

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED OCT 10 1979

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JAN 4 1980

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

Government Cable Office (AHRS SITE NO. SEW-200)

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

218 6th Avenue

_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Seward

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Alaska

VICINITY OF

Alaska, at large

CODE

02

COUNTY

Seward Division

CODE

210

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

 DISTRICT BUILDING 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

Ann M. Lacey

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 4-147

CITY, TOWN

Anchorage

STATE

Alaska 99509

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

District Recorder

STREET & NUMBER

Box 596

CITY, TOWN

Seward

STATE

Alaska 99664

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) (907) 274-4676

DATE

April 10, 1978

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDSOffice of History & Archaeology, Alaska Division of Parks
619 Warehouse Dr., Suite 210

CITY, TOWN

Anchorage

STATE
Alaska

99501

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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

The cable office, essentially completed and in use in 1905, was a distinctive two-story frame building, approximately 25' x 30', erected on a concrete foundation. The exterior finish was stucco cream color with pink trim. The original pillared front porch, with a balcony on top surrounded by a railing, remains. The building has a metal roof with a brick chimney in the center. The second story has one dormer with three windows. All the windows in the building have many small panes. The exterior design is unaltered from its original appearance.

The interior of the first floor as originally used was described in this way: The operator's room (or central space) was closed entirely to the public. Messages were received in the front room into which the main entrance under the porch led from 6th avenue. Here a railing separated the public from the receiving clerk. In back of the operator's room was a smaller room for testing batteries. Upstairs were sleeping rooms for the employees. (Daily Gateway, August 9, 1905).

Very little functional change occurred in the building between 1924 and 1931-- when Seward and Ketchikan were the last remaining cable stations in Alaska. If anything, however, traffic and activity was even more brisk. In 1931 the cable service was terminated and replaced by wireless. This continued until 1961 when all mechanical and management activities were transferred to City Hall; but at that time both floors provided living accommodations for employees. The government then disposed of its interest in the building and it has privately operated as an apartment since then, retaining the landmark features so well remembered by the generations since 1905.

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Aug. 18, 1905-1961 BUILDER/ARCHITECT U.S. Army Signal Corps

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The extension of the Alaska Cable to Seward and building of the Cable Station marked a significant epoch in the history of Seward. It signified recognition by the government of the importance of the tidewater terminus of Alaska's first railroad to the interior and gave confidence to those who were planning and working to make Seward the metropolis of the great Northwest Territory. It placed businessmen in immediate touch with outside interests which corresponded with their own, and gave to every resident a much-desired daily communication with the outside world. (Daily Gateway, August 7, 1905)

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

This building was constructed as the cable office and station for the Washington to Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph system (WAMCATS) with completion of the extension of the cable from Valdez to Seward.

Perhaps of greater and more lasting value to Alaska than all the benefits derived from the discovery of gold was the development of a communications system which brought the distant populated sections of the Territory together and linked them by ocean cable with the continental United States.

On May 26, 1900, Congress provided funds for the extensive communications system which would tie Alaska and the States together. This act initially provided \$450,550 for connecting Headquarters, Department of Alaska, at Fort St. Michael, by telegraph and cable lines with other Army posts in Alaska. As originally planned, and as provided for in the Congressional Act, the Alaska telegraph system would have brought the territorial military posts into communication with each other and with the commanding general, stationed at Fort St. Michael. This in itself would have been a worthwhile logistical accomplishment, but the far-seeing policy and aggressive leadership of General A.W. Greely, brigadier general of the Signal Corps, carried this venture much further to connect most of Alaska with the United States. Commercial business over these facilities was to be permitted insofar as deemed equitable and in the public interests by the Secretary of War. Enthusiastic over the project and having the authority and funds (plus the necessary political support furnished by Secretary of War Elihu Root) General Greely demanded immediate and forceful action to serve these broader purposes.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

UTM NOT VERIFIED

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY -1

QUADRANGLE NAME Seward (A-7)

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:63 360

UTM REFERENCES

A 0,6 3,6,4,5,9,0 6,6,6,5,3,1,0
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 10 and 11 in Block 8 of the Townsite of Seward, in the Seward Recording Precinct, Third Judicial District, State of Alaska. Also as shown on sheet 4, Sanborn Map of August, 1927.

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

Pamela Goodall/Assistant Librarian

ORGANIZATION

Seward Community Library

DATE

March 30, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

Box 537

TELEPHONE

(907) 224-3646

CITY OR TOWN

Seward

STATE

Alaska 99664

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

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

10/4/79

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

W. Ray ...
 ATTEST: W. Ray ...

DATE

1/4/80

for
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

Dec 20, 1979

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So vast a project was unique in the annals of telegraphic engineering, in respect to the immensity, remoteness, inaccessibility, climatic severity and uninhabited nature of the region to be served. But the Signal Corps vigorously attacked the almost insurmountable difficulties which faced it, and under the leadership of General Greely erected a marvelous monument to its skill, fortitude and courage. With the help of Infantry units, Signal Corps built a remarkable system of communication with the rest of the civilized world. (The U.S. Army in Alaska, Pamphlet 360-5, July 1972, pg. 48)

By a second Act of Congress (approved March 2, 1905) an appropriation of \$95,000 was made for the extension of the cable from Valdez to Seward at the head of Resurrection Bay, the southern terminus of what would become the Alaska Railroad. Its length was 223 miles. (Pathfinder of Alaska, May 1925). Civilian service was now recognized as permanent.

Seward's rapid communications were thus initiated on August 7, 1905. The first message transmitted over the cable after it was connected was to A. C. Frost, president of the Alaska Central Railway, then in Chicago:

"This first message transmitted over Alaska Cable connects Seward from this day to the great city of Chicago." (Daily Gateway, August 7, 1905).

U.S. Commissioner Hildreth also sent a message to Attorney General Moody, requesting him to send greetings to the President of the United States from the citizens of Seward. The reply from President Roosevelt through the Attorney General was:

"The president has read with great pleasure your cablegram, the first coming over the Seattle-Seward cable; and desires me to express to you, and through you to the citizens of Seward his cordial thanks, for greetings and good wishes and hearty congratulations on completion of the cable." (Daily Gateway, August 18, 1905).

The Station building was sufficiently complete to be put into immediate use when the cable was laid to Seward. Shortly thereafter, the building was completely finished. In early February, 1906, a flagstaff 20 feet high was set on top of the cable station to fly a flag 8 feet long, furnished by the cable operator at Valdez. (Seward Weekly Gateway, February 10, 1906)

The cable that was laid from Valdez to Seward in 1905 lasted until 1924, when a new cable replaced it. It had been decided by General Greely that when the additional cable was secured, that the northern terminal would be Seward, now the terminus of the Alaska Railroad, rather than Valdez.

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The cable proved an important factor in the building of the Alaska Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks. The railroad now established an alternate route to the Yukon Valley, much superior to earlier wagon roads, river boats, and trails. The completion of the railroad had added materially to the importance of Seward. The development of Seward and then Cordova tended to decrease the importance of Valdez; and with the increased traffic over the Alaska Railroad, Cordova, too, began to decline in importance. With all these factors taken into consideration, the decision to favor Seward placed an entirely different aspect on the public communications facilities in Alaska.

The establishment of Ketchikan as the main relay point, with one cable running direct to Seattle and branches serving the two main sections of Alaska central and southeastern Alaska -each of which had approximately the same amount of traffic with Seattle and considerable traffic with each other, clearly indicated that Ketchikan would be a bottleneck. The solution was to duplex the cable between Seattle and Ketchikan (which would permit two messages to be sent simultaneously), and to provide the cable office at Ketchikan with relays.

With this accomplished, a station in southeastern Alaska could transmit a simplex-operated (single message) cable to Ketchikan, and from there over the duplex-operated cable to Seattle, Seward to be sending or receiving from Seattle over the same cable. Or by a simple switching arrangement, Seward could now work with a southeastern Alaska station while Ketchikan was transmitting to Seattle. (The U. S. Army in Alaska, pag. 59).

The new Ketchikan-Seward cable link was completed on October 10, 1924. Entrenching the shore cable for the low-water mark was a difficult task, as it involved crossing under the Alaska Railroad tracks and a section through the city streets. On December 1, 1931 the use of the Seattle-Ketchikan, Ketchikan-Seward cables, which were the last remaining cables in operation, was discontinued. All traffic between the lower 48 and Alaska, and within Alaska, was thereafter handled by radio.

In 1933 the Ketchikan-Seward cable, while not in use, was still in excellent operating condition and was tested daily. When the Seward-Cordova cable was interrupted by an earthquake shock in 1934, it was not repaired. The advancing tide of radio had gradually reduced the value of the cables until their maintenance no longer was justified. So by the end of June 1940, cables no longer existed as an active part of the system. (The U. S. Army in Alaska, pg. 63)

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According to records at the District Recorders' office, the U.S. Government retained ownership of the cable building until 1961. It was then converted into apartments for Alaska Communication System employees when they took over. The mechanics and operation were moved to City Hall. Later in the year the original cable office was sold to a local family, and has been an apartment house ever since. It remains much as it was during the important years from 1905 to 1961; and is in excellent condition.

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The Iditarod Trail (Seward-Nome Route) and Other Gold Rush Trails, pages 83-107.

The Pathfinder of Alaska, March 1925, pages 5-6, 18, May 1925, pages 5-7, 17, April 1925, pages 3-6.

Seward Weekly Gateway and Daily Gateway, August 7, 9, 18, September 2, 23, 1905; February 10, October 20, 1906; May 30, 1908; February 5, 1921; October 9, 1924.

U. S. Army in Alaska, Pamphlet 360-5, July 1972, pages 47-65.

A sketch showing completion dates of the
 Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System

