National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms Type all entries—complete applicable sections

Name 1

Ester Camp Historic District historic AHRS SITE NO. FAI-204 and or common Cripple Creek Resort

2. Location

N/A street & number

Ester city, town

___ vicinity of

county Fairbanks North Star

Present Use

agriculture

educational

government

🗶 entertainment

industrial

military

X_ commercial

Borough

02

Status

X occupied

no

99725 Alaska state

Classification 3.

- Category Ownership X_ district public X private building(s) structure both _ site __ object
 - unoccupied work in progress **Public Acquisition** Accessible N/A in process X__ yes: restricted ... yes: unrestricted ___ being considered

code

Owner of Property 4.

Richard S. and Jerelyn Witham name

P.O. Box 101 street & number

F . . .

city, to	own Ester	vicinity of	state Alask	a
5.	Location	of Legal Description		

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Fairbanks District Recorders Office

200 Cushman Street street & number

Fairbanks city, town

city, town Anchorage

state	Alaska	99701

Representation in Existing Surveys 6.

title	Alask	<u>ka Heri</u>	tage Res	sources	Survey	has t	his property	/ been dete	ermined	eligible?	yes	<u>X_ no</u>
date	198	34					_	federal	s	tate	_ county _	local
			Alaska	Divis	ion of Parks	and	Outdoor	Recreat	ion			
depo	ository	for surve	y records	Office	e of History	and	Archaeo1	ogy, P.	D. Box	107001		
city.	town	Anchor	age						state	Alask	a 99510	-7001

OMB No.	1024-0018
Expires	10-31-87

For NPS use only

1 . . . 2 1 4 . . . I received

not for publication

code

museum

religious

scientific

other:

_ transportation

private residence

99725

park

090

date entered

7. Description

Condition	

X

ndition		Check one
excellent	deteriorated	_X_ unaltered
good	ruins	X_ altered
fair	unexposed	

Check one

__X_ original site _X_ moved

date 1936-1937

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

AL - - I

The Ester Camp Historic District exemplifies the numerous mining camps that existed at one time or another in the Fairbanks Mining District. Encompassing the entire Cripple Creek Resort property, the historic district lies adjacent to the small town of Ester, located about nine miles northwest of Fairbanks. Ester Camp has eleven historically significant wood frame buildings (noted below and on the site location map as A-K), two historic mine shafts and a water tank (noted as L-N), and three non-contributing wooden buildings (noted as 0-0).

The eleven historic structures include a mess hall/bunkhouse, five smaller bunkhouses, an assay office/superintendent's office, a blacksmith's shop, a storage building, and two "wanigans" that served as individual residences. "Wanigan" is an Alaskan frontier term used to describe a simple, one room frame cabin built on skids or built strongly enough to be moved frequently over snow and ice as mining operations shifted from place to place. The three non-contributing buildings include a reconstructed saloon/garage, a former firehouse now used as a theater, and an outhouse. These structures are considered non-contributing because they are reconstructed or because they were built after the period of historic significance. (For a detailed description of the district's components, see the end of this section. For their arrangement, see the site photograph.)

Buildings in the historic district are from two periods in the region's mining from 1900 to 1914, and from a later period that had its heyday in the history: mid-1920s and slowly wound down in the mid-1950s. During the early period, from which the assay office/superintendent's office and blacksmith shop date, the "camp," as people called it, was a small town known as Ester City that served several mining In 1907 Ester City had three hotels, five saloons, four or five other claims. businesses, and several homes.

By the later period, from which the remaining historic buildings date, the camp had evolved to serve a large-scale mining operation. The Fairbanks Exploration Company (F.E. Co.) created Ester Camp in the winter of 1936-1937, and workers continued to use it until the mid-1950s.

In 1958 the F.E. Co. sold the camp to a group of investors. Since, it has operated as a resort. The present owners purchased the property in 1986. All of the district's buildings have been appropriately adapted for use as part of the resort complex. There is no immediate threat to the district's preservation.

The Ester Camp Historic District retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The setting for the Ester Camp Historic District has undergone some minor changes, but, as detailed below, most of them are due to historical processes that were normal for mining camps and do not interfere with Ester Camp's integrity.

The camp sits on the low Keystone Bench at the edge of the Ester Creek Valley. The space between the buildings is a parking area and divided by an access road.

8. Significance



Specific dates 1905-1906 1936-1937 Builder/Architect Fairbanks Exploration Company

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Ester Camp Historic District is associated with the discovery of gold in the Fairbanks area during the early 1900s and later development of large-scale placer gold mining there. The district's buildings are representative of both of these phases of the camp's history. The camp is also associated with John C. Boswell, a significant local leader and top official of the Fairbanks Exploration Company (F.E. Co.).

Following Felix Pedro's discovery of gold in the area in 1902, more than 20 small mining camps sprang up along creeks within a 30-mile radius of the Fairbanks supply station. Among them was Ester City, founded in 1905-1906. According to the 1907 <u>Tanana Directory</u>, the community had three good hotels, five saloons, two general merchandise stores, a laundry, a barbershop, two restaurants, and a roadhouse. Ester, Cleary, and Fairbanks creeks were the biggest gold producers in the Tanana Valley. By 1920 these three creeks and their tributaries had yielded over \$30 million worth of gold.

During this early period, most mines were small, drift mining operations. After the richer, more accessible areas had been mined, activity declined. Gold production in the Fairbanks district fell from \$10.5 million in 1909 to \$3 million in 1915.

In the early 1920s, representatives of what became the Fairbanks Exploration Company began investigating the possibilities for larger scale, more mechanized placer mining operations in the Fairbanks area. Before any gold was removed by dredges, the company had invested \$9-\$10 million. They constructed the Davidson Ditch to bring sufficient water to operate the dredges, a 5,000 kilowatt power plant near Fairbanks, a pumping plant at Chena, and shops and camps for their equipment and work crews at Chatanika and several other sites. Eventually, the F.E. Co. operated seven dredges in the Fairbanks area.

The F.E. Co.'s mining activities were of major economic and social importance to the Fairbanks area between the mid-1920s and the onset of World War II. The company was the single largest employer and contributor to the Fairbanks economy. Ester Camp was one of the larger and more long-lived of the company's camps.

Although the F.E. Co. began exploratory work in the Ester area during the late 1920s, it was 1933 before the company consolidated enough holdings in the Ester area to consider opening a camp there. The major buildings at the F.E. Co.'s Ester Camp were built or moved to the site during the winter of 1936-1937. Dredge No. 6 was dismantled and moved from Goldstream Creek to Eva Creek in the Ester area. Crews moved the mess hall/bunkhouse from Fox Camp to Ester. Bunkhouse G was built. The company adapted several buildings at Ester for an assay office, blacksmith shop, and garage.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Acreage of nominated property11.4 Quadrangle nameFairbanks (D-3) UTM References	1)		Quadrang	le scale 1:63 360
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c 0 6 4 5 1 8 5 0 7 1 9 1			6 4 5 1 9 0 0	7, 1, 9, 1, 4, 5, 0
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Verbal boundary description and ju Camp Historic District boundar These boundaries were selected originally sold in 1958. List all states and counties for prop	ries corres d by the F. perties overla	pond to the E. Co. as th pping state or	property lines f e camp boundarie	or Cripple Creek Res es when the property
state N/A	code	county		code
state N/A	code	county		code
11. Form Prepare	аву			
name/title Wendy H. Arundale,	, Research	Associate		
organization Institute of Arctic	c Biology		date December	14, 1985; revised 19
street & number University of Ala	aska		telephone (907)	474-6136
city or town Fairbanks			state Alaska	99775
12. State Historic	: Prese	rvation	Officer C	ertification
The evaluated significance of this prope	مريا ماري ويوري ومرجو وارتدار			
-				
As the designated State Historic Preserv 665), I hereby nominate this property for according to the criteria and procedures	inclusion in th	e National Regist	ter and certify that it h	
State Historic Preservation Officer signa	ture)	alle.	Bittme	~ <u></u>
title State Historic Preservat	tion Office	r	date	March 25, 1987
For NPS use only I hereby certify that this property is	s included in th	e National Regist		3/6/82
•	s included in th	e National Regist	ter date	3/6/87

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

(AHRS No. FAI-204)

Continuation sheet Ester Camp Historic District Item number 6

Historic Resources in the Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks, Title: Alaska

Date: September, 1981 x Local

Depository for Survey Records: Fairbanks North Star Borough Planning Department

City: Fairbanks State: Alaska 99701

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Surrounding parts of the property are covered with recent growth of alder, birch, and spruce trees with accompanying undergrowth. Not far beyond are the valleys of Ester and Cripple creeks where ample evidence of extensive dredging operations is visible. The homes of the present town of Ester are east of the camp.

The district's structures are in fair to very good condition. They are stark, utilitarian structures, with very few decorative features. None of the district's buildings was built for winter use. The early structures have no insulation.

Relatively little is known about the early camp and buildings. One account indicates that a hotel stood where the mess hall-bunkhouse is located (Matheson and Haldeman, 1981). Available photos were taken from such a distance that they provide only contextural views. A 1938 aerial photograph shows that the road into Ester Camp cut through the middle of the camp; this road now lies east of the district's center. However, an access road heading west still bisects the district.

The F.E. Co. buildings from the later period are almost unchanged from when they were part of a functioning F.E. Co. mining camp. The most obvious change is the addition of false fronts and porches to the assay office, blacksmith shop, and Malemute Saloon. These additions are not integral parts of the structures and could be removed. They are not architecturally inappropriate. The false fronts and porches were added about 1958. They were reportedly built of historic materials from a bunkhouse that stood near the mess hall-bunkhouse and burned during the late 1940s or early 1950s.

A few of the F.E. Co. buildings at the site have disappeared. These include a six-hole outhouse, two smaller outhouses near bunkhouse I, a four room bunkhouse which stood between bunkhouse I and the road, and another bunkhouse of undetermined size located in this same general area that burned. The company moved the four room bunkhouse during the late 1940s-early 1950s. Two other buildings, a two story washhouse located just south of bunkhouse I and a tool shed situated southeast of the storage building and blacksmith shop, were probably taken down toward the end of the F.E. Co. era. These buildings were secondary support buildings and were structurally similar to buildings that still remain in the district.

Available evidence indicates that the buildings from the early period were built on their present sites. Some of the F.E. Co. buildings, including the mess hall-bunkhouse, possibly one or more of the bunkhouses (except bunkhouse G), and the wanigancabins were moved to Ester Camp from other locations. Moving was accomplished by putting a building on skids or sleds and towing it to its new location in the winter using one or more bulldozers. The mess hall-bunkhouse was moved during the winter of 1936-1937. A photograph dated "late 1930s" shows all of the potentially moved structures at Ester Camp in their present locations. It seems reasonable to assume that the moved structures were brought in between 1936 and 1937. The moved structures came from other F.E. Co. mining camps.

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In keeping with a common practice in Alaskan mining camps, the buildings were designed to be moved. Because of this many F.E. Co. camps have disappeared. Ester Camp, Chatanika, and Fairbanks Creek camps are the only F.E. Co. camps in the Fairbanks area largely intact.

BUILDINGS AND FEATURES CONTRIBUTING TO THE DISTRICT'S HISTORIC CHARACTER (See Map):

A. Assay Office/Superintendent's Office: ca. 1906. Wood frame building (16' x 24' 6") with weathered wood clapboard exterior; one story; gabled roof with galvanized corrugated metal sheathing. A false front and porch were added in 1958 or 1959 after the camp became a resort. Used as Camp Superintendent's Office during the F.E. Co. era, this structure currently serves as a souvenir and snack shop. Condition: fair to good.

B. Blacksmith Shop: ca. 1906. A one story wood frame building $(25' 3'' \times 27' 10'')$ with galvanized corrugated metal sheathing on three sides of the exterior; gabled roof. A false front, sheathed in weathered clapboards, and porch were added in 1958 or 1959 after the camp became a resort. A small alcove at the front of the west wall that serves as a darkroom and a narrow side pocket in the center of the west wall that accommodates backdrops are also recent additions. Believed to be one of the original Ester townsite buildings, this structure was a blacksmith shop during the F.E. Co. days. A rack beneath an extension of the eaves along the west side of the building provided storage for the blacksmith's stock. The building is now a photography studio where tourists may have their pictures taken in turn-of-the-century costumes. Condition: fair to good.

C. Storage Building: built before 1940, probably between the 1936 and 1937 mining seasons. The structure is a shed-roofed wood frame building (12' x 24') sheathed in galvanized, corrugated sheet metal with a porch (7' 10" x 24') running the entire length of the southwest side. The F.E. Co. used this building to store drilling equipment; it is still used for storage. Condition: good to very good.

D. Mess Hall/Bunkhouse: 1934. Two story wood frame building $(72' \times 17' 6'')$ with crawl space. Exterior walls and hipped gable roof sheathed in galvanized corrugated sheet metal. Photos showing the original plans for the mess hall/bunkhouse and its shed-roofed washroom addition $(12' 6'' \times 26' 3'')$ are included. The date on the plans and interview information (Clausen and Hartung n.d.a.) indicate that the mess hall/bunkhouse was built in 1934 at the F.E. Co. camp at Fox and moved to Ester between the 1936 and 1937 mining seasons.

A few original features are not on the plans. Among them are: a back porch with a screened-in room (14' 6" \times 10' 6") that served as a meat cache; a pair of doors at the southeast corner in the crawl space leading to the coal bins with a pulley to lift them open; and a low wooden well house with a metal water tank located just west of these doors along the south wall.

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Indoor plumbing was installed during the early 1940s. Originally the camp had a six-holer outhouse that stood not far from the mess hall's front door. Removal of the outhouse and its attendant odors was one of the demands made by the camp's miners in a 26-day strike in 1941. A shed-roofed addition to house toilets, urinals, and wash basins was added to the north side. After it became part of the resort, the owners added an exterior laundry room (13' 9" x 10' 6") off the back porch and an unroofed front porch. However, aside from such minor changes, the mess hall bunkhouse has undergone remarkably few modifications. The mess hall/bunkhouse is now used as a hotel with dining room. Condition: very good.

E-I. Bunkhouses: before late 1930s, specific construction dates unknown. Onestory wood frame buildings with galvanized corrugated sheet metal sheathing on the exterior and roof. Bunkhouses E ($39' \times 20'$) and F ($40' 8'' \times 20' 4''$) have four rooms each and a gabled roof. Bunkhouses G ($36' \times 16' 4''$) and H ($28' 3'' \times 16'$) have three rooms each; H has a gabled roof, G a shed roof. Bunkhouse G is probably the one for which plans were drawn in 1937. Bunkhouse I ($88' 6'' \times 10' 8''$) is a larger, eight room version of E and F. Bunkhouse G was clearly built at Ester. The other bunkhouses were probably built at Ester about this time, although one or more of them might have been built slightly earlier at other locations and moved to Ester. These bunkhouses are currently used for additional guest rooms and housing for the staff. Condition: fair to good.

J-K. Ditch walkers' wanigans: two wood frame buildings shaped much like boxcars with shallow gabled roofs and exterior sheathing of tar paper and battens. These were built to house the ditch walkers who patrolled sections of the Davidson Ditch. They were moved to Ester Camp in the late 1930s and used as housing for the foreman and others with seniority and responsibility at the camp.

Wanigan/Cabin J's exterior is unaltered, but cabin K has been modified. On the south side near the front a corrugated fiberglass greenhouse with an exterior entrance door, on the north side a small rectangular addition, and across the back a screened-in porch have been added. Except for the addition on the north side, these alterations appear to be reversible. They were made after 1958, probably by a former resort manager who lived in this cabin. Despite the additions, the original form and appearance of the wanigan is discernable. The wanigans are housing for the resort staff. The winter caretaker currently lives in Cabin J. Condition: fair to good.

L-M. Shafts: two shallow, vertical mining shafts dating from the early mining period are within the district. Their openings are roughly rectangular and less than four feet on a side. Shaft L is on the hillside above and to the north of the smaller bunkhouses. Shaft M is below and to the southeast of the storage shed. Some remnants of wooden framing remain inside each shaft, but there is no other associated material. Condition: poor.

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N. Water Tank: a round wooden water tank sits on the hillside above and to the north of the smaller bunkhouses not too far from shaft L. The tank was installed when the F.E. Co. ran Ester Camp. Water came in to the tank from Ester Creek and was stored here for drinking and cooking because the well water was rusty and unpalatable. Condition: fair.

NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

0. Malemute Saloon/Garage: a 1969 reconstruction of an original Ester townsite building that burned on June 3, 1969. A single story, wood frame structure with metal sheathing on three sides and weathered wooden clapboards on the front, gabled roof covered with corrugated sheet metal, false front, and porch. The appearance is visually compatible with the nearby Assay Office and Blacksmith Shop. During the F.E. Co. era the building was a garage. The original building contained half of the bar from the Royal Alexandra Hotel at Dawson. The other half of the bar was stored next door, and subsequently was installed in the new saloon.

G. Firehouse Theater: recent, date unknown. Log structure with gabled roof sheathed in metal. Formerly the Ester Volunteer Fire Company Firehouse, now a small theater associated with the resort.

H. Outhouse: date unknown. Wood frame structure sheathed in galvanized corrugated sheet metal. Appearance is visually compatible with district's historic buildings.

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Perhaps the most active year at Ester Camp was 1940 when the company built Dredge No. 10 to work Cripple Creek. Over 300 men lived at Ester Camp that year. To accommodate them all, canvas tents on wooden platforms dotted the hillside above the bunkhouses. The mess hall served double shifts at every meal. Although the camp shut down during World War II, the company maintained the buildings and equipment. Production resumed as soon as the government lifted its ban on gold mining. Ester Camp operated until the mid-1950s when the company discontinued its mining operations.

Ester Camp is associated with John C. (Jack) Boswell, an important figure in Fairbanks mining history. Boswell came to Alaska from Oregon in 1926 and found work as a laborer for the F.E. Co. He enrolled at the University of Alaska that fall and completed a B.S. degree in Mining Engineering in 1929. He completed a professional degree, Engineer of Mines, in 1942. For over 15 years, Boswell worked at Ester Camp. In 1934, Boswell became the F.E. Co.'s "Superintendent of the Ester District Hydraulics." He and his wife, Jewell, moved into the log cabin that had belonged to McQuarrie, one of the original discoverers of gold on Ester Creek. In 1946 he became Superintendent of Stripping and Thawing, in 1950 Assistant Manager of Fairbanks Operations, and from 1952 until his retirement in 1965, Manager of Fairbanks Operations. Boswell served in leadership positions in a number of Fairbanks civic groups including the United Fund, the Central Region Republican Committee, the University of Alaska Alumni Association, the Midnight Sun Baseball League, and the Tanana Valley Sportsman's Club. In 1955 he served as a delegate to the Alaska Constitutional Convention where he chaired the Resources Committee and was a member of the Executive Committee.

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Continuation sheetEster Camp Historic District Item number 9

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1979 History of Alaskan Operations of United States Smelting, Refining and Mining Company. Mineral Industries Laboratory, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Cole, Terrance

1981 E.T. Barnette. The Strange Story of the Man Who Founded Fairbanks. Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, Anchorage.

Clausen, Ansgar and Rolland Hartung

1985 Interview. Oral History Collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, E.E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Eagan, Dan

1985 Interview.

Matheson, Janet and F. Bruce Haldeman

1981 <u>Historic Resources in the Fairbanks North Star Borough</u>. Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks.

McAnerney, John M.

n.d. Collection. Alaska and Polar Regions Department, E.E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Naske, Claus-M.

n.d. Gold, the Development of Fairbanks and the Founding and Growth of Ester. Manuscript for Malemute Inc., Ester.





Ester Camp Historic District Ester, Alaska Photographer Richard Veazy December, 1985 Negative on file with Malemute, Inc. No number Site Plan for Cripple Creek Resort based

on drawing prepared when present owners bought the property.











