

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1935

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Rev. Bert J. Bingle/Leo B. Jacobs

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The United Protestant Church possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling. It is associated with an event--the establishment of the Matanuska Agricultural Colony--which made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of Alaskan and national history. Because of its unique qualities as a religious complex, it merits consideration. But association with the government-inspired socio-economic experiments during the early year's of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal" adds a dimension of special significance. Better than any other existing set of structures, this facility most poignantly personifies the character of the Matanuska Colony.

History of the Colony

Although the hope for subsistence agriculture in Alaska was initiated (as a necessity) by the Russians; and espoused by a handful of scientists, economists and agronomists for more than half a century after purchase, viable activity did not occur until 1934. It took a world-wide depression to spark the flame. The idea of extensive colonization of the Nation's "last frontier", providing subsistence homesteads for thousands of depression-ridden U.S. families, surfaced early in FDR's first term. It germinated speedily following a 1934 summer visit to Alaska by the President's confidant, Jacob Baker, Deputy Director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Baker reported to Washington that the Tanana and Matanuska Valleys and Kenai Peninsula, alone, could provide for thousands of families, relieve some of the Nation's overwhelming relief problems, and would greatly stimulate development of Alaska. Beset by a myriad of priorities and problems, however, the decision was made to initiate a scaled-down program. On February 4, 1935, by Executive Order 6957, the President closed to entry, 11 townships (more than 240,000 acres) in the Matanuska Valley. Soon a tent camp for advance surveyors and engineers was built adjoining the lonely Alaska Railroad spur station at Palmer. By April the survey to select the best 40 acre (and some 80) homesite farm tracts was underway; and articles of incorporation for the non-profit Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation were filed at the Territorial Capitol, Juneau. Concurrently, relief agencies were screening hundreds of farm families in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Logistical operations were also marshalling on the Pacific Coast. (Miller: 1975)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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United Protestant Church (AHRS SITE NO. ANC-248)

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1 of 3

"On 23 April 1935 the North Star, chartered by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration from the Department of the Interior, sailed from San Francisco for Seward, Alaska, with the administrative staff and several hundred construction workers for the FERA's colonization project in the Matanuska Valley. On May 1 the army transport St. Mihiel sailed with the first colonists, and in the following weeks the two vessels shuttled between Alaska and San Francisco and Seattle with supplies, construction equipment, additional laborers, and a total of 202 colonists and their families. The Anchorage Daily Times, which for nearly a year had been reporting first the rumors and then the details of the colonization plan, found prose too thin to mark the arrival of the colonists and called on Whittier:

I hear the tread of pioneers,
Of thousands yet to be,
The first low wash of waves
Where soon shall roll a human sea.
The elements of empire here
Are plastic yet and warm,
The chaos of a mighty world
Is rounding into form.

The Daily Times spoke for those Alaskans who believed that at last the settlement and development of the territory, long delayed by federal neglect and misinformed popular ideas about the region, were about to begin. The new federal interest in Alaska, the colony itself, and the accompanying publicity would end stagnation, and the small white population, much of it a changing, drifting group of occasional residents, would be enlarged by those attracted by the space to be filled, the land to be taken, and the resources waiting for use. Decades late, Alaska would (finally) experience the kind of frontier growth that had populated the western states." (Miller: 1975: 1)

Church Role in the Colony

The Presbyterian Church, preeminent in pioneering Alaskan missions since the 1870's, began planning for the spiritual needs of the Colony from its inception. When actual construction began, the church immediately transferred the seasoned Alaskan minister, Rev. Bert J. Bingle, from Cordova to Palmer. In the words of the present pastor of the United Protestant Church, the Rev. Henry P. Guinotte:



A-83629, MARCH 27, 1937, 16 COMP. GEN. 887

LEASES - RENT - QUARTERS IN ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION OWNED BUILDING THE GENERAL RULE THAT PAYMENT OF RENTAL BY ONE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY FOR PREMISES UNDER THE CONTROL OF ANOTHER SUCH DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY IS UNAUTHORIZED, IS NOT FOR APPLICATION TO QUARTERS OCCUPIED AS A POST OFFICE IN A BUILDING ERECTED AND OWNED BY THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION, THE CORPORATION HAVING BEEN ORGANIZED UNDER THE TERRITORIAL LAWS OF ALASKA, BEING A SEPARATE CORPORATE ENTITY, AND ONLY PARTIALLY UNDER THE SUPERVISION OR CONTROL OF FEDERAL OFFICIALS.

ACTING COMPTROLLER GENERAL ELLIOTT TO THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, MARCH 27, 1937:

REFERENCE IS MADE TO A LETTER DATED MARCH 4, 1937, Q B 79, AND PRIOR COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE FOURTH ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL, REQUESTING DECISION AS TO WHETHER RENT MAY BE PAID FOR QUARTERS OCCUPIED BY THE POST OFFICE AT PALMER, ALASKA, IN A BUILDING ERECTED AND OWNED BY THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION, THE QUESTION INVOLVED BEING WHETHER THE SAID ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION IS A FEDERAL GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY WITHIN THE PRINCIPLES OF DECISIONS HOLDING THAT PAYMENT OF RENTAL BY ONE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY FOR PREMISES UNDER THE CONTROL OF ANOTHER SUCH DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY IS UNAUTHORIZED.

THERE WAS SUBMITTED WITH THE REQUEST FOR DECISION A COPY OF A REPORT DATED JUNE 2, 1936, FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR, WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION, CONCERNING THE MATTER, AS FOLLOWS:

YOUR LETTER OF MAY 26, RELATIVE TO THE BUILDING OCCUPIED BY THE POST OFFICE AT PALMER, ALASKA, IS HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGED, AND IN CONNECTION THEREWITH WE WOULD ADVISE THAT THE BUILDING SO OCCUPIED IS THE PROPERTY OF THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION.

THIS CORPORATION WAS ORGANIZED UNDER TERRITORIAL LAWS AND CANNOT BE CONSTRUED AS BEING A FEDERAL AGENCY.

THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION GRANTED FUNDS TO THE TERRITORY FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING WORK FOR RELIEF CASES IN THE SAME MANNER THAT MONIES WERE GRANTED TO THE VARIOUS STATES UNDER THE EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION, AND IT IS OUR OPINION THAT IN VIEW THEREOF SUCH BUILDINGS AS WERE CONSTRUCTED DO NOT REVERT TO THE GOVERNMENT BUT RATHER ARE THE PROPERTIES OF THE AGENCY FOR WHICH THEY WERE CONSTRUCTED.

CONCERNING THE STATUS OF THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION AND ITS FUNDS, THERE HAS NOW BEEN RECEIVED A REPORT (A-80541) DATED MARCH 12, 1937, FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION, IN PART AS FOLLOWS:

AS TO THE IDENTITY OR STATUS OF THE FUNDS GRANTED TO THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION FOR OPERATION FROM AND AFTER FEBRUARY 15, 1936, ATTENTION IS RESPECTFULLY DIRECTED TO THE STATEMENT IN LETTER OF SEPTEMBER 9, 1936, ADDRESSED TO THE CHIEF OF THE AUDIT DIVISION, TO THE EFFECT THAT "SUBSEQUENT TO FEBRUARY 15, ALL FUNDS FOR USE BY THE MATANUSKA VALLEY COLONIZATION PROJECT WERE GRANTED DIRECT TO THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION.'

DIRECT GRANTS TO THE CORPORATION WERE MADE PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATOR BY THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ACT OF 1933, PUBLIC 15, 73RD CONGRESS, AS SUBSEQUENTLY AMENDED BY THE ACT OF FEBRUARY 15, 1934 PUBLIC 93, 73RD CONGRESS, WHICH PROVIDED, IN PERTINENT PART, THAT "NOTHING CONTAINED IN THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ACT OF 1933 SHALL BE CONSTRUED AS PRECLUDING THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATOR FROM MAKING GRANTS FOR RELIEF WITHIN A STATE DIRECTLY TO SUCH PUBLIC AGENCY AS HE MAY DESIGNATE.' SECTION 7 OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ACT OF 1933 PROVIDED THAT THE TERM "STATE," AS USED IN THE PROVISIONS OF THE ACT, INCLUDES ALASKA.

IN VIEW OF THE DECISION RENDERED BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL UNDER DATE OF JANUARY 2, 1935, FILE A-56783, WITH RESPECT TO THE STATUS OF FUNDS GRANTED TO STATES BY THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATOR, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT MONEYS GRANTED DIRECT TO THE PUBLIC AGENCY, PURSUANT TO THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ACT OF 1933, ARE NOT FOR CLASSIFICATION AS FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER THE CONTROL OF AN AGENCY OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

AS TO THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE CORPORATION'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS CONSISTS CHIEFLY OF OFFICERS OF THE GOVERNMENT, THUS MAKING THE CORPORATION A GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY, IT IS DESIRED TO CORRECT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE BOARD CONSISTS CHIEFLY OF OFFICERS OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION CONSISTS OF NINE PERSONS, ONLY THREE OF WHOM ARE EMPLOYED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. THERE IS GIVEN BELOW A LIST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

CHART

GOVERNOR JOHN W. TROY ----- JUNEAU.

DR. ERNEST GRUENING ----- WASHINGTON, D.C.

COL. OTTO F. OHLSON ----- ANCHORAGE.

R. L. SHEELY ----- PALMER.

P. A. HESS ----- FAIRBANKS.

A. H. MCDONALD ----- ANCHORAGE.

E. R. TARWATER ----- ANCHORAGE.

P. C. MCMULLEN ----- SEWARD.

WILLIAM BOUWENS ----- PALMER.

OF THE ABOVE, ONLY GOVERNOR TROY, DR. GRUENING, AND COL. OHLSON ARE EMPLOYEES OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THEY DO NOT FUNCTION AS OFFICERS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ON THE BOARD OF THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION, BUT SERVE IN A VALUABLE ADVISORY CAPACITY, AS DO OTHER FEDERAL EMPLOYEES IN THE STATES IN CONJUNCTION WITH EMPLOYEES OF THE STATE RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATIONS.

ON THE BASIS OF THE RECORD, AS SUPPLEMENTED BY THE INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION IS A PUBLIC AGENCY AS DISTINGUISHED FROM A GOVERNMENT AGENCY AND THAT THE MONEYS GRANTED DIRECTLY TO THE CORPORATION AS A PUBLIC AGENCY ARE NOT FOR CLASSIFICATION AS FEDERAL FUNDS.

IN VIEW OF THESE REPORTED CIRCUMSTANCES FROM WHICH IT APPEARS THAT THE ALASKA RURAL REHABILITATION CORPORATION WAS ORGANIZED UNDER THE TERRITORIAL LAWS OF ALASKA, IS ONLY PARTIALLY UNDER THE SUPERVISION OR CONTROL OF FEDERAL OFFICIALS AND HAS THE STATUS OF A SEPARATE CORPORATE ENTITY, AT LEAST WITH RESPECT TO THE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTY UNDER ITS CONTROL, I HAVE TO ADVISE THAT THE STATUS OF THE CORPORATION IS NOT SUCH AS TO PRECLUDE PAYMENT TO IT BY THE POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT OF REASONABLE RENTAL, OTHERWISE PROPER, FOR THE OCCUPANCY OF ITS PROPERTY FOR POST OFFICE PURPOSES.

INVENTORY OF THE
MARY NAN GAMBLE PAPERS, 1935-1945 (MS 94)
AND PHOTOGRAPHS (PCA 270)

concerning her work on the
Matanuska Valley Colonization Project
for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration

Alaska Historical Library
Division of State Libraries
P.O. Box G
Juneau, Alaska 99811

August 1986

Introduction and Scope Note

In 1934, Mrs. Mary Nan Gamble, an administrative assistant for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (F.E.R.A.), helped with the planning and criteria for selecting 200 farm families from the Midwest to participate in the Matanuska Colony project. The Matanuska Valley was selected for its favorable farming conditions and trade potential with Anchorage and the Alaska Railroad areas. Under the F.E.R.A. Act of 1933, the E.R.A. of each state could obtain grants for "rural rehabilitation relief" as a substitute for direct rural relief. Funding was provided to Midwest states and the Territory of Alaska for establishment of the agricultural colony near Palmer, Alaska. Before the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation - Corporation (A.R.R.C.) was incorporated, the first administrative agency was the California Emergency Relief Administration (C.E.R.A.). High costs faced by the colonists caused a larger debt loan than they were told to expect. Within four years, about sixty percent of the original colonists had left.

Mrs. Gamble was one of three people who accompanied the contingent to Alaska, lived with them in tents until the forest was cleared and roads and cabins built on their forty acre tracts. Upon her return to Washington D.C., Mrs. Gamble maintained case records and a project history for two more years. She later made other trips to Alaska for the government as a census official.

The papers and photographs of Mary Nan Gamble were donated by her daughter, Keith Ann Duncan, to the Alaska State Museum and were later transferred to the Library.

The papers (Ms 94) contain copies of official reports and memoranda on the colony development and problems. Conflicting orders from various agencies or boards connected with the colony caused difficulties for colonists and administrators. Mrs. Gamble also received personal letters from colony officials that describe their concerns

and activities. There are a few letters from colonists and copies of various publications or writings on the colony from newspapers throughout the country. The photograph collection (PCA 270) of 976 views includes the official album of the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation Matanuska Colonization Project, 1935. It is a pictorial record of the colonists, their travel to Alaska and the development of the colony, by photographer Willis T. Geisman.