

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**DATA SHEET**  
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

FEB 28 1979

DATE ENTERED

27

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Wickersham House (AHRS NO. FAI-139)

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Alaskaland

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Fairbanks

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Alaska at Large

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Alaska

CODE

02

COUNTY

Fairbanks Division

CODE

090

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY** DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT**OWNERSHIP** PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION** IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS** OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE** YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO**PRESENT USE** AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

The City of Fairbanks

(907) 452-1881

STREET &amp; NUMBER

410 Cushman Street

(907) 452-4244 Alaskaland

CITY, TOWN

Fairbanks

STATE

\_\_ VICINITY OF

Alaska 99701

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

District Recorder

(907) 452-1541

STREET &amp; NUMBER

604 Barnette Street

CITY, TOWN

Fairbanks

STATE

Alaska 99701

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Alaska Heritage Resource Survey

(907) 274-4676

DATE

6/30/74

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Office of History &amp; Archaeology, 619 Warehouse Dr., Suite 210

CITY, TOWN

Anchorage

STATE

Alaska 99501

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE <u>1967</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

With white picket fence, flower boxes and planted blue-grass lawn, the home of Judge and Mrs. James Wickersham was a frontier phenomena when it was completed in June, 1904. Of planed siding and wood frame, rather than the proverbial log construction; with four rooms and a graceful porch, fence and lawn it was unique among rough miner's cabins, almost all single-roomed and with no amenities. The neighborhood, sloping gently to the south bank of the Chena River, was well-wooded with white birch and some black spruce. Although within easy walking distance it was pastoral compared to the hurly-burly business district. At the corner of Noble, the house faced First Street and had the first wooden residential sidewalk. From the planted lawn, principally to the back of the house, one gained an unexcelled view of the Chena River and the rolling hills of the goldfields to the North.

As built in 1904 the original cottage was free-standing, one story, with an essentially square floor plan for the total of 720 square feet. The interior space included an 18' x 15' parlor, 15' square dining room, slightly smaller bedroom with large closet and an 8' x 15' kitchen with built-in pantry. With exception of a dining room partition, added later, the interior remains unaltered in design (as indicated in attached floor-plan). Interior walls were papered, and by the second year all rooms except the kitchen were carpeted. It was well furnished with contemporary furniture of the period.

Slightly more than two years after completion, Judge Wickersham added two extensions; off the kitchen and the dining room. These two rooms apparently were not as sturdily built as the main house and did not survive much beyond the period of Wickersham occupancy. One of these replaced the tent bedroom for Mrs. Wickersham's summer use, built in 1905.

By the time that James Wickersham moved his legal residence to Juneau in 1921, more affluent residential districts had developed and First street had become largely industrialized. Under a number of subsequent owners, the house declined drastically and finally was slated for demolition to accomodate a filling station. The Pioneers of Alaska then intervned and the house, soon honored as State Landmark #1 was moved, in 1967, to Alaskaland, where a number of other historical buildings, structures, and the sternwheeler Nenana, had already been placed to create an Historical Park.

Now near the Nenana, and sited at almost the same proximity to the Chena Rivers as at its original location, the house was gradually stabilized. In 1976, through a Bicentennial grant, restoration was begun to recapture the aura of Wickersham occupancy as a period home museum; properly honored as the first State Historical Landmark.

Wickersham House has a commanding setting at Alaskaland. It is located along an important street approach--the front entrance facing--just as it did originally at First Street. The open land behind still faces the Chena River. In eventual restoration the white picket fence, window boxes and planted lawn will be added. In its present setting Wickersham House is more harmoniously attuned to its history-laden surroundings and mileau than had it remained in situ. Most importantly it will be maintained and will remain a memorial to a noted Alaskan.

# 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 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 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 1904-1921

BUILDER/ARCHITECT James Wickersham

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designated by Governor Walter J. Hickel as Alaska State Historical Monument No. 1, on May 9, 1966, this house is of transcendent importance in Fairbanks history. Because of the stature of the man whose name it bears as builder and resident, it is of statewide significance, as well. This was the first frame residence, with the first picket fence and planted blue-grass lawn in Fairbanks. The builder, James Wickersham remains a towering figure in Alaskan public life and literature--"The Territory's most dominant political figure for the first three decades of the Twentieth Century." He provided the name for--and is considered one of the founding fathers of Fairbanks.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After having seen yeoman frontier judicial service at Eagle, Nome and Valdez, Judge James V. Wickersham witnessed the beginning of Fairbanks. He arrived in 1903 to establish the new headquarters for Alaska's vast Third Judicial District. As stated in his own words:

Below us, far and wide, lay the glorious valley we had come to help settle. . . From the north bank of the Chena river the new Metropolis of the Tanana came into view on the opposite shore. A rough log structure, with spread-eagle wings looked like a disreputable pig sty, but was in fact, Barnette's trading post, the only mercantile establishment in the new camp. A hundred yards up the stream, also facing the river, a half-finished two-story log building without doors or windows bore the home-made sign on a white cloth-- "Fairbanks Hotel." Two other small log cabins marked, "Pioneer," and "Northern," made known to miners with wilderness thirst that civilization and its vices were there. A half-dozen new squat log structures, a few tents, and an incoming stream of dog teams and gold seekers, a small clearing in the primeval forest-- that was Fairbanks as I first saw it on April 9, 1903.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Wickersham diaries and papers, Ruth Alman, Juneau, Alaska.  
 Wickersham, James OLD YUKON: TALES, TRAILS, TRIALS, Washington Law Book Co., D.C., 1938.  
 Naske, Claus-M, AN INTERPRETIVE HISTORY OF ALASKA STATEHOOD, AK. NW Pub. Co., Anchorage, 1973  
 Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress, HD 442, Gov't Printing Off., D.C. 1961  
 Alaskaland File, City of Fairbanks, Alaska.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY -1

QUADRANGLE NAME Fairbanks (D-2) QUADRANGLE SCALE 1: 63 360

UTM REFERENCES

ok A	<u>26</u>	<u>463450</u>	<u>7190600</u>	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The structure identified as Wickersham House in Alaskaland records.

### 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, State Historian

ORGANIZATION Office of History & Archaeology, Div. of Parks DATE December 14, 1978

STREET & NUMBER 619 Warehouse Dr., Suite 210 TELEPHONE (907) 274-4676

CITY OR TOWN Anchorage 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 A. Starnable

TITLE SHPO DATE 1/23/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE 4-27-79

ATTEST: William Taborch DATE April 27, 1979

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION



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In a community of log structures, this building was considered the first frame residence built in Fairbanks. With a carpenter hired at \$12.50 a day and common laborers at \$1 an hour, using local sawed lumber at \$75 rough and \$100 planed per thousand board feet (much of it hand carried from the mill) the four-room structure went up speedily. On June 11 it was finished: "beautiful (sic) papered. Japanese matting. Moose antlers for hat rack. Lumber bill \$313.80." The judge was pleased with his own handiwork contributions: "made window boxes" for flowers; built the "first real picket fence in the Tanana Valley--real planed pickets and white paint. Blue grass seed for lawn" (the first planted lawn, also).

According to Judge Wickersham's diary for 1905 (March 17) "bought nice carpeting for house, sideboard too, as well as set up phonograph". (May 7) "Had musical, played phonograph" and (May 26) "erected tent bedroom in back of building for Debby". On June 6, he enthused: "wild rose blooms in yard", and (June 23) "board sidewalk now in front of house".

The Wickersham's were now well settled in their comfortable, well-furnished home. For 1906 the diary entries are scant, but important: (Aug. 6) "building two more rooms to house. . . putting in heating plant." and (Sept. 9) "the house has now 6 good rooms." The home at First and Noble would be his castle, even though unanticipated public duties would soon keep him in Washington, D.C. much of the time during his remaining 18 years of residency in Fairbanks.

By 1907 the Judge began grappling with a serious personal decision. Fairbanks continued to escalate; the population was approaching 6,000 and the goldfields were yielding \$10,000,000 annually. Private law practice was in great demand--and remunerative. As Judge Wickersham wrote in his diary, he "was a poor man (\$3,000 salary annually) and just then had a reasonable and proper opportunity to re-enter law practice with a fair prospect of accumulating a stake before opportunity failed or old age overtook". (He had passed his 50th birthday). Additionally, he had never been confirmed as District Judge by the U.S. Senate, but rather had served under repeated recess appointments by President Theodore Roosevelt. A recent disagreement with Alaskan Governor Wilford B. Hoggatt had negated important support. His wife's deteriorating health required constant attention. There was a further dilemma: Republican leaders were increasing the pressure for Wickersham to become a candidate for Alaska's lone Delegate to Congress. Yet on September 8, 1907 he resigned his Judgeship and wrote in his

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diary: ". . . the end of my political career was reached without a pang of regret--with real genuine feeling of relief--I can now begin to organize my home life--library--and my own private fortune." He misjudged his destiny. Wickersham,reluctantly, became a Republican candidate for Alaskan Delegate in June 1908. Thereafter, however, he was avidly elected to the 61st and three succeeding Congresses (March 4, 1909-March 3, 1917). Then he successfully contested the election of Charles A. Sulzer to the 65th Congress and served from January 7 to March 3, 1919. He again successfully contested the election of Sulzer to the 66th Congress; and served from March 1 to March 3, 1921, succeeding George B. Grigsby (who had qualified on credentials of a special election to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Sulzer, which occurred while the contest was pending). He was not a candidate for renomination in 1920. James Wickersham moved to Juneau in 1921, because of its importance as the Capitol, and resumed the practice of law. He was elected to the 72nd Congress (March 4, 1931-March 3, 1933); unsuccessful ran for reelection in 1932; then resided in Juneau until his death, October 24, 1939.

The man who has been called "the Territory's most dominant political figure for the first three decades of the Twentieth Century" also litigated much of Alaska's most dramatic mining law cases. Although voteless as lone Delegate during the formative years of the Civil Code Period, which initiated Home Rule, James Wickersham was the architect of the Second Organic Act (1912) which gave Alaska its first Legislature. This, in turn, provided women's suffrage, improved public education, saw extensive trail, wagon road and railroad building, provided full citizenship and voting rights for Natives, workmen's compensation, a Pioneer's Home, juvenile courts, establishment of a University system, creation of the offices of Attorney General, Treasurer, Commissioners of Health and Mine Inspection, and the first attempt at popular election of the Governor.

Wickersham was an effective Populist advocate in a period of intense conflict between small business, public and monopolistic interests relating to mining, merchandising, transportation and fisheries. His tenure in the national Congress saw the creation of National forests, some conservation measures, settlement of the long-standing boundary dispute with Canada, an International agreement on sea otter and fur seal, ameliorating of the serious dislocations created by World War I, and introduction of the first bill for Alaskan Statehood. But he also developed an intense disenchantment with "federal bureaucratic bumbling" of Alaskan affairs. Insufficient home rule was frustrated by internal efforts

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within the Federal frame-work. In 1923, speaking against "the power of national bureaucracy" he said, "This autocratic enemy to free government is making its last stand. There actually exists today a congressional government in Alaska. . . by 30 bureaus and their executive proclamations. . . more offensive in practice than that which existed here during the 70 years of Russian rule under the Czar."

The residence at Fairbanks is tangible physical evidence of the significant contributions that James Wickersham provided Alaska and the Nation.



PLAN 1/4" = 1'-0"  
TOTAL SQUARE FEET = 722 sq. ft.  
(NOT INCLUDING PORCH)

LIVING ROOM  
15' x 18' = 270 sq. ft.

BEDROOM  
8' x 11'4" = 96 sq. ft.

CLOSET  
3'4" x 8' = 29.8 sq. ft.

FRONT PORCH  
6'-2 1/2" x 8'-6" = 53 sq. ft.

ENTRY

EXISTING PARTITION  
TO BE REMOVED

PANTRY

DINING  
13' x 15' = 200 sq. ft.

KITCHEN  
8' x 15' = 126 sq. ft.

(PREVIOUS ADDITION)

