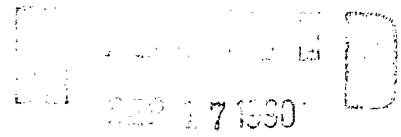


USDI/NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL
REGISTER

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1. Name of Property

=====

historic name: First Mission House

other name/site number: First Mission House and Place of Worship
First Moravian Mission
AHRS Site No. BTH-013

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number: 291 Third Avenue (Tract C)

not for publication: NA

city/town: Bethel

vicinity: NA

state: AK county: Bethel Division code: 050 zip code: 99559

=====

3. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. See continuation sheet.

Judith E. Bittner
Signature of certifying official

Sept 7, 1990
Date

Alaska
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register

other (explain):

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic:	<u>religion, education</u>	Sub:	<u>religious structure</u>
			<u>church residence</u>
			<u>church school</u>
Current :	<u>recreation and culture</u>	Sub:	<u>museum</u>

7. Description

Architectural Classification: other

Other Description: vernacular

Materials: foundation wood pilings
roof wood, shingle
walls wood, weatherboard

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

First Mission House is a one-and-a-half story, rectangular, wood frame building with a steeply pitched gable roof. Constructed between August and October 1885 on a bank overlooking the Kuskokwim River, it is the first permanent building constructed by the Moravian missionaries at the site they named Bethel. Although it has been necessary to relocate the building, its current location is still on the original Moravian Church land grant. The house and nine other buildings of the Moravian Mission complex are now situated in a line along Third Avenue in Bethel.

The building measures 38'6" by 16'8" and has an eave height of 15'6". It is perpendicularly oriented. The roof overhang is 9" on the east and west sides, and 14" on the north and south sides of the building. Both the east and west walls have symmetrical fenestration with three evenly spaced six-light over six-light double hung windows. These windows are positioned high on the walls, just below the eaves. A single, fixed, six-light window is located in the peak of each gable end wall. The north gable window is placed horizontally with two rows of three lights across. The south gable window is placed vertically with three rows of two lights across. The single outside entry is located on the east side of the north wall. It is sheltered by an arctic entrance with a shed roof and has a westwardly-oriented door. The stairs to the upper floor are situated inside at the north end of the house. Interior floor to ceiling height is eight feet.

First Mission House rests on a foundation of wood pilings. The house was constructed from lumber and tools carried by ship from San Francisco to Bethel. Sills, joints, shingles, and rafters were cut from spruce and hemlock. The wall studs are sandwiched between rough redwood boards placed diagonally on a 45 degree angle. The two sheathing layers run in opposite directions. Felting paper covers both outside and inside sheathing. The

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : A, B

Areas of Significance: religion
exploration/settlement
education

Period(s) of Significance: 1885-1910

Significant Dates: 1885

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Torgersen, Hans (architect)
Kilbuck, John and
Weinland, William (builders)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
X See continuation sheet.

First Mission House in Bethel is associated with Moravian missionary activity in southwest Alaska. Constructed in 1885, it was the first permanent Moravian building in the Kuskokwim River area. First Mission House is the oldest historic building still standing at the site the Moravians selected for their first mission which they named Bethel. The town was the first permanent Euroamerican settlement along the lower Kuskokwim River, and today it is the area's largest community and regional center. The Moravians constructed the first Protestant churches, schools, and orphanages in the lower Kuskokwim drainage. They played a significant role in introducing Christianity and Euroamerican culture to the Yup'ik Eskimos of the area. Among their contributions, the Moravians developed a Yup'ik alphabet and grammar, printed Moravian literature in Yup'ik, and conducted missionary activities in the native language. First Mission House was the first permanent residence for staff at the mission, the first place of worship, and the first school house in Bethel. Relocation of the house was deemed necessary to place the structure in closer proximity to other mission buildings in 1910; to save the structure from destruction by erosion of the river bank in 1945; and to restore the building and reestablish its siting in line with other mission complex buildings in 1984.

9. Major Bibliographical References

X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

NA preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

- previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- X State historic preservation office
Other state agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than 1 acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
A 04 349620 6742940 B
C See continuation sheet. D

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

The nominated property is within U.S. Survey 3064, Church Reserve, Tract C, between Mission Lake and Third Street and the City of Bethel's Yuktarvik Museum and the Moravians' Bookstore.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the 40' x 20' area occupied by First Mission House.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: The Rev. Kurt H. Vitt, Th. M.
(with assistance from Carol Burkhart, Office of History & Archaeology, Alaska Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation)
Organization: The Alaska Moravian Church Date: January 22, 1990
Street & Number: P.O. Box 545 Telephone: (907) 543-2478
City or Town: Bethel State: AK ZIP: 99559

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National Park Service

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

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exterior walls are covered by weatherboard, and wallpaper lines the inside walls. The roof is covered with cedar shingles. Originally heated by a wood stove, over the years the house has been fitted with stovepipes at various locations. The restored building, however, has no chimney or stove pipe.

The First Mission House was designed by Hans Torgersen, one of the first five Moravian missionaries sent to Alaska in 1885. Torgersen, a skilled carpenter, drew rough sketches of the proposed building but died in a boating accident before construction actually began. The task of building the house fell to John Kilbuck and William Weinland, two ordained ministers with no prior construction experience. The exterior of the building was completed in October of 1885. Interior finish work continued during the winter and was completed the following year.

Alterations

The original door to the First Mission House was located on the east wall and led directly into the kitchen on the north end of the building. After the first winter, 1885/86, the doorway was relocated to the east side of the north wall and fit into an arctic entrance. In 1910 this door was closed, the arctic entrance removed, and the building was used as a workshop and industrial school room. At that time the main entrance was relocated to the south wall of the structure.

In 1985 the First Mission House was restored to its 1886-1910 appearance. The arctic entrance is again located on the east side of the north wall, providing direct access to the interior stairwell and the former kitchen. The roof has been reshingled with cedar shingles similar to the original wood shingles.

During restoration, the original weatherboard that remained useable was retained and placed on the north side and half of the east side of the building. All boards were refastened with square nails similar to those typically used during the last century. New cedar boards for the other outside walls had to be hand-machined in Bethel since the old design was no longer commercially available. The same was done for all window and door frames where the original wood had deteriorated. Double doors, added to the south side of the building after 1910 to accommodate the storage of

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large objects and pieces of equipment, were removed and the south wall returned to its original design.

The interior layout of the building originally included a kitchen and pantry at the north end of the house. The stairway and a partition running the width of the building separated the kitchen from a dining room. A temporary partition divided the remaining ground floor area into two bedrooms for the missionaries and their wives. The upstairs was used for storage. Later, the upper floor was divided into two small bedrooms to accommodate additional mission staff. During the twentieth century, the downstairs wall separating the two bedrooms was removed to create a large storage area. The original dining or sitting room, kitchen and pantry walls have not been altered over the years. During restoration false walls were erected to install electrical wiring and insulation. Although the building was originally heated by wood, heat is now ducted from the nearby Moravian Bookstore to avoid placement of a furnace in the building.

Relocations

The earliest mission structures at Bethel, including the First Mission House, were constructed on a tundra bank overlooking the Kuskokwim River. Later buildings constructed by the Moravians, such as missionary residences, store, school house, and church, were built closer to the river. In 1910, the First Mission House was moved nearer to the river bank, to be in line with the other buildings in the complex. During the following 35 years the house was used as a workshop and an industrial school room.

Over the years, erosion and flooding of the Kuskokwim River undermined the bank on which the Moravian mission complex was located. In 1939, some of the buildings were moved back from the bank. First Mission House was not moved until 1945, when additional erosion necessitated relocation of the remaining structures to the south end of Mission Lake where the other mission buildings had been relocated. First Mission House was placed on a temporary foundation of 50-gallon drums and used principally for storage until 1984 when it was moved to its present location and restored.

First Mission House is now located on Third Street, with nine other mission buildings and still within the boundaries of the original 1911 federal land

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land grant to the Moravian Church. It is oriented in a north-south direction similar to its original orientation. (See attached site plan.) First Mission House is located twenty feet east of the Moravian bookstore. The City of Bethel's Yuktarvik Museum is adjacent to the west of the structure. A wood boardwalk separates Yuktarvik Museum and First Mission House. The buildings are situated on the edge of a dirt parking lot. Between the buildings and the river are a large muskeg bog and lake.

Bethel has a long tradition of moved buildings. All the Moravian Mission buildings constructed prior to World War II have been moved at least once due to riverbank erosion. Relocation has not adversely affected the integrity of First Mission House. The structure's present location replicates its close proximity and earlier linear relationship to other mission buildings. The present site, similar to the original, has no vegetation around it. First Mission House is the oldest and best preserved structure from the early mission period (1885-1910) in Bethel.

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While a few Russian Orthodox priests and fur traders had visited the lower Kuskokwim River area prior to 1885, the Moravian missionaries were the first to settle permanently in the area. Sheldon Jackson, a Protestant minister who in 1884 was appointed General Agent for Education in Alaska, invited the Moravians to establish a mission in southwest Alaska. With a budget of \$50,000 for the establishment of schools throughout Alaska, Jackson approached various Protestant groups to open missions and schools in Alaska to accomplish his goals and stretch the inadequate funding.

In the summer of 1884 two Moravian representatives, J.A.H. Hartmann and William H. Weinland, visited southwest Alaska. They recommended that the first mission station be located at a site on the lower Kuskokwim River near Mumtrekhtagamiut, a small Yup'ik Eskimo village and trading post. In June 1885, five missionaries--John and Edith Kilbuck, William and Caroline Weinland, and Hans Torgersen--arrived at the proposed site which they named Bethel. They hastily built a temporary frame shelter. Hans Torgersen, a skilled carpenter, drew rough sketches for a more permanent building, but died in a boating accident before construction started. Kilbuck and Weinland, ordained ministers with no building experience, began work on First Mission House in August and the exterior was completed in October of 1885.

Moravian Church policy held that missionary work be conducted in Native languages. The missionaries immediately began to learn the local Yup'ik language and develop a Yup'ik alphabet and grammar. Subsequently, catechisms, hymns and liturgies, Passion Week manuals, Scripture passages, segments of the Old and New Testaments, the Gospels, an additional grammar and dictionary, and eventually the complete New Testament were translated and printed in Yup'ik. This work continued in spite of opposition from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and its predecessors, who adhered to a policy of heavy suppression of Native languages until 1960. The efforts of the Moravian missionaries to educate the Yup'ik in their language not only helped the missionaries accomplish their goals but also helped the Yup'ik preserve their language.

First Mission House served as the first permanent living quarters for the two missionary families who began the Bethel mission, as a place of worship, and for the first year as the school. In 1886, a separate school

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house was built as well as a log residence where the Kilbucks moved. The Weinlands continued to live in First Mission House until they left Bethel in 1887. First Mission House was then used for a few years as the mission school and continued to be a place of worship.

In the fall of 1889, a new log school house opened and First Mission House was again used as a residence for missionaries and students. In September 1901, it became the residence and office of the newly appointed superintendent of the Moravian Missions in Alaska, Reverend G. Adolph Stecker, and his wife.

From 1910, when the Moravian missionaries moved the house to be in line with other mission buildings closer to the river, until 1945, it was used as a workshop and an industrial school room. In 1945, after it was moved away from the encroaching river, the building was used principally for storage. In 1984, the Moravian Church moved First Mission House to its present location and placed it on pilings. Restoration of the structure to its 1886-1910 appearance began in 1985 and was completed in October. Since that time, First Mission House has served as the Alaska Moravian Church museum.

From 1885 until 1910, First Mission House was one of the most significant structures in the developing Moravian Mission. The Bethel mission was the first of three Moravian centers started in southwest Alaska. From these bases at Bethel, Carmel (near today's Nushagak), and Ogavik (upriver from Bethel), the Moravians opened chapels in eleven Yup'ik Eskimo villages and made regular visits to many other villages in the area as they attempted to minister to the peoples' spiritual needs. The Bethel station was the largest Moravian mission in Alaska and the headquarters for its southwest Alaska missionary activity. Along with being the first permanent building at Bethel, First Mission House is the oldest, best preserved building associated with the early period of Moravian missionary work in the Kuskokwim River drainage.

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Fienup-Riordan, Ann, editor. The Yup'ik Eskimos As Described in the Travel Journals and Ethnographic Accounts of John and Edith Kilbuck, who served with the Alaska Mission of the Moravian Church, 1885-1900. Limestone Press, Kingston, Ontario, 1988.

Henkelman, James W. and Kurt H. Vitt. Harmonious to Dwell: The History of the Alaskan Moravian Church, 1885-1985. Moravian Seminary and Archives, Bethel, Alaska, 1985.

Krauss, Michael. Alaska Native Languages: Past, Present, and Future. Alaska Native Language Center, Fairbanks, Alaska, 1980.

Oswalt, Wendell H. Historic Settlements Along the Kuskokwim River, Alaska. Alaska State Library Historical Monograph No. 7, Alaska Division of State Libraries and Museums, Department of Education, Juneau, Alaska, 1980.

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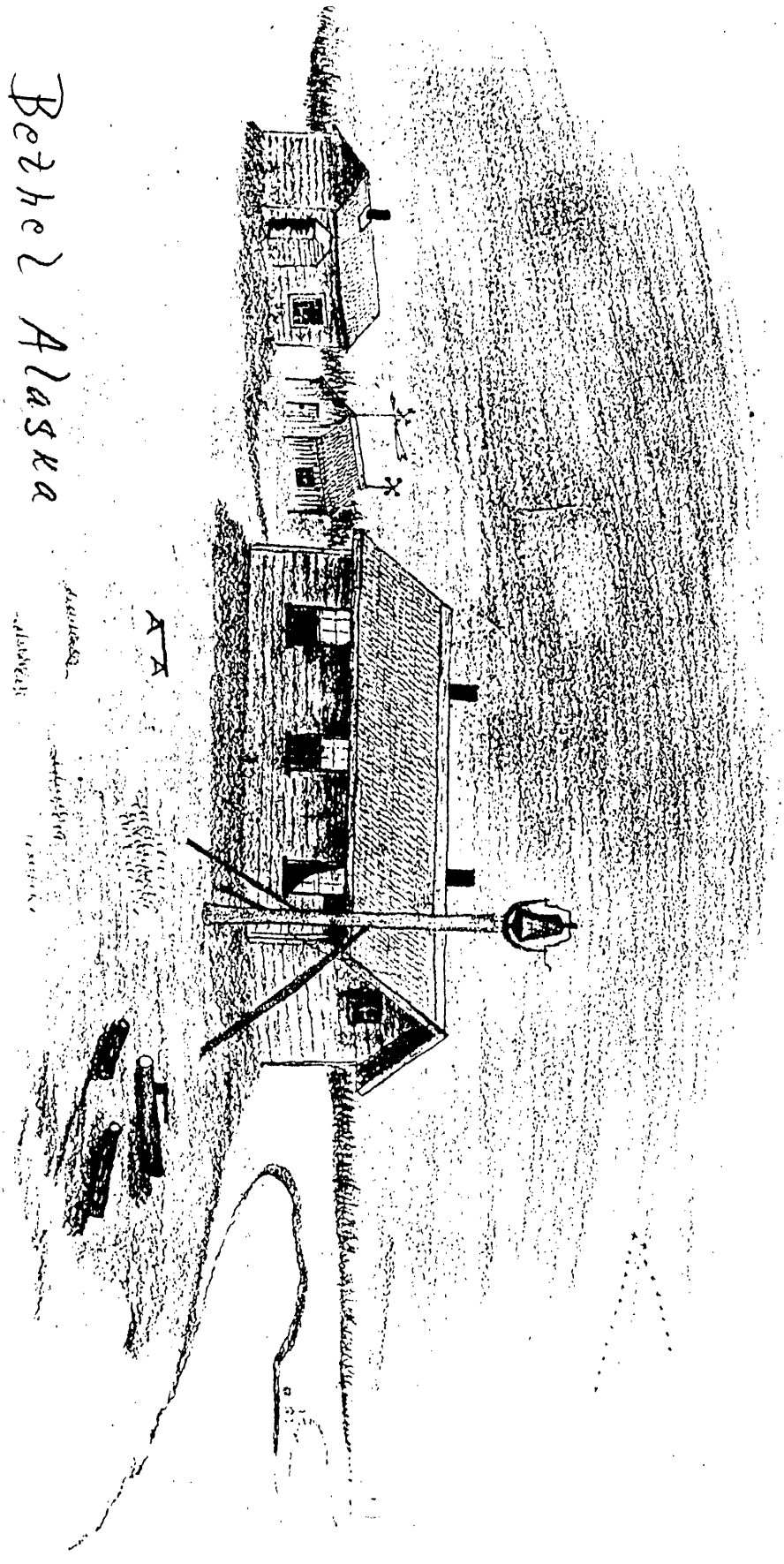
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number Photograph identification

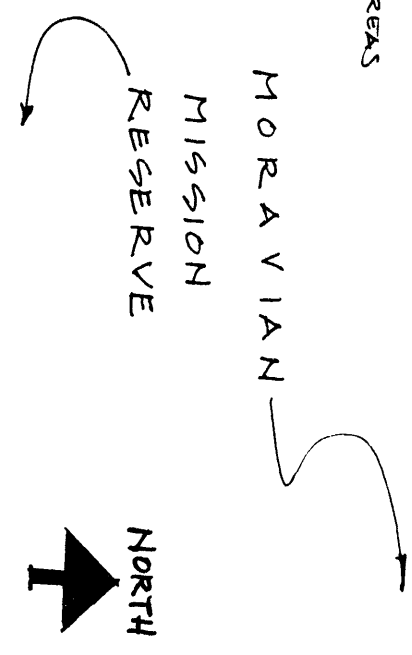
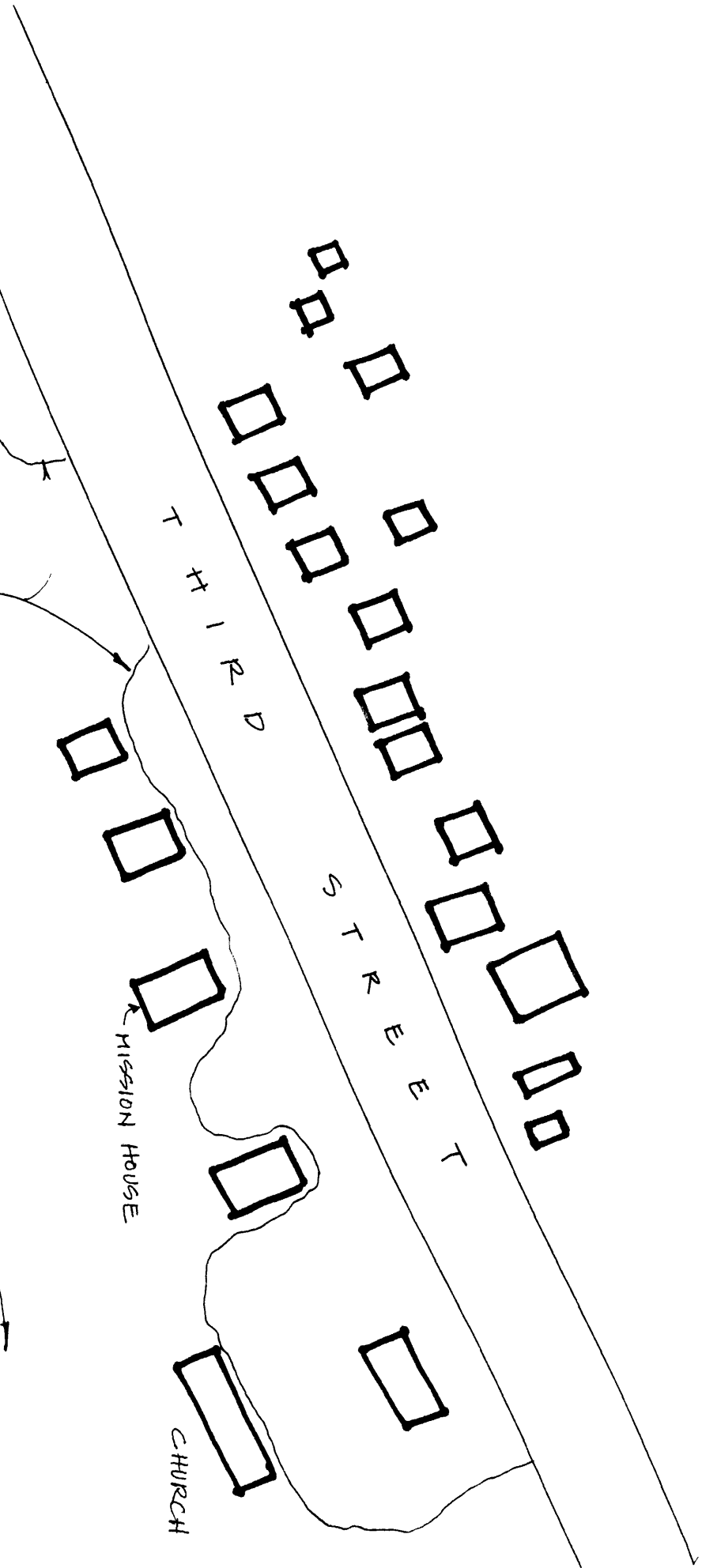
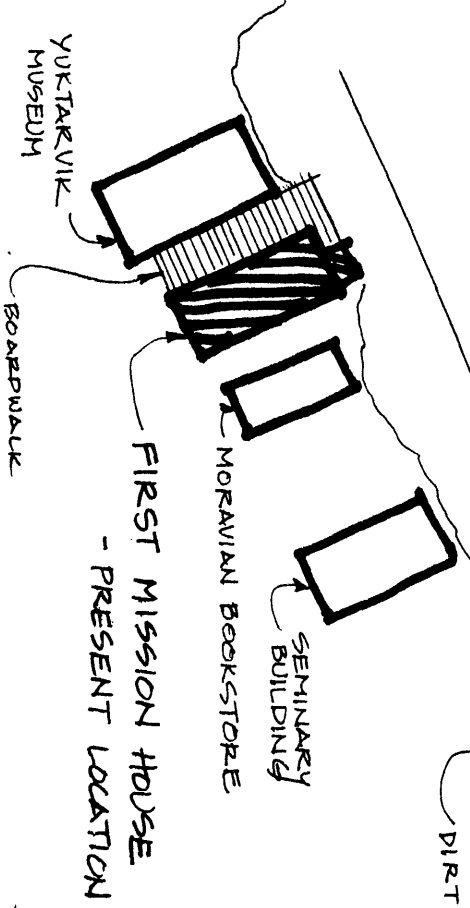
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1. First Mission House
AHR Site No. BTH-013
Bethel, Alaska
Donna L. Lane
August 1989
Office of History & Archaeology, Alaska Division of Parks & Outdoor
Recreation, P.O. Box 107001, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-7001
Looking southeast
2. First Mission House
AHR Site No. BTH-013
Bethel, Alaska
Donna L. Lane
August 1989
Office of History & Archaeology, Alaska Division of Parks & Outdoor
Recreation, P.O. Box 107001, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-7001
Looking southwest
3. First Mission House
AHR Site No. BTH-013
Bethel, Alaska
Donna L. Lane
August 1989
Office of History & Archaeology, Alaska Division of Parks & Outdoor
Recreation, P.O. Box 107001, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-7001
Looking northeast
4. First Mission House
AHR Site No. BTH-013
Bethel, Alaska
Unknown
May 1887
Moravian Archives, P.O. Box 2084, Bethel, Alaska 99559
Drawing from the southwest of First Hission House, log school, and
shed

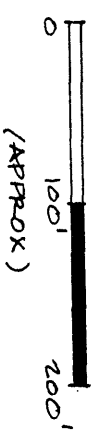
Bethel Alaska
May, 1897.



First Mission House
AHRs Site No. BTH-013
Bethel, Alaska
House, log school, and
shed from southwest
#4

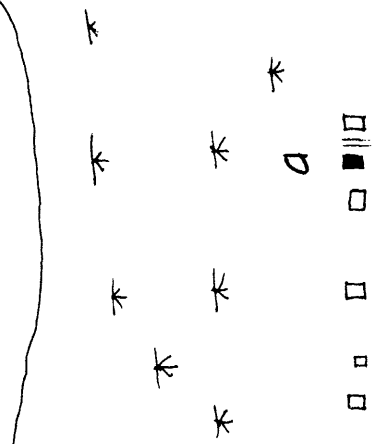
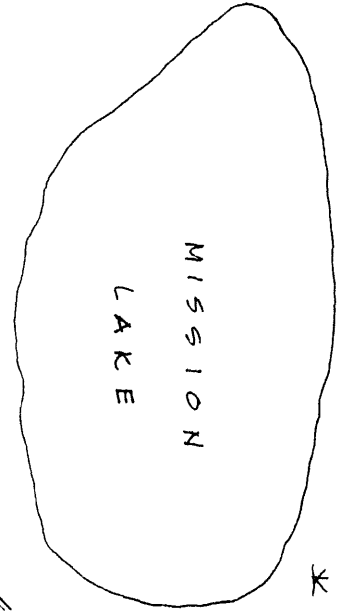


FIRST MISSION HOUSE
 AHR'S SITE NO. BTH-013

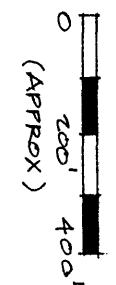
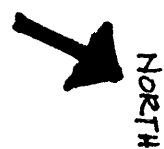


THIRD ORIGINAL MORAVIAN MISSION KENNEL STREET

RUNWAY



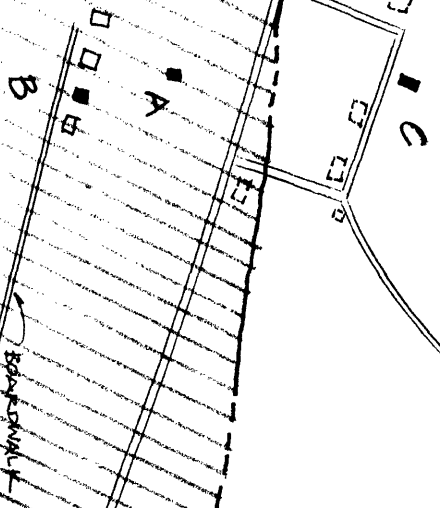
LOCATIONS OF FIRST MISSION HOUSE
A 1885-1910
B 1910-1945
C 1945-1984
D 1984-PRESENT



1986 RIVERBANK



CEMETERY



1912 RIVERBANK

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

FIRST MISSION HOUSE
AHR5 SITE 013
BTH-013