

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED FEB 8 1980 APR 10 1980  
DATE ENTERED

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

AND/OR COMMON  
"The Church of a Thousand Trees"

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
S. Denali and Elmwood Streets (907) 745-3822  
CITY, TOWN  
Palmer  
STATE  
Alaska

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
VICINITY OF  
Alaska, at large

CODE  
02

COUNTY  
Matanuska-Susitna Division

CODE  
170

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
The United Protestant Presbyterian Church, Inc.  
Rev. Henry Guinotte (907) 745-4392

STREET & NUMBER  
P.O. Box 699  
CITY, TOWN  
Palmer  
STATE  
Alaska 99645

--- VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
District Recorder (907) 745-3080

STREET & NUMBER  
P.O. Box 860  
CITY, TOWN  
Palmer  
STATE  
Alaska 99645

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Alaska Heritage Resources Survey

DATE  
1-4-79  
--- FEDERAL  STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
Alaska Div. of Parks, Office of History & Archaeology  
619 Warehouse, Suite 210  
CITY, TOWN  
Anchorage  
STATE  
Alaska 99501

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input 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

This uniquely designed, volunteer constructed, rustic log church property of three buildings, fully symbolizes the pioneer spirit of the original Matanuska Colony. The church building, if viewed from the air, is shaped like a cross: exaggerated in width of the arms as compared to length. Overall length of the graceful two-story log structure is 84'. The two wings (which comprise the arms of the cross) run parallel along the dominant center nave at each side (north and south). These wings, strongly rectangular, 15' wide by 30' long, thus make the arms of the exaggerated cross a total of 62' across, and 30' wide. Instead of a spire, a more practical bell-tower was placed at the crown of the asbestos shingled roof just back from the front ridge peak. The bell-tower is square and open faced on all sides, capped by a rectangular dormer roof with pronounced overhang. The large bell housed within--the original--is fully visible from any direction.

The exterior of the church is pleasingly and harmoniously related to all of its elements. Had all log walls been placed horizontally in the conventional manner, a certain monotony would have resulted. Instead, the dominant central band around the building--or about two-thirds of the upper first floor facing--consists of smaller, carefully matched logs placed upright. The largest number of windows are thus framed and related to this element. The building, for its time, was unusually provided with natural lights--with as many windows as structural stress would allow. There are two porticoed, double-doored entrances, capped by crosses. After the first winter's experience, what was intended as the principal central entrance on the north side was sealed off inside. Although the structure remains, sans low concrete steps and walkway, the more pronounced west portico became the sole entrance, as it remains.

The dominant central interior--the church nave--is entirely rustic, done in good taste, with restraint. The pews are of carved wood; the chandeliers of logs with homemade fittings. The alter is simple and effective: two chairs flank the minister's raised podium; to the right and left is a simple log divider, slightly lower than the podium. On the back wall surrounded by the inner facing logs and rising to the ceiling, is a finished wooden panel surmounted by a simple cross. The two wing interiors are more prosaic. Designed for Sunday school, meetings and social functions, the inner walls and one story ceilings were finished with wall board. In later years, when the church was jacked-up and excavated for a full concrete basement, much more centrally heated, comfortable, space was provided. The two one-story wing rooms with tall attics are not as heavily used now as they were initially.

The two other buildings, the manse, immediately adjacent to the church and the garage, beyond, are consistent in style and material to the church. Both face South Denali Street. All of the buildings have been well maintained; and with the exception of the addition of the church basement, which did not alter its physical appearance, none have been altered since construction.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1935

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

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

### History of the Colony

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

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Miller, Orlando W., The Frontier in Alaska and the Matanuska Colony, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1975.

Guinotte, Henry, Rev. "The History of the United Protestant Church", (Church program), December 17, 1978.

Newspaper files: Anchorage Daily Times; Matanuska Valley Pioneer; Valley Settler; Palmer Frontiersman.

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY -1 **ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**  
 QUADRANGLE NAME USGS Anchorage (C-6) QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:63 360

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>06</u>	<u>388135</u>	<u>6830455</u>	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Northern one-third of area platted as Civic Center Community Block in original Townsite Survey, FERA, 1934-5.

## 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  
 Michael S. Kennedy, Historian

ORGANIZATION  
 Office of History & Archaeology, Div. of Parks

STREET & NUMBER  
 619 Warehouse Dr., Suite 210

CITY OR TOWN  
 Anchorage

DATE  
 2-10-79

TELEPHONE  
 (907) 274-4676

STATE  
 Alaska 99501

# 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 *William M. ...*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer DATE 1/28/80

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

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

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
*J. W. ...* DATE 4/10/80

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION  
*Kristin O'Connell* DATE 4/9/80

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	FEB 8 1980
DATE ENTERED	APR 10 1980

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

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

8

PAGE

1 of 3

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

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

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

Church Role in the Colony

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

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED FEB 8 1980	APR 10 1980
DATE ENTERED	

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

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2 of 3

'Mr. Bingle arrived at Palmer May 6, 1935, ahead of the colonists. A few survey men were here plus some homesteaders; days later the construction division arrived to construct tents for the families soon to arrive from Minnesota. By the next Sunday, May 12th, Mother's Day, the colonists had arrived and the first tent church service was held with thirty-five persons present. The sermon topic was "Our Mothers", an appropriate theme. . . . That evening an informal get-acquainted service was held and the tent creaked under the strain of the crowd. These services and the campfire services will never be forgotten.

Rev. Bingle was the spiritual leader, fisherman, carpenter and editor of the colony news sheet. Under his direction, work was immediately started on a community hall; where civic and religious groups could meet regularly. Odds and ends of lumber were collected and fitted into the first building used for worship at Palmer. However, religious services were held in the new hall only a short time when sickness entered the valley and several children died. A doctor arrived the next day and the community hall became the colony's hospital.

Services were held thereafter in the homes of the people, and finally in a separate tent. It was here that plans were made to formally organize a church and in August, 1935, \$1,500 was loaned by the Presbyterian Board to build a manse. The manse was ready for occupancy by November 1st, and the pastor's family, the church and the library moved in. Soon the manse was overcrowded and the need for a church building was pressing. On November 24th a church council was established, a constitution drafted, and the church was named. By Easter of 1936 services were moved to the gymnasium, for the manse could not hold the congregation which at times numbered over eighty.

In the summer of 1936 Mr. Bingle visited the (Presbyterian) National Missions Board in New York carrying an appeal for funds to build the church. \$1500 was loaned to start the work. The church council secured grounds from the Colony authorities for the erection of a permanent church and manse.

A construction foreman (experienced in log work) was engaged to superintend the many volunteer labors who gave freely of their time. The goal was to be in the new church by Christmas, but

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	FEB 8 1980
DATE ENTERED	APR 10 1980

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

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3 of 3

the Alaskan winter tightened up. While the men worked at fever pitch in 10, 15, and 25 below zero weather, day after day, the women served them coffee and hot meals. All through the winter and into the spring of 1937 the work continued. Groups helped to build the log walls, raise the 32 foot log trusses frozen like giant icicles weighing hundreds of pounds. Eighteen men came together to put the roof on in cold rain. Men and women worked like Trojans. After the roof was on, the women came day after day until they had caulked all the cracks between the logs and applied linseed oil on the logs so that the first service could be held on Easter Sunday.

When the day came for the dedication . . . protestant men and women in the valley looked with pride unique and substantial building, and thought, "That is my church home, I helped build it"!

On April 11, 1937 "the church of a thousand trees" was dedicated and the Rev. Bert J. Bingle was installed as pastor by the Presbytery of Yukon of which the church had become a member just the day before.

There has been much sacrifice and love in the building of this church by the pioneers. With a steadfast faith in God and the desire to pioneer with Christ, the congregation met in the open air on this site in the summer of 1936 . . . and said: "It is now that we come to formally dedicate these grounds to the God who has led us so far in this adventure. . . . We stand here at this time with bared heads asking that the Christ be our leader, our guide, our stay, our Saviour. Amen". (Guinotte: 1978)