

PH0351458

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED FEB 2 1977  
DATE ENTERED AUG 3 1977

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

\*\* Tanana Mission (AHRS SITE NO. TAN-018)

AND/OR COMMON

Mission of Our Saviour, Episcopal Mission

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

*E of Tanana at*  
Junction of Yukon and Tanana Rivers

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Tanana

VICINITY OF

Alaska

STATE

Alaska

CODE

02

COUNTY

Yukon-Koyukuk Div. 290

CODE

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

**ACCESSIBLE**

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Episcopal Diocese of Alaska

STREET & NUMBER

1205 Denali Way

CITY, TOWN

Fairbanks

VICINITY OF

Alaska

99701

STATE

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

State of Alaska Recorders Office

STREET & NUMBER

604 Barnett

Room 161

CITY, TOWN

Fairbanks,

Alaska

99701

STATE

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS)

DATE

Nov. 11, 1976

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Alaska Division of Parks, 323 E. Fourth Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Anchorage

STATE

Alaska

99501

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Tanana Mission, constructed sometime between 1899 and 1905, served native people of the lower Tanana and middle Yukon rivers until it was abandoned during the early 1940's. The cemetery surrounding the church structure contains graves of natives and non-natives and continues to be used as a burial site. The four-gabled structure is similar in style to another Alaskan Episcopal church, St. Peter's-By-The-Sea, in Sitka. The Tanana Mission, however, is distinguished by its combination of log and frame structure, the careful application of the shingled exterior siding and roofing and the fine treatment of the extensive tongue-and-groove interior finishing.

The church structure with its high multi-gable roof measures approximately 52x48 feet (see attached figures). On the east side of the interior is a raised platform on which stood the altar. The altar was flanked on the south by an entrance and on the north by a room probably used for the storage of vestments. The north section served as a place to display the deceased during wakes and the balcony over this section was perhaps intended for a choir. A stairway to the balcony begins in the partitioned northwest corner of the structure. From the floor of this section is a crawl space leading to the cavity on the west which contained a wood-burning stove which served to heat the church. Entrances into the church were located in the southwest and southeast corners which faced the river. No additions or alterations to the church appear to have been made.

The landscape surrounding the church was originally cleared of trees and bushes. Today, a second growth of spruce and birch occurs as well as a wild grass vegetation cover. The initial location of the graveyard was to the east of the church and contains individual as well as family gravesites surrounded by wooden picketed fences, a traditional aspect of native graves in this area. The graveyard has since extended to the south and west of the church.

# 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 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1899 - 1945

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown at present

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Tanana Mission today is the abandoned church building and cemetery of the once extensive Episcopalian Mission of Our Saviour with its church, hospital, sawmill, cemetery, rectory, school located nearly three miles above the present village of Tanana. The significance of the Tanana Mission as an historic district is multi-faceted. First, it is important to the history of interior Alaska as a place where permanent native (Indian) community was established near the mission which located itself opposite the prehistoric trading center of many interior Athapaskan Indians - Nuchalawoyya. Second, the mission represents a place where native people learned and participated in the activities of a foreign culture especially its religious customs. It is also the burial site of the ancestors of many Tanana residents. Finally, the church of the mission represents a unique style of architecture in early 20th century Alaska. The adjacent graveyard, however, depicts traditional picketed fence construction around individual and family graves typical of many native cemeteries in interior Alaska.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TANANA MISSION

With the establishment of the Tanana Mission near the mouth of the Tanana River, the Episcopal church in Alaska created a center for missionary activity among Indians of the lower Tanana and middle Yukon rivers. Its history begins with the Church Missionary Society of England that established a mission in 1888 under the direction of Reverend T.H. Canham near the mouth of the Tozitna River, 11 miles below Tanana (Brooks 1973:475). The mission, called St. James' Mission, was situated near the trading post of Arthur Harper - Harper's Station - where native people from along the Yukon and Tanana rivers brought furs to exchange for non-native products such as firearms, ammunition, tea, flour and tobacco. In 1891, the mission was turned over to the Reverend J.L. Prevost of the Methodist Episcopal Church who remained in charge of the mission for the next fifteen years (Brooks 1973:475). Following his appointment, Reverend Prevost and

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- 1) The Alaskan Churchman  
1908-1947 Volumes 2 through 42.
- 2) Brooks, A.H.  
1973 Blazing Alaska's Trails.  
University of Alaska Press, College.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 1/2

UTM REFERENCES

A	0,5	545-075	7227-725	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

With the Tanana Mission church structure approximately at the center of the acreage, the four corners of the acreage are marked by extending diagonal lines from the four corners of the church structure. The south and east corners will occur on the bank of the Yukon River with the south corner near the mouth of a dry creek bed. The line from the east corner to the north corner should well encompass the eastern limit of the (cont'd)

## LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Elizabeth F. Andrews

ORGANIZATION

Cooperative Park Studies Unit

DATE

(907) 479-7050

STREET & NUMBER

University of Alaska

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

STATE

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Russell W. Cahill*

TITLE

SHPD - Alaska

DATE

1/28/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

*Wm. Stutz*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

8/3/77

ATTEST:

*Charles [Signature]*

DATE

2-29-73

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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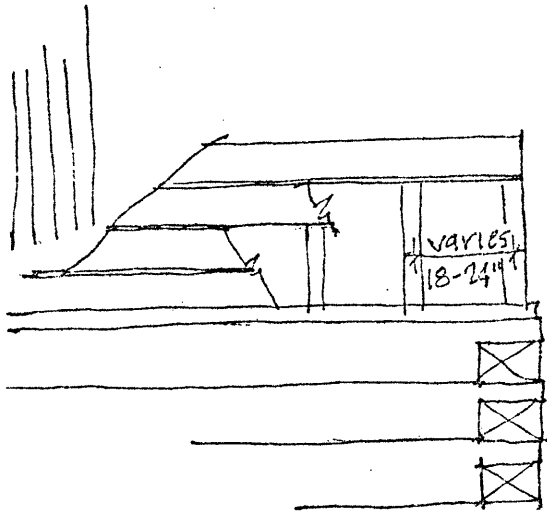
Tanana Mission, Alaska (AHRS Site No. TAN-018)

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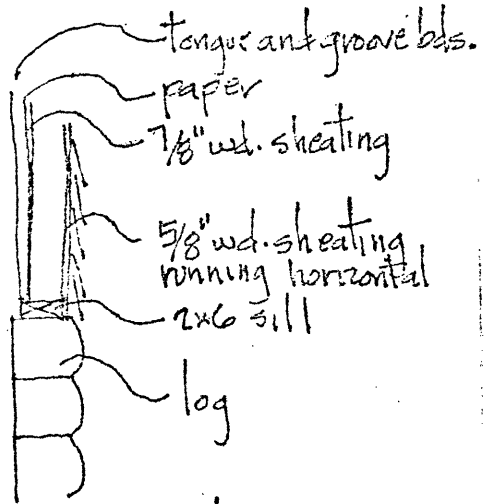
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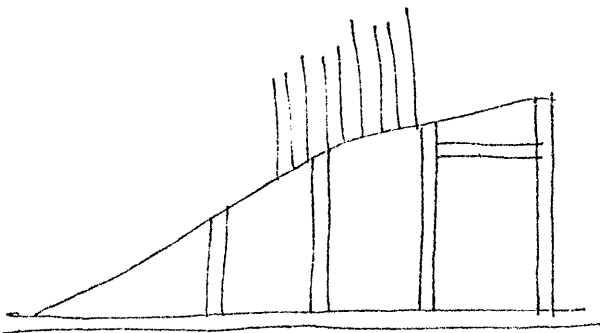


ELEVATION  
WALL TYPE 1

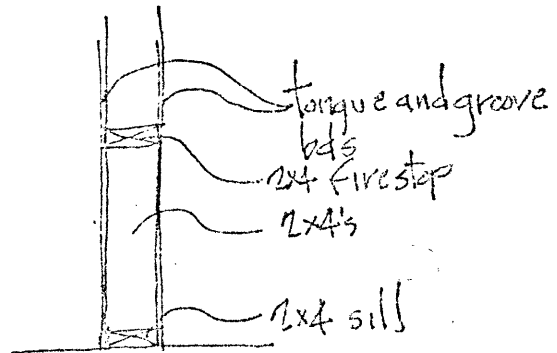


SECTION

all timber rough cut  
on all walls investigated



ELEVATION  
WALL TYPE 2



SECTION

drawing by Anthony S. Donald  
10/76

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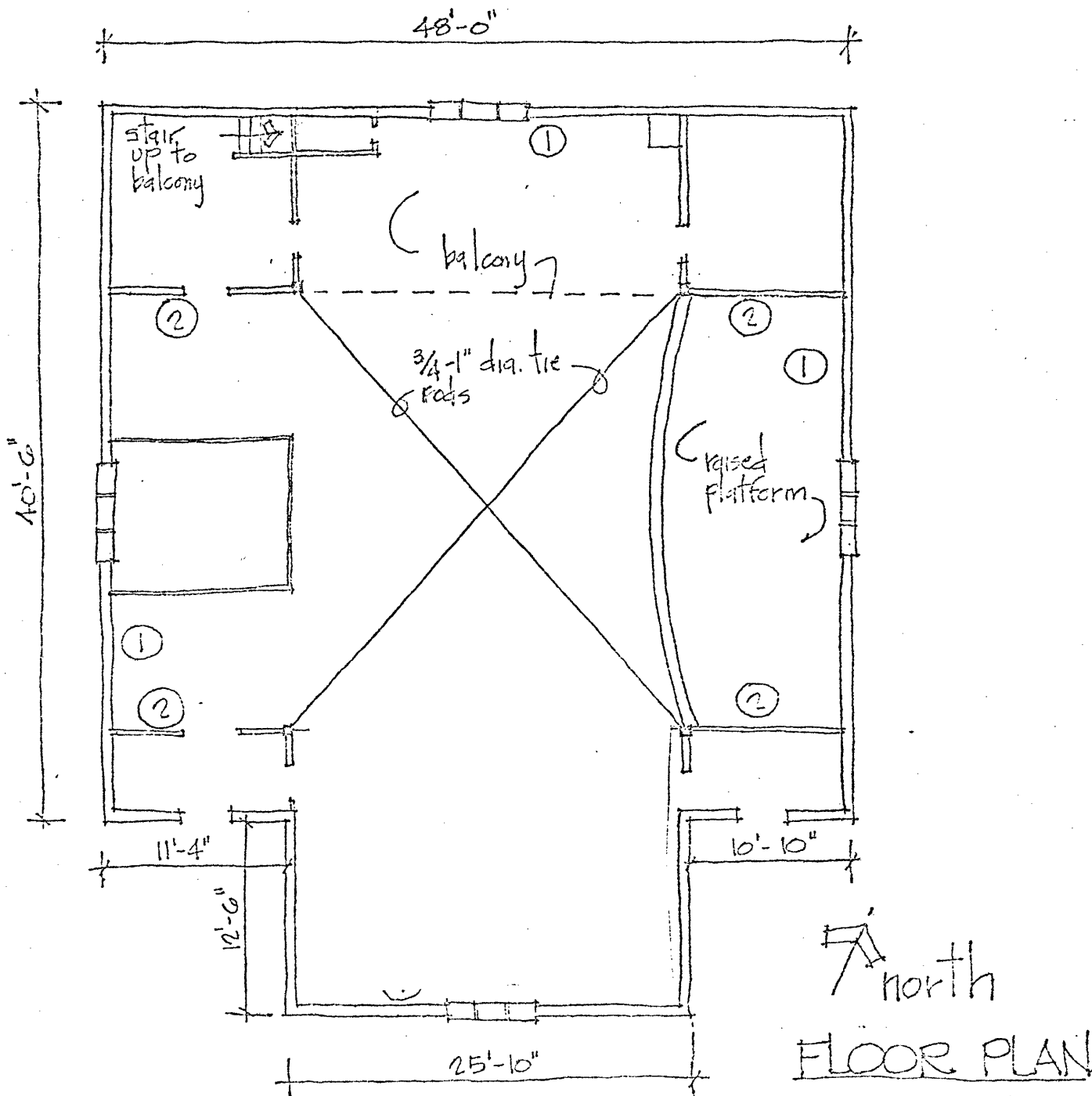
DATE ENTERED

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## CHURCH AT TANANA, ALASKA

drawing by Anthony S. Donald

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Peter Trimble Rowe, Bishop of Alaska, located a new site for the mission in 1896 on the right bank of the Yukon opposite the traditional native trading center, Nuchalawoyya, at the junction of the Yukon and Tanana rivers. That fall a 300x100 foot clearing was made at the new site where a log cabin from the old mission was situated (U.S. Survey 1906:384). The new mission was named Mission of Our Saviour (Rowe 1920:83). A sawmill was placed near the clearing in 1898 and another cabin constructed. Before the turn of the 20th century, work on the church building had begun with money donated by a Mary Rhineland King (Rowe 1906:83) and the first native house near the mission was built. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the Mission of Our Saviour (Tanana Mission) had received patent to 485 acres of land solely for "missionary purposes" on which a church, hospital, sawmill, cemetery, rectory, school reserve and some 13 native houses were situated (U.S. Survey 1906:394). With these structures the Tanana Mission was able to undertake its missionary pursuits for the religious instruction, health care and education of the native populace of the area.

ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSION

The personnel of the Tanana Mission throughout the 20th century sought to serve native people in the promotion of their welfare. Bishop Rowe of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska stated in the application for patent to the land that a large part of the land was devoted to "agricultural and industrial pursuits" for the "education and betterment and welfare of the adjacent Indian communities..." (U.S. Survey 1906:393). To bring these new and beneficent opportunities to native people the mission, as noted above, consisted not only of a church but a school and hospital as well. The importance of providing health care to native people was evidenced in the reconstruction of the hospital twice following fires which destroyed their facilities in 1909 and 1914. The school provided an opportunity to learn skills which would allow native people to operate in the encroaching non-native culture of American immigrants to Alaska. The church served to instruct them in the ways of Christianity. Native people were encouraged to abandon the semi-subterranean houses which they occupied elsewhere by being granted land where they were "allowed to build (log homes) under certain considerations affecting their behavior, the land remaining in the possession of the Mission (U.S. Survey 1906:384).

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Throughout the 20th century, agents of the mission included priests, deacons, deaconesses and lay readers as well as doctors and nurses who through the Christian ethic of the church served to promote the welfare of native people. With natives inhabiting mission land, the mission could effectively serve the people who formed a new community centered around the Mission of Our Saviour Still, the activities of the church and its personnel brought some changes to the traditional way of life.

Native people lived a life out on the land, travelling many miles as part of their annual subsistence cycle in order to partake of their surrounding natural resources such as caribou, moose, bear, as well as salmon, grayling and whitefish. Traditional village sites were strategically located in order that a multiple of food resources could be efficiently procured. As the mission grew, native people settled in a permanent village, practiced new religious teachings, were given medical attention as they were exposed to alien diseases, and buried their dead in the mission cemetery.

After operating for over 40 years, the Tanana Mission was vacated. The school at the Indian village closed in 1940. In 1945, a new hospital was built by the Office of Indian Affairs three miles below the mission at the then predominately white community of Tanana where a new Episcopal church, St. James', was erected several years earlier (The Alaskan Churchman 1947). Native people living on the mission land also moved, establishing new residences at Tanana.

Today the past history of the Tanana Mission is embodied in the church structure with its associated cemetery. While most of the other buildings and houses that formed the mission consist of archaeological remains, the church and cemetery are prominent on the bank of the Yukon River above the modern community of Tanana. This church, still unique among Alaskan architecture, represents the establishment of a new life style among native people. In offering the opportunity to learn new ways, it encouraged native people to adopt Christian doctrines and to settle in a permanent village so that children could be instructed in non-native ways at school. The church became important in the life events of native individuals and families as the newborn were baptized, couples were married and the deceased were laid to rest in the Christian services conducted in the church.



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- 3) Rowe, P.T.  
1920

"Historical Data of Alaskan Missions",  
The Alaskan Churchman, Vol. 14, No.3,  
pp. 82-83.

- 4) U.S. Survey  
1906

U.S. Survey No.721 of the Protestant  
Episcopal Mission Reserve at Tanana.  
Microfilm on file at the Bureau of Land  
Management, Fairbanks.

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cemetery which surrounds the church building as should the line from the west corner to the south. The west-south line approximately follows the left bank of the dry creek bed and encompasses the archaeological remains of the deaconess' home and out buildings.

See sketch map on Property Map Form.