



1031

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 Kirsch's Place

other names/site number Fireweed Station Lodge  
AHRS Site No. TAL-065

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2. Location

=====

street & number Mile 1.5 Sunshine Road or Mile 215.3 Alaska Railroad

not for publication n/a

city or town Talkeetna vicinity X

state Alaska code AK county Matanuska-Susitna code 170

zip code 99664

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. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Judith E. Bettner
Signature of certifying official

Dec 1, 1997
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:

- X entered in the National Register 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]

1/9/98

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Kirsch's Place

Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>      </u>	sites
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	structures
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	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

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**6. Function or Use**

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

Cat: domestic Sub: hotel

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

Cat: domestic Sub: hotel

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Description**

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

no style

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials (Enter categories from instructions)**

foundation concrete

roof metal

walls log

other \_\_\_\_\_

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

About twelve miles south of Talkeetna, Alaska, Kirsch's Place sits two hundred feet to the east of the Alaska Railroad tracks at Mile 215.3, at the northern end of Sunshine Siding. The switch that joins the second, or crossing, track to the main line is two hundred feet south of the lodge. When John Kirsch built the lodge in 1946 the railroad's Sunshine Section House stood at the siding.

The setting is one of rolling hills and boreal forest (birch, white and black spruce, willows, and alder). At the time of the lodge's construction, Mt. McKinley could be seen to the northwest from the site. Fires set during construction of the Alaska Railroad had lowered the forest's canopy which has since grown back and obstructed the view. Sunshine Creek passes beneath the tracks a half mile north, and Montana Creek is about three miles to the east of the lodge. A fresh water spring is about a hundred yards north of the lodge and fifty feet east of the tracks.

Kirsch built the lodge in 1946 to house family and guests. Oriented north-south, it is a one-and-one-half story log building constructed of three sided logs and measures 11.7 x 8.6 meters. The west elevation is the main façade. This elevation has a door towards the left end accessed by stairs. A second door is in a 3 x 2.5 meter arctic entry at the right end. Spaced between the doors, from left, is a 1/1 double hung sash window, a paired 1/1 double hung sash window, and a smaller 1/1 double hung sash window.

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

- 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.)

- 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)

commerce  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1946

Significant Dates 1946  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Kirsch, John  
\_\_\_\_\_

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Kirsch's Place

Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska

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**9. Major Bibliographic References**

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Crume, De Verle. Personal communication, 1988 to 1996.

Kari, James and James A. Fall, editors. *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina*. Fairbanks, Alaska: Native Language Center and the CIRI Foundation, 1987.

Kirsch, Andrew. Personal communication, 1993, 1994, 1997.

Kirsch, Jim. Personal communication, 1993, 1996.

Luthman, Vern. Personal communication, 1997.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough. *Knik Matanuska Susitna - a visual history of the valleys*. Sutton, Alaska: Brentwood Press, 1985.

Seager-Boss, Fran. *Talkeetna Middle-Susitna Region: An Archaeological Survey and Inventory*. Palmer, Alaska: Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 1996.

Spurlin, Walter, personal communication, summer 1993.

- 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
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

**Name of repository:** Matanuska-Susitna Borough

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Kirsch Cabin

Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska

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**10. Geographical Data**
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**Acreeage of Property** 2 acres

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

Table with 6 columns: Zone, Easting, Northing, Zone, Easting, Northing. Row 1: 1, 05, 652460, 6896750, 3, [blank]. Row 2: 2, [blank], [blank], [blank], 4, [blank]. Row 3: [blank], [blank], [blank], [blank], [blank], See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)**

The lodge occupies the front portion of a five acre parcel in Section 18, Township 24 North, Range 4 West, Seward Meridian. The site is bounded on the west by the Alaska Railroad. Beginning at the northern end of the Sunshine Siding switch, it runs 330 feet north, then 200 feet east, then 330 feet south, and 200 feet west.

**Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)**

The boundary includes the lodge, shed, outhouse, and dump site built and used by John Kirsch between 1946 and 1959 that comprised the lodge.

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**11. Form Prepared By**
=====

**name/title** Thomas G. Kluberton, Owner

**organization** Fireweed Station Lodge

**date** July 5, 1997

**telephone** 907-733-1457

**street & number** P.O. Box 200

**city or town** Talkeetna

**state** AK

**zip code** 99676

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**Additional Documentation**
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**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)**

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The north elevation is a gabled end with a paired 1/1 double hung sash window at the right corner of the first floor, and a single 1/1 double hung sash window toward the left corner. The gable wall has wood shingle siding. Two windows are evenly spaced in the gable wall.

The east elevation has four windows spaced along its length. Three are 1/1 double hung sash windows and one is a fixed window. The south elevation is the other gabled end. A door to the second story is centrally placed in the gable, with windows evenly spaced on either side of the door. A stairway of halved log stringers and tread lead to a small landing outside the door. A window is centrally placed on the first floor of this side. The arctic entry is on the left side of this elevation. It has a paired 2/2 double hung sash window in its south side.

The lodge's wall logs, originally set on creosoted posts, are now on a cement foundation. They are eighteen courses high to the gables. Initially, the lodge had a dirt cellar just beneath the kitchen. The second owner expanded the root cellar to the full dimensions of the building. An entry to the basement was made on the north end of the lodge. Stairs constructed from railroad ties led to a door framed by railroad ties. A shingled roof sitting on small spruce posts covered the stairs. It had no walls and deteriorated. In 1993, concrete walls and a floor were installed. A new door and stairs will be installed in keeping with the original architecture of the building. The original roofing material has been replaced with a metal roof.

Fifty feet south of the lodge is a small shed. It measures 2.43 x 6.19 meters and is divided into two roughly equal parts. The west half was added by the second owners. A log outhouse stands a hundred feet south of the shed. Standing 150 feet northeast, slightly uphill from the lodge is a non-contributing barn/corral built by the second owner. Fifteen meters east of the barn is a dump, a contributing site.

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

Kirsch's Place, built in 1946, is a rare artifact of the post-World War II era movement to settle and develop the rural areas of southcentral Alaska adjacent to and only accessible by the Alaska Railroad. The expansion of the World War II military bases near Anchorage and the town's growing population because of construction jobs created the dynamics to support Kirsch's dream of operating a backcountry lodge. John Vernon Kirsch constructed his lodge along the Alaska Railroad tracks at the north end of Sunshine Crossing to provide lodging for people interested in hunting the abundant moose in the upper Susitna River valley and fishing in Montana and Sunshine creeks. To augment the family's income, he tried mink farming and ran a trap line. Kirsch pursued his dream and operated the lodge until his death in 1959. In the early 1960s the new State of Alaska began constructing roads in the area making the area north of Anchorage and Palmer more accessible, thus ending the post-war development period in southcentral Alaska.

Historic background

Alaska's population declined after the turn-of-the-century gold rushes, and Alaskans looked to the federal government to help attract settlers. Between 1915 and 1923, the federal government constructed the Alaska Railroad. After, the federal government not only operated the railroad, it also conducted campaigns to encourage settlement around it. In 1935, the federal government funded a resettlement relief project to move approximately 200 families to create a farming community in the Matanuska Valley. John Vernon and Rose Mae Kirsch participated in this program. Although they left the project in 1940, they wanted to stay in Alaska. After working wartime construction projects in Anchorage, John, Rose, and their three sons moved to Sunshine in 1946.

Kirsch's friend and former-colonist, Kerwin Frank, ran the railroad section house at Sunshine. Fortuitously, the 1917 survey of the area defined a 28.8 acres parcel along the railroad right-of-way in Township 24 North, Range 4 West, Seward Meridian. Exactly how much land Kirsch acquired to build his lodge is not clear, but the five acre parcel in Lot 5 that includes the lodge was part of his land.

Kirsch's dream was to operate a hunting and fishing lodge. Kirsch and his sons constructed a log lodge to specifications drafted by son Andrew. He had a railroad bulldozer operator cut a road from the lodge to nearby Montana Creek, then moved a small trailer near the creek to provide shelter for clients. Kirsch added one small cabin on Montana Creek, and one on Hugo Lake (assumed to be one of the lakes now referred to as Sunshine Lakes).

Relying on word of mouth for clientele, Kirsch had many customers, particularly servicemen from the Anchorage bases. He charged ten dollars a night for room and board. Rose Kirsch cooked the meals until she moved to

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Anchorage in the early 1950s. Generally, the guests slept in the two rooms upstairs which had no indoor access to the rest of the lodge. Special guests, such as doctors, stayed in the boys' rooms. As many as twelve clients a night were accommodated.

For additional income, Kirsch tried mink farming. It proved unprofitable. The family also ran trap lines around Sunshine Lake, Montana Creek, and along the Susitna River.

The boys left to work for the Alaska Railroad. In 1959 Kirsch died and the family turned the lodge over to Louis Odsather, the insurance company representative, to pay off debts. In 1963 Walter Spurlin and Bob Coulors purchased the lodge. Coulors died in a bulldozer accident shortly after. The Spurlin family made the lodge their home in 1964 and lived there until 1974 when Walter retired from the Alaska Railroad. The current owner operates the lodge as a bed and breakfast.

Kirsch's Place is one of few that remain from the post-World War II period of growth and development of rural areas in southcentral Alaska. Few were on adequate foundations. Some were abandoned and deteriorated; others were altered and no longer have their historic appearance. In the 1960s road access began to supplement railroad access in the area starting a new period of growth and development.

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Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska

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

**name** Thomas G. Kluberton

**street & number** P.O. Box 200

**telephone** 907-733-1457

**city or town** Talkeetna **state** AK **zip code** 99676  
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**NPS Form 10-900-a**  
**(8-86)**

**OMB No. 1024-0018**

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section** Photograph identification  
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1. Kirsch's Place  
Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska  
Tom Kluberton  
July 4, 1996  
P.O. Box 200, Talkeetna, Alaska 99676  
looking northeast at the west front and south side elevations of the lodge
2. Kirsch's Place  
Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska  
Tom Kluberton  
July 4, 1996  
P.O. Box 200, Talkeetna, Alaska 99676  
looking southwest at the east back and north side elevations of the lodge
3. Kirsch's Place  
Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska  
Tom Kluberton  
July 4, 1996  
P.O. Box 200, Talkeetna, Alaska 99676  
looking southeast at the west front of the lodge and the shed
4. Kirsch's Place  
Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska  
Tom Kluberton  
July 4, 1996  
P.O. Box 200, Talkeetna, Alaska 99676  
looking east from the Alaska Railroad at the site
5. Kirsch's Place  
Matanuska-Susitna, Alaska  
Tom Kluberton  
July 4, 1996  
P.O. Box 200, Talkeetna, Alaska 99676  
looking south at front of shed

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 97001631

Date Listed: 01/09/98

Kirsch's Place  
Property Name

Matanuska-Susitna AK  
County State

N/A  
Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*Paul R. [Signature]*  
to \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

1/9/98  
Date of Action

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Amended Items in Nomination:

Resource Count:

The outhouse is considered a contributing resource to the property. For clarity, the count is therefore revised to read: three contributing buildings. The dump is considered an independent contributing resource since it represents a common property type historically associated with isolated rural domestic properties (similar to outhouses, wells, or springs), where access to public utilities and services is nonexistent.

U. T. M. Coordinates:

The correct UTM coordinates are: 05 652460 6896090.

This information was confirmed with Jo Antonson of the AK SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)