

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

109

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

=====  
1. Name of Property  
=====

historic name Council City and Solomon River Railroad

other names/site number North Star Line, Last Train to Nowhere  
AHRS Site No. SOL-00032

=====  
2. Location  
=====

street & number Mile 31, Nome-Council Highway not for publication N/A

city or town Solomon vicinity X

state Alaska code AK county Nome code 180

zip code 99762

=====  
3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant   nationally   statewide  X  locally. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Judith E. Buttner  
Signature of certifying official

Jan 9, 2001  
Date

Alaska  
State or Federal agency and bureau

=====  
In my opinion, the property   meets   does not meet the National Register criteria. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
=====

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

=====  
4. 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

[Signature]

3/2/01

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

h Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

=====  
**5. Classification**  
=====

**Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)**

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property (Check only one box)**

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>        </u>	<u>  1  </u>	buildings
<u>        </u>	<u>        </u>	sites
<u>  6  </u>	<u>  2  </u>	structures
<u>        </u>	<u>  1  </u>	objects
<u>  6  </u>	<u>  4  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   0  

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)   N/A

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad

Nome, Alaska

=====  
**6. Function or Use**  
=====

**Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)**

Cat: Transportation Sub: Rail-related  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)**

Cat: Vacant/not in use Sub: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

=====  
**7. Description**  
=====

**Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials (Enter categories from instructions)**

foundation N/A  
roof N/A  
walls N/A  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)**

Three locomotives, two flat cars, and a boiler associated with the Council City and Solomon River Railroad are 150 feet east of the centerline at mile 31 of the Nome-Council Highway and 250 feet north of the Bonanza Channel bridge. The remains stand on the Solomon River flood plain where they were abandoned over 85 years ago. The site is on tidal marsh land that is wet and poorly drained.

The Council City and Solomon River Railroad's equipment included three 0-4-4T locomotives originally used on the New York Elevated Railway. Few 0-4-4T engines were manufactured, and only a few survive. One similar to Council City and Solomon River Railroad engines #1 and #2, which are Class F models, is in the National Museum of Transportation at St. Louis, Missouri. There is possibly one in Cuba, and possibly one in a swamp in Louisiana. Only 38 Class F locomotives were built at Rome, New York. The other Council City and Solomon River Railroad engine is a Class E model, of which only 50 were built. The engines on the Seward Peninsula are deteriorated, but recognizable.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.) N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1903-1913  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates 1903  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Forney, designer  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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**(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)**

Brennan, Joe. Columbia University, New York. June 22, 2000.  
<http://www.cc.columbia.edu/~brennan/rails/forney.html>.

Buzzell, Rolfe G. and Douglas Gibson. *Nome-Council Road: Cultural Resources Survey Along Mile 32 to Mile 42, Seward Peninsula, Alaska*. Public-Data File 86-4. Anchorage: Alaska Department of Natural Resources, 1986.

Clifford, Howard. *Rails North: The Railroads of Alaska and the Yukon*. Seattle, Washington: Superior Publishing Company, 1981.

Harrison, E.C. *Nome and Seward Peninsula*. Seattle, Washington: Metropolitan Press, 1905.

Lee, Dick, Alaska Pioneer's Home, Palmer, Alaska. Personal communication, June 2, 2000.

Osborne, Alice. "The Council City and Solomon River Railroad," *The Alaska Journal*, 5:1 (Winter 1975): 49-54.

Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, Inc. *Railroad History 162*. Spring 1990.

Smith, P.S. *Geology and Mineral Resources of the Solomon and Casadepaga Quadrangles, Seward Peninsula, Alaska*. Bulletin 433. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Geological Survey, 1910.

Western Alaska Construction Company. *Council City & Solomon River Railroad "The North Star Line"*. New York: c. 1904. Copy in files of Candy Waugaman, P.O. Box 80589, Fairbanks, Alaska 99708.

White, John H. History Department, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. Personal communication with author, June 30, 2000.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS) N/A**

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**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

**Name of repository:** University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nome campus

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

**UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)**

	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>
1	<u>03</u>	<u>527199</u>	<u>7157811</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
<u>See continuation sheet.</u>						

**Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)**

The train is located in the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 10, Township 11S, Range 29W, Kateel River Meridian.

**Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)**

The boundaries include the Forney locomotives, railroad cars, and boiler historically associated with the Council City and Solomon River Railroad. All of the structures are within an area of about 200 feet by 10 feet and stand on the tundra just to the east of Mile 31, Nome-Council Highway, as shown on the attached site plan.

=====  
**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

**name/title** Lisa Reddaway, Design Engineer

**organization** Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

**date** July 27, 2000

**street & number** P.O. Box 1048 **telephone** 907-443-3414

**city or town** Nome **state** AK **zip code** 99762-1048

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

Page 5

Forney's patented design, dating from 1866, was "an American standard (4-4-0) that operated rear-end first." It was a small tank engine with an extended frame that carried water tanks and a coal bin over the non-driving wheels. There were no bells, cowcatchers, steps, or box under the cab. They had vacuum brakes, unusual in America, instead of air brakes. A diagram of the 1883 design shows a 22-foot engine, of which one half is exposed boiler and firebox, and the other the cab and tender. The two 42-inch drivers are ahead of the cab on a 60-inch wheel base, and 56-inch wheel base on the truck under the tender. The smokestack extended five feet.

The first of the type was used in Chicago in the late 1860s. The New York Elevated Railway purchased its first Forney engines in 1878 and they became the elevated railway's standard engine in 1881. Most of the engines were disposed of with the end of steam passenger service on the elevated trains in 1903, but a few continued to be used with work trains into the 1930s. The Western Alaska Construction Company purchased three of the surplus Forney engines for the Council City and Solomon River Railroad.

Each of the two railroad flatcars at the site is 32 feet long. The hardwood beams used to construct them were hand fitted and the joints are still tight. The boiler at the site, alongside one of the cars, is from the railroad machine shop at Dickson.

The locomotives and cars have deteriorated since they were abandoned at the site in 1913. Vandals picked away at the smaller fittings over the years. The site has periodically flooded with saltwater. The cars are rusted and only the boilers and running gears survive. A little of the original wood elements on the locomotives is still present. Despite their deteriorated condition, the locomotives and rolling stock at the site are what remains of Alaska's first standard gauge railroad. They also represent a chapter in the transportation history of the Seward Peninsula.

The abandoned Solomon Ferry at the site dates from 1931. Pete Curran, Jr., a local resident, operated it until the Bonanza Channel bridge was constructed over the river in 1958. The standing building is known as the Bonanza warehouse. The Lee family, area miners, hauled the fuel storage tank east of the train from the Oro Fino mining camp to the site after 1939. There is also a vertical boiler at the site that is partially submerged in the Bonanza channel. Its origins are unknown.

Contributing resources:

- 3 0-4-4T locomotives
- 2 railroad cars
- 1 boiler from the railroad machine shop at Dickson

Non-contributing resources

- 1 warehouse building
- 1 Bonanza Channel ferry
- 1 fuel storage tank
- 1 boiler not associated with the railroad debris



**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

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A 1980s photograph of the railroad cars and engines at Solomon titled "Last Train to Nowhere" has added value to the remains through the appreciation by residents and visitors, and has led to plans by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to create a state wayside at the site. The Solomon Native Corporation owns the surface rights to the land where the train sits, but will be transferring ownership to the State of Alaska. Bering Straits Native Corporation owns the subsurface rights. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is investigating the possibility of raising the engines and cars off the tundra to protect them from saltwater.

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

Page 8

**Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)**

The Council City and Solomon River Railroad on the Seward Peninsula was the first standard gauge railroad in Alaska. Intended to run 50 miles, only 35 miles of track were laid before the company ran out of money in 1906. Trains ran to the end of track during the summer months from 1903, the first year of construction, until 1913 when a storm destroyed the railroad's southern terminus, the Dickson townsite, about 35 miles east of the City of Nome. The three 0-4-4T Forney steam locomotives that stand at the site where they were abandoned in 1913 are rare. Because of storms, fires, permafrost, saltwater, and the passing of years, the remains of the locomotives, two railroad flatcars, and a boiler from the company's machine shop at Dickson are among the little evidence that exists of the railroad. The remains on the tundra are testimony to the many big dreams of entrepreneurs who participated in the Nome gold rush. Few of the dreams became reality. The railroad was to provide year-round, economical transportation to facilitate gold mining. The high costs of construction and operation in a distant location and the harsh environment of the north combined to defeat the plan.

Background

In 1900, freight rates to and from the gold fields on the Seward Peninsula were high. Supplies were brought from West Coast ports to the mining boom town of Nome by steamship then transported by riverboat or trail to the mines. Nome did not have a deep water harbor and supplies had to be lightered from the ships anchored several miles offshore. Summer overland travel was difficult for horses because of the terrain plagued by permafrost, and winter overland travel was difficult for sled dogs because of frequent storms and winds. River travel on the Seward Peninsula was hindered by low water during the summer months and ice in the fall. In 1903, overland freight from Nome to Council City was \$57.50 per ton. This was over \$1.00 a ton-mile, while in the states the rate was less than a cent a ton-mile.

In September 1902, survey work began for a standard gauge railroad that would generally follow the course of the Solomon River from its mouth to Council City, fifty miles inland. The Western Alaska Construction Company organized in Chicago and announced in May 1903 that it had acquired the right of way to build a railroad to serve the flourishing gold mines around Solomon, Big Hurrah, and Council City. A few years earlier, a narrow gauge railroad known as the Wild Goose Railway had been built from Nome along the Anvil River to serve miners working there. Preparations were underway for large scale mining in the Council City area. Three large ditches were under construction, hydraulic lifts were in use, and the first dredge on the Seward Peninsula was operating in the area. The Council City and Solomon River Railroad would be the first standard gauge railroad built in Alaska, and the farthest north and west in the United States.

Construction began in June 1903. The southern terminus, named Dickson, was on the east bank near the mouth of the Solomon River, across from the town of Solomon. The railroad boasted that it carried nearly a thousand paying passengers on the ten miles of track constructed in 1903. Intended to run

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

Page 9

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fifty miles, tracks ran thirty-five miles, from Dickson to Penelope Creek, before the company filed for bankruptcy in 1907. Between 1908 and 1913, trains ran intermittently. The rolling stock included three locomotives, seventeen freight cars, and two passenger cars.

The locomotives at the site are three of only four 0-4-4T Forney steam locomotives known to exist of the 334 of them built for the New York Elevated Railway. The New York Locomotive Works at Rome, New York, built only a few of the locomotives, including the Council City and Solomon River Railroad engines #1 and #2 in 1886. The Baldwin Company built engine #3 in 1881. All three locomotives were rebuilt in 1894. Presumably the rebuild was to replace worn parts and repaint the trains. The Western Alaska Construction Company bought engines #1 and #2 (originally New York Elevated engines #21 and #159) in 1903, and engine #3 (originally New York Elevated engine #303) in 1904.

J. Warren Dickson, the Council City and Solomon River Railroad's vice president and general manager, selected the site for the coast terminal. He thought that using the natural harbor at the mouth of the river would extinguish the need for freight to pass through Nome. In addition to warehouses and offices, the company built a hotel in 1904 that became known as the Solomon Roadhouse (listed in the National Register of Historic Places on September 17, 1980) after the railroad discontinued operations in 1907. Dickson, a short distance north and on the east side of the Solomon River, was connected with Solomon by a ferry and a foot bridge. A spur went from Dickson west then south to the harbor, crossing the Solomon River and a slough, ending a short distance west of the original Solomon townsite.

In 1904, Solomon and Dickson were thriving communities, next in size and importance after Nome and Council City on the Seward Peninsula. The coal-fueled railroad operated during the summer months and offered regularly scheduled service until the company declared bankruptcy in 1907. After, trains operated intermittently. In 1913, a storm destroyed the Solomon and Dickson townsites. Intact buildings were relocated inland to Jerusalem Hill where the village of Solomon stands today. The locomotives and rolling stock were abandoned at the end of the spur line that connected the main line and the harbor.

After its creation in 1905, the government's Alaska Road Commission constructed roads and trails around the territory. One of its first projects was a wagon road connecting Nome and Council City, reducing the need for the Council City and Solomon River Railroad. Although its harbor was better than Nome's, Dickson never replaced its rival. In 1918, the Alaska Road Commission contracted to have the rails of the abandoned railroad removed.

The story of the engines is an interesting one. When new, they were bright and shiny, painted a rich red color with gold striping. Their brass and iron parts were polished. They propelled trains on one of the busiest and most profitable passenger railroads in the United States. Today, far from New

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad

Nome, Alaska

Page 10

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York, standing on the tundra in northwest Alaska in a sparsely settled area, the three engines are among the last of their type in existence.

In the 1980s, Ed Bovy titled his photograph of the abandoned engines and cars on the tundra the "Last Train to Nowhere." The photograph is still a popular poster and available for sale in a number of gift shops around the state. As a result, the train is well known and special to Alaskans and visitors.

=====  
**Additional Documentation**  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)  
=====

**Property Owner**  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Solomon Native Corporation  
street & number P.O. Box 243 telephone 907-443-7526  
city or town Nome state AK zip code 99762-0243

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

Page 14

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NPS Form 10-900-a  
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Photograph identification

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1. Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska  
Lisa Reddaway  
June 27, 2000  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, P.O. Box  
1048, Nome, Alaska 99762-1048  
Looking northeast at the remains (from top of photo) of a flatcar, two  
of the engines, and another flatcar
2. Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska  
Lisa Reddaway  
June 27, 2000  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, P.O. Box  
1048, Nome, Alaska 99762-1048  
Looking east at the most northerly of the Forney engines
3. Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska  
Lisa Reddaway  
June 27, 2000  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, P.O. Box  
1048, Nome, Alaska 99762-1048  
Looking east at the second most northerly of the Forney engines
4. Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska  
Lisa Reddaway  
June 27, 2000  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, P.O. Box  
1048, Nome, Alaska 99762-1048  
Looking east at the most southerly of the Forney engines
5. Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska  
Lisa Reddaway  
June 27, 2000  
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, P.O. Box  
1048, Nome, Alaska 99762-1048  
Looking southeast at the remains (starting at left of photo) of two  
engines, a flat car, and an engine; the tank visible in the background  
is not included in the nomination

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

Page 15

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NPS Form 10-900-a  
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section Photograph identification**

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6. Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska  
Unknown  
1904(?)  
Candy Waugaman, P.O. Box 80589, Fairbanks, Alaska 99708-0589  
From Western Alaska Construction Company, *Council City & Solomon River Railroad "The North Star Line"*, New York: c. 1904.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 01000109

Date Listed: 3/2/2001

Council City & Solomon River Railroad  
Property Name

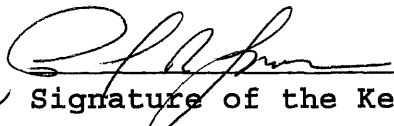
Nome  
County

AK  
State

N/A

Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

3/2/01  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

**Resource Count:**

The correct resource count is: *0 (zero) non-contributing resources.*  
[The physical resources identified as non-contributing in the nomination lie outside the immediate 200' x 10' boundary set for the nominated property. These resources are referenced only as part of the larger setting for the historic rolling stock.]

**Architect/Builder:**

The full name of the engine designer was: *Matthia Nace Forney.*

These revisions were confirmed with Jo Antonson of the AK SHPO office.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)



Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

"THE NORTH STAR LINE"

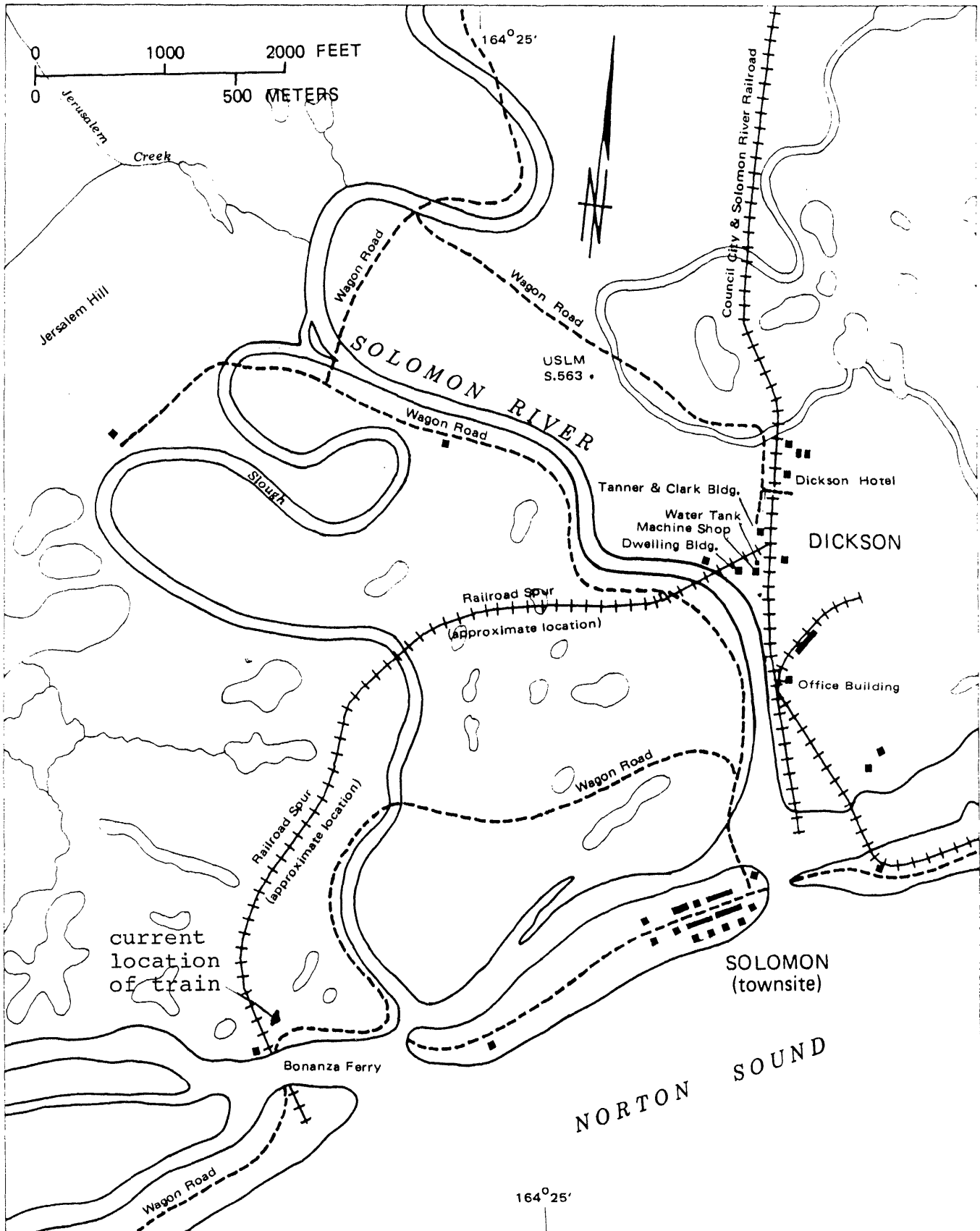


FIRST STANDARD GAUGE TREESTLE IN ALASKA—ROCK CREEK, ON LINE OF COUNCIL CITY & SOLOMON RIVER RAILROAD.

— 6 —

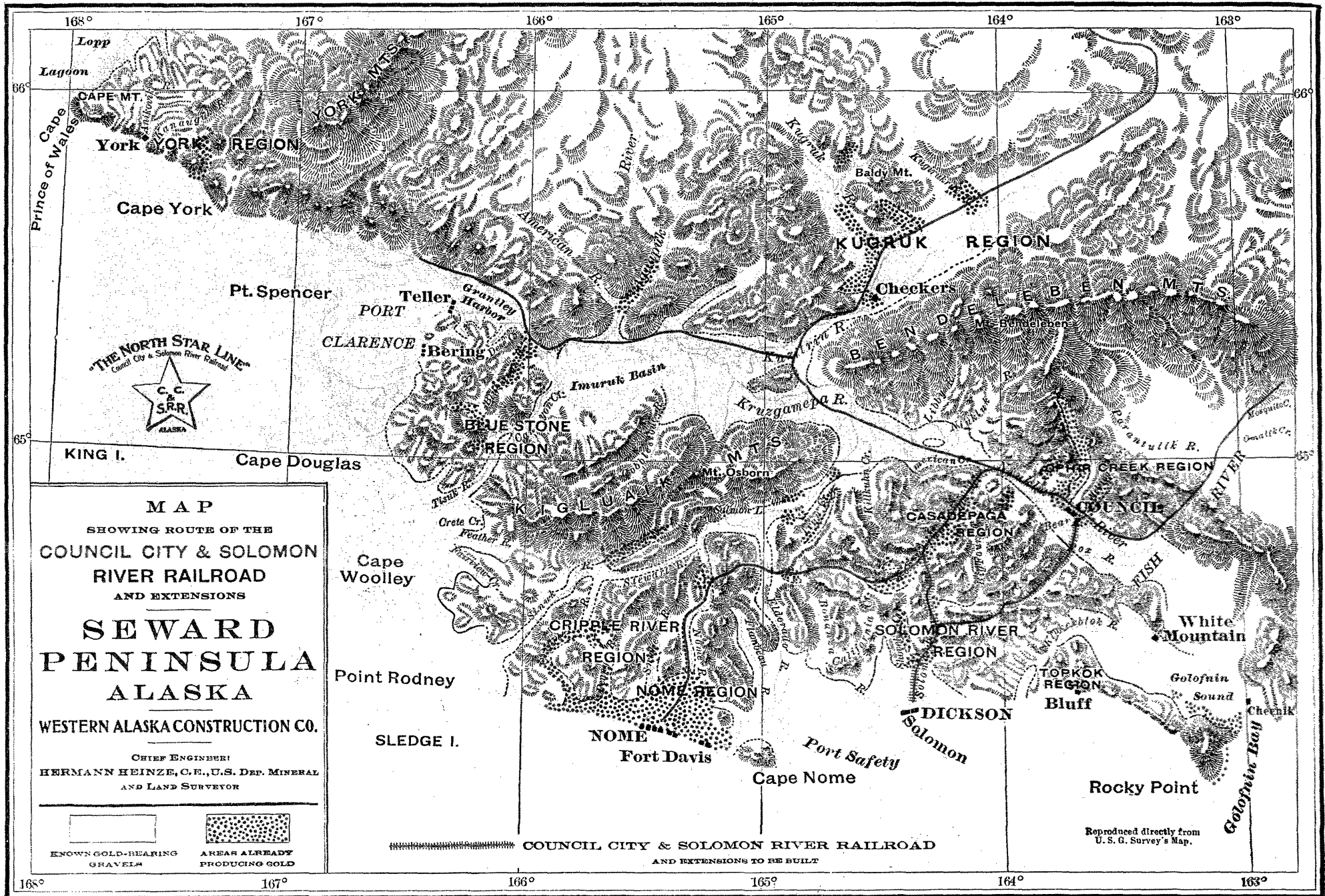
From Western Alaska Construction Company, Council City & Solomon River Railroad "The North Star Line" (New York, c. 1908).  
4

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska



Solomon area 1907 and current location of engines, rolling stock and boiler. Map from Buzzell and Gibson, Nome-Council Road (1986).

The ocean terminal at Dickson, including dock, freight yards, etc., and the main line nearly to Big Hurrah, were completed in the season of 1903. In the Company's yards at Dickson are now stored the materials for completing about 40 miles more road early in the season of 1904.



This Railroad, and proposed extensions, connects all the principal mineral producing areas and centers of population and mining known at present throughout the Solomon River, Council City, Casadepaga River, Ophir Creek, Blue Stone, York, Kugruk, and Nome regions, etc., with tide-water and vessel transportation at Dickson (Solomon), Grantley Harbor, Port Clarence, and Good Hope Bay, thus "gridironing" the Peninsula—the richest mineral producing area on the North American continent, which produced over \$5,000,000 in gold alone in 1903. (See U. S. Mint Reports.)

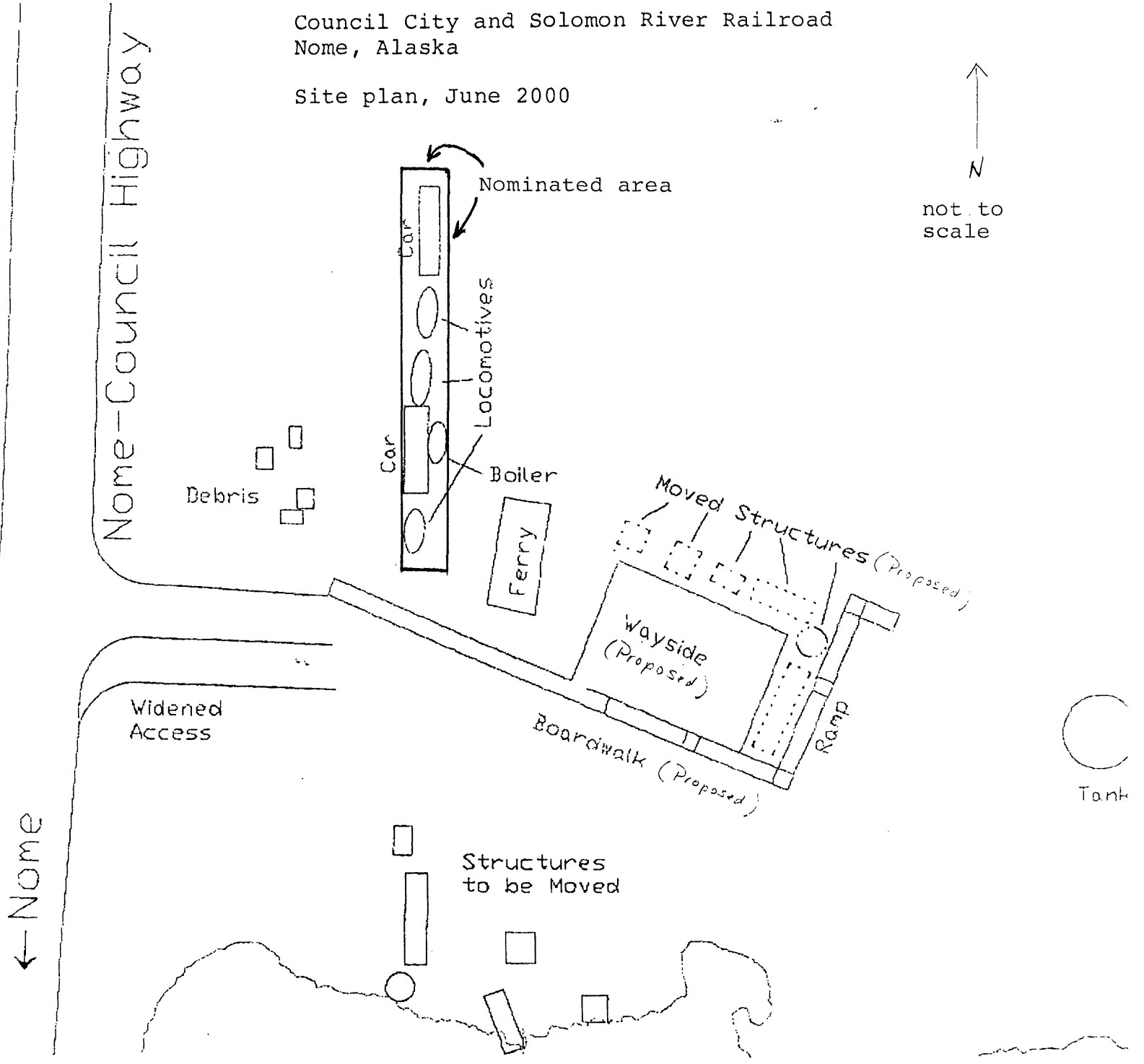
WESTERN ALASKA CONSTRUCTION CO., 81 FULTON STREET, NEW YORK.

Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

Site plan, June 2000



not to scale



Council City and Solomon River Railroad  
Nome, Alaska

Site plan, June 2000

