

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**
FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED **OCT 24 1985**
DATE ENTERED **NOV 29 1985**

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Chisana Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

Shushana, Chathanda City or Johnson City

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

An irregular cluster of structures extending westward approximately one fourth mile from the southeast end of the Chisana airstrip and parallel to Johnson Creek.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Chisana

VICINITY OF

000

STATE

Alaska

CODE

02

COUNTY

Southeast Fairbanks Div. 240

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 29

CITY, TOWN

Glennallen

VICINITY OF

STATE

Alaska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Magistrate's Office

STREET & NUMBER

State Office Building

CITY, TOWN

Fairbanks

STATE

Alaska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Alaska Heritage Resource Survey NAB-042

DATE

1984

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Office of History and Archeology, State Parks

CITY, TOWN

Anchorage

STATE

Alaska

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION
 EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR
 DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE
 UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE
 ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Chisana historic district is comprised of 20 historically significant log structures. Most of the structures date from the winter of 1913-14, others from the post-1930 period when the airstrip was built and gold market prices jumped from \$20/ounce to \$32/ounce, and the post-1950 period and the growth of hunting guide service companies. The log structures reflect interior Alaska and Yukon Territory building practices with their extended roof beams and porches. Some log cabins have built-up berms which keep cold air from seeping inside. The extreme temperatures of 50 degrees below or more required other heat saving techniques in chinking, chimney and stove placement, and outhouses.

The former street grid pattern can still be discerned though the line of log structures has been depleted. The remaining structures were built to house a variety of gold rush businesses, government offices, and residences, but were abandoned by World War I, and after World War II were re-used for big game hunting lodge operations. The enclave of structures is surrounded by a spruce forest. The south edge of the townsite has been eroded by Johnson Creek, a broad, braided stream draining the Gold Hills area and emptying into the Chisana River. The log community is in stark contrast to its wilderness setting, under the towering Wrangell Mountains (elevation of up to 16,390 feet). The population varies with the seasons from 6 to 26 (approximately); the community is one of four small villages within the 12 million acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

The gold rush era log cabins retain their integrity, though most are being used for guide service functions or as summer residences. Changes include metal roofs (from blazo cans to aluminum and tar) instead of sod, new foundations (one of cement) instead of bare logs on tundra, and metalbestos stove pipe. Wood heat is still used, but small solar cells power batteries for lights and radios. Chisana is without electricity, telephone, sewer system, or water works. The airstrip or a difficult pack horse trail are the town's link to the nearest town, Glennallen, over 100 miles to the west. Thus any introduction of non-indigenous materials is costly. All structures within the Chisana historic district are built of local timber. The National Park Service has plans to rehabilitate several structures for park use.

BUILDINGS AND SITES CONTRIBUTING TO THE CHARACTER OF THE DISTRICT (see map):

- A. U.S. Commissioner's Court: ca. 1913-14, log cabin, one-story, gabled roof. In fair condition. ca. 1960 small addition to west wall and wood plank roof added. Vacant. Rehabilitation planned by the National Park Service.
- B. U.S. Commissioner's Residence: ca. 1913-14, log cabin, one-story, gabled roof. In fair condition. ca. 1960s wood plank roof added. Vacant. Rehabilitation planned by the National Park Service.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

- C. Women's Jail: ca. 1913-14, log cabin with a porch facing east and a gabled roof. Roof deteriorating. Rehabilitation planned by the National Park Service.
- D. Saloon: ca. 1913-14, log cabin with a small porch facing east and a gabled roof with a second (ca. 1960) roof covering it. In poor condition.
- E. Earl Herst Cabin: ca. 1913-14, log cabin, gabled roof. In fair condition.
- F. Historic Post Office: ca. 1913-14, log cabin, 1 1/2 stories high with cold cellar and a gabled roof. Recently refurbished.
- G. Cache: ca. 1913-14, log cabin, one-story high with gabled roof. Recently refurbished.
- H. Blacksmith's Shop: ca. 1913-14, log cabin, one-story high with gabled roof. In poor and deteriorating condition.
- I. First N.P. Nelson Cabin: ca. 1913-14, log structure with three connecting rooms and a gabled roof.
- J. Sidney "Too Much" Johnson Cabin: ca. 1913-14, log structures with gabled roof, cold cellar, and storm porch. In fair condition.
- K. Lou Anderton Barn and Corral: ca. 1930, log structure. Vacant.
- L. Second N.P. Nelson Residence: ca. 1930, log structure with gabled roof and a cold cellar. Recently refurbished.
- N. Log Shed: ca. 1930.
- O. Old Cache: ca. 1913-14, log structure, one-story, gabled roof. In fair condition.
- P. Mercantile, now Wrangell R Ranch Cookhouse: ca. 1913-14, log structure, gable roof and porch. Refurbished with concrete foundation and cellar.
- Q. Storage Shed: ca. 1930, log structure with gable roof.
- R. Garage: ca. 1930, log structure with gable roof.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

- S. Mail Cabin: ca. 1930, log structure with gable roof.
- T. Log Residence: ca. 1930, log structure with gable roof.
- W. Billy James Residence Cabin: ca. 1913-14, log structure with a gabled roof. Good condition.

Additionally, four Native grave houses are located on a ridge northwest of town. The site of a Native village is below (south) the ridge (all outside historic district and across air field). Ahtna Native Corporation plans to nominate site to the National Register.

NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

- M. Cabin under construction.
- U. Smokehouse (n.d., recent). Log structure with gable roof.
- V. Meat cache (n.d., recent).
- X. Shower and laundry (n.d., recent). Log structure with gable roof.
- Y. Sawmill (n.d., recent). Machinery from ca. 1940, rough cut, sawmill. Powered by Willy's jeep motor.
- Z. Bunkhouse (n. d., recent). Log structure with gable roof.

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 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 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 checked="" 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 1913-1935 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Various

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The cluster of 20 log cabins in the Chisana historic district stand as the best reminder of the log communities of gold rush Alaska. The "Shushana" stampede of 1913 typified the small scale gold rushes prevalent during Alaska's gold rush era. The resultant log community of Chisana grew to a reported 400 log cabins, and at that time claimed to be the largest log cabin community in Alaska if not in North America (according to at least one over zealous gold rush editor). Chisana was like most gold rush camps that grew and prospered for a season or two then declined to a meager existence or abandonment. A surprising number of the remaining log cabins are associated with the characters of gold rush boom towns: prospector, dog musher, merchant, saloon man, and the keeper of law and order. The district remains as a cohesive log village that represents vernacular log-building techniques in the Alaska and Yukon Territory region.

History

During May 1913, Billy James, his wife, Matilda Wales, and Nels P. "North Pole" Nelson discovered placer gold in Bonanza Creek. Nelson traveled to Dawson for grub and sparked the rush. An estimated 2,000 headed for the diggings that summer. A fleet of small steamboats left Dawson and Fairbanks and ran up the Tanana and White Rivers to the strike; White Pass and Yukon route officials promoted a cross country route for stampedeers from the Yukon Territory via Whitehorse; but the eventual dominant route was from Shushana Junction (now McCarthy) on the Copper River and Northwestern Railway across the Wrangell Mountains by trail some 80 miles to the diggings via the Scolai Pass or Nizina-Chisana Glaciers, two of the most rugged routes ever crossed by a gold stampede.

The stampedeers staked the creeks for 25 miles around Gold Hill, while merchants platted three townsites. Chisana townsite (also called Chathanda City and Johnson City) became the dominant community after a miners' meeting moved the U.S. Commissioner's and recorder's office and post office to the new town in September 1913. Log cabins went up quickly during the fall and winter. The growth of Chisana was as much a result of the mining decline of Nome, Fairbanks, and Dawson as the belief that the new gold fields would be permanent and extensive. Only the tributaries of Glacier and Bonanza Creeks, however, proved productive. The population quickly dropped and by 1920 the census taker found only 148 residents in the vicinity. In 1939 the post office closed.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Knute Peterson, When Alaska Was Free (New York, 1977)
 Newspapers, 1913-1915; Chitina Leader, Cordova Daily Alaskan, Fairbanks Weekly Times, Dawson Daily News, Skagway Alaskan.
 Oral interviews: Neil Finnesand, stampede participant, August 1983; Ivan Thorall, long-time resident, July 1982, June 1983; Terry Overly, long-time resident, June 1983; Ray McNutt, long-time resident, July 1982, June 1983.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 30

UTM REFERENCES

A	N, W	4 4, 5 2, 0, 0	6 8 8, 1 8, 5, 0	B	N, E	4 4, 5 8, 0, 0	6 8 8, 1 8, 5, 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	S, W	4 4, 5 2, 0, 0	6 8 8, 1 6, 5, 0	D	S, E	4 4, 5 8, 0, 0	6 8 8, 1 6, 5, 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet.

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

STATE	NA	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE		CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Robert L. Spude, Regional Historian and Michael Lappen, Historian.

ORGANIZATION

Alaska Regional Office, National Park Service

DATE

May 1984

STREET & NUMBER

2525 Gambell Street, Room 107

TELEPHONE

907/261-2638

CITY OR TOWN

Anchorage

STATE

Alaska

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES

NO

NONE

Timothy A. Smith, Deputy
 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National State Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Edward C. Beaman

TITLE

Chug Kasaan, National Park Service

DATE

10/16/85

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

William B. Bushong

DATE

11/29/85

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

Of the reported 400 cabins of 1913-14, only a handful remain. Fortunately, some of these are associated with prominent gold rush participants. North Pole Nelson, one of the discoverers, went on a fling "outside," squandered his gold, and came back to spend a half century looking for another strike. Two of his cabins stand in Chisana -- one built ca. 1913-14, the other in the 1930s. His ashes were buried in 1960 by local miners on top of King Mountain nearby. Nelson's partner, Billy James and James' wife, Matilda Wales, also lost their money and lived in a cabin adjacent to North Pole's. The partners, however, spent much of their time in suits over mining ground or Chisana property. James, a veteran of the Klondike and a half dozen other gold rushers died in 1957, 20 years after Matilda.

On First Avenue is the cabin of Sidney "Too Much" Johnson, the dog sled freight and express musher who carried goods and 200 pounds of mail from the railroad 73 miles over frozen rivers, the Nizina and Chisana Glaciers, up the Whiskey Hill grade, and down into Chisana. Johnson received his nickname from his penchant to unload freight on the glacier when the weight got to be "too much." Nelson, James, and Johnson, symbolize Alaska, its sourdough miner and its musher; Matilda represents the little recognized woman's role in Alaska history.

Other structures dating from the rush include typical gold rush businesses: post office, blacksmith shop, saloon, and mercantile. These were part of Chisana's business district: a row of mercantiles, restaurants, barbers, harness, tin and assay shops, saloons, and other mining camp enterprises on "First Avenue." Fires and flooding have taken most of these structures, but the semblance of a street can be seen from the old post office to the present Wrangell R ranch cookhouse (historic mercantile).

Law and order was present early in Chisana and physical reminders are still present in the U.S. Commissioner's buildings. The White River district commissioner rushed to the diggings with the stampedeers but lost his job when the office was renamed Chisana. Chisana's first commissioner was Anthony J. Dimond, a miner turned lawyer. Tony Dimond established the presence of law and order with the help of veteran Deputy U.S. Marshal Frank H. "Al" Hoffman. A stampeeder from Nome, Anthony McGettigan, became Dimond's assistant and recorder.

During the winter of 1913-14, a two-story "federal building" (no longer standing) was constructed, two jails built (one for men, the other for women), and log residences occupied. Dimond left with the "bust" in the summer of 1914. He later became prominent in politics as Alaska's sole delegate to Congress (1933-44). Hoffman and McGettigan remained. Following two short term appointees, McGettigan became commissioner. He served the

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

community for 25 years (1914-39) as recorder or commissioner, or postmaster (Chisana's last) and sometimes miner. In 1943, on a walk to his mining claims, he was attacked by a bear -- only a boot and the stub of a leg were later found.

Three structures associated with law and order remain -- the later U.S. Commissioner's Court (which may have been Deputy Marshal Hoffman's residence), U.S. Commissioner's residence (reportedly Dimond's and later McGettigan's), and women's jail. Wooden details on the Commissioner's buildings and the women's jail show outstanding log craftsmanship, from hand carved wooden door knobs and hinges to decorative diamond-shaped, wood details around window trim. Unfortunately, the early Chisana records were destroyed by fire. Thus building histories can only be pieced together from period newspapers and the reminiscences of old timers.

A Native village was adjacent to the town (no structures remain). Four Native graves with their Russian Orthodox crosses and small grave houses stand on a rise overlooking the town. The vacant townsite area includes historical archeology potential.

With the construction of the airstrip ca. 1930, new buildings were built at the town's eastern end. An airstrip extension in 1956 and the introduction of fly-in hunting and guide services, brought about preservation of buildings through use. Isolation has saved Chisana from modern intrusions. A walk through the cluster of log structures gives one the sense of scale and ambience of a typical Alaskan gold mining camp's first season of growth.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

The historic district is within an unsurveyed township; the verbal description follows local landmarks. The southern boundary follows the north bank of Johnson Creek and the northern boundary follows, in part, the southwestern and northeastern edge of the Chisana airfield. From the northeast corner of the airfield an extension line of the northern boundary leads due east some 400 feet to a corner point on an imaginary north-south line (this line is the historic district eastern boundary); the eastern boundary extends approximately 500 feet from the northeast corner point south to Johnson Creek and is located in order to include all historic structures within the district (as noted on the map). From the southeastern corner at Johnson Creek, the southern boundary follows Johnson Creek some 2,500 feet due west to an imaginary north-south line which is parallel to the eastern boundary, and extends from the southwest corner on Johnson Creek 1,000 feet due north to the northwest corner point. From the northwest corner point the remaining portion of the northern boundary extends approximately 1,500 feet to the Chisana airfield. The western boundary is to include all known structures or structural remains. And the northern boundary, in main, is to be parallel to the former grid system and be north of all known structures or structural remains.