska Road Commission January 1,1937

COLONY TRACTS WITHIN THE GENERAL SOIL TYPES

1 Bodenburg association: Gray,well-drained, silty or very fine sandy upland soils that are deep over sand and gravel.

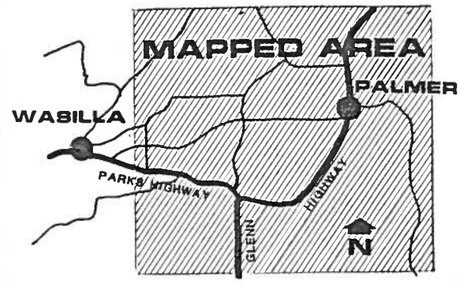
2 Doone-Knik association: Brown to grayish-brown,well-drained ,silty upland soils that are deep to shallow over sand and gravel.

4 Homestead-Knik association: Brown, to grayish-brown,well-drained,silty upland soils that are shallow over gravel and sand.

7 Knik-Coal Creek association: Grayish-brown, welldrained, silty upland soils that are shallow over sand and gravel; and dark-gray,poorly drained soils in depressions.

11 Tidal Marsh-Clunie Association: Gray-poorly drained soils in sediments of tidal plains; and very poorly drained peat soils that are shallow or moderately deep over tidal silt and clay.

12 Susitna-Niklason association: Dark-gray, well-drained, silty or fine sandy soils that are shallow or moderately deep over coarser sediments on alluvial plains.



Historical District

40 acre parcel

80 acre parcel

▲ Tent camps

● Historical Sites NHR

○ Proposed Historical Sites NHR