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

OMB No. 1024-0018



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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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.

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1. Name of Property:

==========

historic name Swanberg Dredge

other names/site number Johnson-Pohl Dredge

AHRS Site No. NOM-00114

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2. Location

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street & number Mile 1 Nome-Council Highway not for publication N/A

city or town Nome 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.**

Judith E. Bittner — Jan 16, 2001
**Signature of certifying official** **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** Edson H. Beall — 3/12/01
**___ See continuation sheet.**
**____ determined eligible for the National Register** _____ _____
**___ See continuation sheet.**
**____ determined not eligible for the National Register** _____ _____
**____ removed from the National Register** _____ _____
**____ other (explain): _____**

_____ _____ _____
**Signature of Keeper** **Date of Action**

## 5. Classification

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

___ private
_X_ public-local
___ public-State
___ public-Federal

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

___ building(s)
___ district
___ site
_X_ structure
___ object

**Number of Resources within Property**

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | buildings |
| _____ | _____ | sites |
| 1 | _____ | structure |
| _____ | _____ | object |
| 1 | 0 | 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

## 6. Function or Use

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

**Cat:** Industry **Sub:** Extractive facility

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

**Cat:** Abandoned/not in use **Sub:**

## 7. Description

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

No style

**Materials (Enter categories from instructions)**

**foundation:** metal
**roof:** metal
**walls:** metal
**other:**

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

The Swanberg Dredge sits in a small pond at Rocker Gulch, approximately one mile east of the center of the City of Nome. It is approximately 200 feet north of the Nome-Council Highway. The Bering Sea is to the south, Nome to the west, the Kigluaik Mountains to the north, and undeveloped flat land to the east. The dredge is approximately 135 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 40 feet high.

The first mining dredges were designed and manufactured in New Zealand. Most dredges in Alaska and Canada were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s and used until the mid-1950s. The Swanberg Dredge was constructed in San Francisco, California, dismantled and shipped in 1946 to Nome where it was reconstructed.

The Swanberg Dredge has a barge-like steel hull, 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and about 6 feet deep. There is a coal-fired boiler in the hull that provided steam heat and a diesel generator that provided electrical power for the machinery. A one-story superstructure covers virtually the entire hull area. A second story on the half of the superstructure toward the bow of the dredge contains the winch room, hopper, and upper end of the trommel screen. The superstructure is steel with corrugated metal sheathing. The flat roofs are covered with metal sheets.

## 8. Statement of Significance

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

- _X_ **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)** Industry

**Period of Significance** 1946-1947

**Significant Dates** 1946

**Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)** N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** N/A

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Spence, Clark C. *The Northern Gold Fleet: Twentieth-Century Gold Dredging in Alaska*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Territory of Alaska. Report of the Commissioner of Mines for the Biennium Ending December 31, 1946.

University Park Elementary School, How Gold Dredges Work, 2000. *www.northstar.k12.ak.us/schools/upk/gold facts/dredge/dredge.html*

Personal contacts with:
Ron Engstrom, miner and longtime Nome resident
Walt Gelvinivitch, retired from Alaska Gold Company
Mary Honsberger, lifelong Nome resident
Jane Perkins, lifelong Nome resident
Diane (Swanberg) Peterson, daughter of Nels Swanberg, Jr.
William Ullrich, former high school teacher, territorial marshal, and lifelong resident of Nome.

**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**
_X_ **Other State agency**
___ **Federal agency**
___ **Local government**
___ **University**
___ **Other**
**Name of repository:** Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** less than one acre

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

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 03 | 482692 | 7151725 | 3 | | | |
| 2 | | | | 4 | | | |

___ **See continuation sheet.**

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

The dredge stands in a small pond in the center of the western quarter of the western half of Section 31, Township 11S, Range 33W, Kateel River Meridian.

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

The boundary of the nominated property encompasses the dredge and the small pond where it has sat since 1946 in the area known as Rocker Gulch, now within the limits of the City of Nome.

## 11. Form Prepared By

**name/title:** Patricia L. Wightman, Environmental Analyst

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

**date:** July 24, 2000

**street & number:** 2301 Peger Road **telephone:** (907) 451-5106

**city or town:** Fairbanks **state:** Alaska **zip code:** 99709

**phone number:** (907) 451-5106

The dredge's bow gantry extends about five feet, and the stern gantry extends about ten feet above the roof of the winch room. The digging ladder at the bow of the dredge is about forty feet long. It has 65 buckets still attached. A single spud at the stern anchored the dredge. It also has a centrifuge that might have been used for removing fine gold from sediments and a save-all sluice located underneath the bucket line to salvage ore dropped by the buckets.

After scooping gravel, the buckets dumped the gravel into the hopper. The hopper fed the trommel. In the trommel the gravel was rinsed with high-pressure water nozzles to break up lumps of dirt and clay. Particles smaller than a half inch passed through the trommel perforations to sluice boxes located on either side of the trommel screen. The oversized material was moved out of the dredge by the stacker conveyor. The sluice boxes continued the washing process. Mercury readily amalgamated with gold and was used to help recover the fine gold from the sluice box riffles.

The Swanberg Dredge has structural integrity although some of the siding on the dredge is missing, the roof leaks, and most of the windows are gone. The basic parts, including the trommel and sluice boxes are still in the structure. The dredge is a good example of small mining dredges built during the mid-twentieth century. The City of Nome owns the dredge and the land where it sits. It plans to develop a gold rush park that will include a boardwalk around the dredge and interpretive kiosks.

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

The Swanberg Dredge, initially known as the Johnson-Pohl Dredge, exemplifies the hopes of miners and mining companies to resume profitable operations on the Seward Peninsula after World War II. The Gold Beach Dredging Company, partly owned by a veteran Alaska gold miner named Walter Johnson, purchased a dredge in San Francisco and shipped it in pieces to Nome in 1946. Unfortunately, wartime inflation made the fixed price of gold, $35 an ounce, inadequate to cover labor and other operating costs. The Swanberg Dredge only operated on the Seward Peninsula for one season before a local bank took possession in 1947. It stands where it stopped operating, and retains structural integrity. It is an example of small gold mining operations, the economic risks of gold mining, and the challenges miners faced working in the far north during the middle years of the twentieth century.

**Historic background**

Miners discovered gold on the Seward Peninsula in the late 1800s, and in 1899 the great Nome gold rush ensued. The excitement died down by the early 1900s, and larger operations that introduced hydraulic mining and dredges around the Seward Peninsula replaced the individual miners and small partnerships. Gold mining continued in the region, although it languished during the 1910s and 1920s. Miners received a big boost in 1934 when President Franklin Roosevelt raised the price of gold by about eight dollars to $35 an ounce. Gold mining dramatically increased, only to be abruptly halted in 1942 when all mining not essential to the Second World War effort was severely restricted by executive order. After the war, the restrictions were lifted. Gold mining resumed, but wartime inflation increased costs, particularly for labor, and few operations could be profitable with the price of gold still set at $35 an ounce.

The Gold Beach Dredging Company was one that hoped to resume gold dredging operations in Alaska after the war. It had acquired claims to Rocker Gulch, just east of Nome, in 1940. To work the area, the company purchased a small gold dredge in San Francisco and shipped it in pieces to Nome in 1946. "Veteran dredge building and operator from San Francisco," and one of the company owners, Walter Johnson, reconstructed the dredge (Spence, p. 128). His financial partner was man named Pohl. Johnson also owned dredges operating on Caribou Creek in the Fairbanks Mining District in interior Alaska and on the Salmon River near Hyder in southeast Alaska; had a hydraulic operation on Slate Creek, a tributary of the Chistochina River in southcentral Alaska; and was one of the owners of a gold-platinum operation near Goodnews Bay in southwest Alaska that operated a dragline in 1946.

Johnson hired a man named Harris to operate the dredge at Nome, replacing Harris that season with a man named Hellrich. The venture was unprofitable. Some local residents said the company did not adequately thaw the ground before dredging. Others said that the pay dirt was deeper than expected. Still others said the costs to strip away the overburden were greater than expected.

Big and small gold mining companies in Alaska found it challenging to operate after World War II because of higher supply and labor costs. According to the Territorial Commissioner of Mines, only fourteen dredges operated in Alaska in 1945, four of which were on the Seward Peninsula. The report noted that the labor shortage hampered operations severely. The number of dredges operating increased the next year when twenty-four dredges operated in Alaska, ten of them on the Seward Peninsula. A Yuba Manufacturing Company dredge expert listed 44 Alaska gold dredging operations, then noted that only 17 of them were active on April 1, 1946 (Spence, p. 128). Some dredges on the Seward Peninsula operated for just a month or so, and twenty-one dredges reportedly sat idle. Before the war, over forty dredges had annually operated around Alaska.

The active dredging operations on the Seward Peninsula in 1946 included Richard and Charlie Lee's two dredges on the Solomon River east of Nome. They had started dredging in 1940, managed to operate during part of the war, and would continue mining until the mid-1960s. Tolbert Scott, a veteran Alaska legislator who had dredged in the Kougarok District north of Nome before the war, used a dredge in that area. In the Council District, two of the four pre-war dredging operations, the Council Dredging Company and the Inland Dredging Company, were working in August 1946. The largest pre-war operator on the Seward Peninsula, the U.S. Smelting, Refining and Mining Company did not resume dredging until 1948.

The local bank owned by Grant Jackson took possession of the Johnson-Pohl dredge in 1947. The Gold Beach Dredging Company hoped to get it back and in 1948 acquired rights to dig a ditch from the Nome River to Rocker Gulch. The ditch was never constructed. The dredge remained on the bank's list of assets until the Alaska National Bank of Fairbanks bought out the Nome bank in 1963. Alaska National Bank sold the dredge for an undisclosed sum to bank board member Nelson Swanberg Jr. in 1966. Of interest, Swanberg had been a part owner of the Rocker Gulch claims before 1940. Swanberg used the dredge as a tourist attraction. Today the City of Nome owns the dredge and plans to build a boardwalk around the dredge as part of the Gold Rush Park currently being developed.

The peak postwar year for gold dredging in Alaska was 1948. Thirty dredges, thirty-eight draglines, and 102 smaller placer works operated. The numbers fluctuated during the 1950s, "but the direction of overall [gold] production was downward" (Spence, p. 127). The Swanberg Dredge is a symbol of the end of the era. Dredges are used only rarely by miners today, victims of environmental protection laws and changes in technology.

**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**

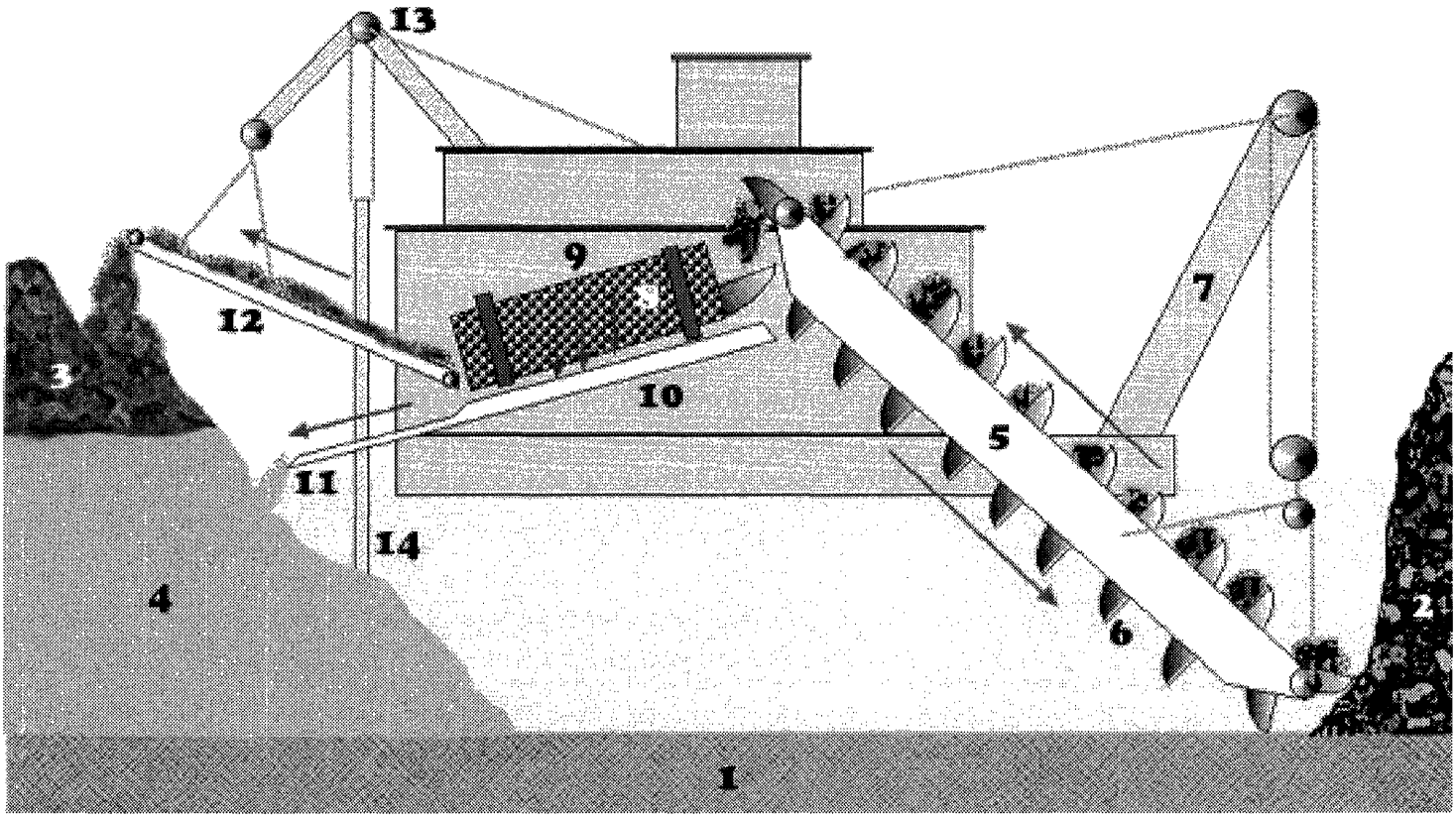
**(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)**

**name:** City of Nome

**street & number:** P.O. Box 281 **telephone:** (907) 443-6663

**city or town:** Nome **state:** AK **zip code:** 99762-0281

The following diagram is of a typical dredge.




1. Bedrock. This is the solid rock on top of which the gravel and dirt rest.

2. Gravel. This is a mix of rocks of various sizes, dirt, and clay.

3. Coarse tailings. Larger rocks were carried on a long conveyor belt and deposited behind the dredge. Tailings got their name because they were deposited at the "tail" of the dredge.

4. Fine tailings. Smaller rocks were sent down the Tail Sluice (11) to be deposited behind the dredge.

5. Bucket line. The bucket line, a long conveyor belt, scooped gravel from the front of the dredge and deposited it in the washing trommel (9).

6. Digging buckets. These were made of thick iron and weighed hundreds of pounds each.

7. Bow gantry. The bow gantry held the bucket line (5) up by a series of pulleys. It raised and lowered the bucket line as conditions dictated.

8. The arrows show where the fine tailings and small gravel containing the gold went as the washing trommel (9) separated them from the coarse tailings (3).

9. Washing trommel. The washing trommel separated the fine gravel from the coarse tailings (3). It was a huge iron cylinder with holes all along its length. It would spin like a washing machine to allow the fine tailings and small gravel to pass through the holes to the sluice boxes (10) underneath. The coarse tailings would be pushed out of the trommel and be conveyed out of the back of the dredge by the coarse tailings conveyor (12).

10. Sluice boxes. Fine gravel was washed through the sluice boxes. The riffles in the sluice boxes trapped the heavier gold. The lighter gravel washed through the tail sluice (11).

11. Tail sluice. The fine tailings (4) from the washing trommel (9) would pass along the tail sluice to be deposited behind the dredge.

12. Coarse tailings conveyor. The conveyor took the coarse tailings (3) from the washing trommel (9) and deposited them behind the dredge.

13. Stern gantry. The stern gantry could move the coarse tailings conveyor (12) from side to side to distribute the coarse tailings (3) evenly behind the dredge.

14. Pivot spud. The pivot spud was driven into the gravel at the stern of the dredge to anchor the dredge in one spot until it was time to move ahead. The dredge could still pivot from side to side.

**Photograph identification**

1. Swanberg Dredge
   Nome, Alaska
   Laura Samuelson, Director, Carrie McLain Museum, Nome
   August 30, 2000
   Alaska Office of History and Archaeology, 550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1310, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3565
   Looking north at the dredge, on the left is the digging ladder and on the right the coarse tailings conveyor

2. Swanberg Dredge
   Nome, Alaska
   Laura Samuelson, Director, Carrie McLain Museum, Nome
   August 30, 2000
   Alaska Office of History and Archaeology, 550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1310, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3565
   Looking northwest

3. Swanberg Dredge
   Nome, Alaska
   Laura Samuelson, Director, Carrie McLain Museum, Nome
   August 30, 2000
   Alaska Office of History and Archaeology, 550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1310, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3565
   Looking north