

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**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 Thomas, George C., Memorial Library (AHRS FAI-004)  
AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 901 First Avenue  
CITY, TOWN Fairbanks VICINITY OF Alaska  
STATE Alaska CODE 02 COUNTY Fairbanks Division CODE 090

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input 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 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Fairbanks North Star Borough (907) 452- 4761  
STREET & NUMBER Box 1267  
CITY, TOWN Fairbanks VICINITY OF Alaska STATE Alaska 99707

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC District Recorder (907) 452-3521  
STREET & NUMBER 604 Barnette Street  
CITY, TOWN Fairbanks STATE Alaska 99701

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Alaska Heritage Resource Survey (AHRS)  
DATE 23 February 1972  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Alaska Division of Parks, 323 East 4th Avenue  
CITY, TOWN Anchorage STATE Alaska 99501

## 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Built in 1909, the George C. Thomas Memorial Library, located at 901 First Avenue in the City of Fairbanks, is a square, log structure. Originally, the building had large windows on each facade, but those on the south and west side have been boarded over. Six log columns on the north and east facades support the hip roof that extends over a wide gallery along the two sides. A full basement is partially below ground level, and a door to the lower level was added after the original construction.

After the fire in 1949 that destroyed about a third of the collection, the interior of the library was remodelled and some changes made to facilitate the library service. The original stamped metal wall covering has been retained where possible. Dirt-filled plank half-walls in the basement are typical of one insulation technique used for buildings in Interior Alaska. Extensive alteration of the lower level has been necessary to provide a working area for the staff.

Owned and maintained by the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the library is open to the public.

# 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      1909

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Significance

The George C. Thomas Memorial Library in the City of Fairbanks was selected in 1915 for the unprecedented meeting between six Tanana chiefs and United States Government officials to discuss native claims to the land and needs concerning work and education. This conference began the natives fight to get compensation for land in Alaska traditionally theirs. In 1971 the federal Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act awarded the natives \$462,500,000, 38,000,000 acres of land, and established regional and village corporations. Built in 1909 and still in use, the library building at 901 First Avenue is a tribute to American missionary activity in Alaska. Purchased from the Episcopal Church in 1942, the City of Fairbanks, and since 1968, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, continues to maintain the library.

### Historical Background

The Episcopal Missionary Society in Alaska believed they had a responsibility to provide reading materials to people in isolated areas. According to local tradition, in 1905 eight sourdoughs from Fairbanks wrote to the Reverend Peter Trimble Rowe, first Episcopal Bishop in Alaska, asking for "mental food." In response, St. Matthew's Mission in Fairbanks, established in 1904, began to provide reading materials for the public and to operate a 24-hour reading room. Magazines and newspapers donated by Episcopal parishes throughout the United States were given away, mailed upon request.

In 1909, Mr. George C. Thomas, a layman interested in the Church's missionary work, donated money to construct a separate library building, and pledged \$1,000 yearly for three years to maintain the building. Although Thomas never came to Alaska, in fact he died before the building was completed, the Board of Trustees decided unanimously to call the new library the George C. Thomas Memorial Library. The formal opening was Thursday evening, August 5, 1909, with speeches given by Archdeacon Stuck, who had donated the first books to open the reading room, and the Honorable James V. Wickersham, Territorial Delegate to Congress.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"History of the George C. Thomas Memorial Library." Unpublished manuscript, Fairbanks, Alaska: George C. Thomas Memorial Library, n.d.  
Malloy, Fran. "How the Library Got Its Name, "Fairbanks Daily News-Miner (27 June 1949).  
Tatty, Stanton H. "A Conference With the Tanana Chiefs," The Alaska Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring, 1971), 2-18.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY       .5      

UTM REFERENCES

A 06 46,54,49 7,19,17,4,9  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B              
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C            

D            

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 1, Block 18, Fairbanks townsite.  
64°50'41"N, 147°43'58"W

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Joan M. Antonson, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Alaska Division of Parks

DATE

30 January 1976

STREET & NUMBER

323 East 4th Avenue

TELEPHONE

(907) 272-4401

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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The library was selected in 1915 as the site for the first meeting between native chiefs in Alaska and United States government officials. On July 5th and 6th, six chiefs, several village headmen, an interpreter, and an Episcopal missionary, the Reverend Guy H. Madara, represented the 1,200 to 1,500 Athabascan Indians in the region. The federal delegation included Alaska's Congressional delegate, Wickersham, two Alaska Engineering Commission representatives, and two land office men. The meeting, reportedly sought by the natives, aired native concerns especially claims to the land, but also educational needs and possibilities for native employment particularly in the construction of the Alaska Railroad. Significantly, at the meeting the chiefs rejected the Government offer to establish reservations. The historic, unprecedented meeting began the natives struggle for recognition of their rights to the land and for an understanding of their cultures. The value of the conference was realized in 1971 when the United States Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The law, the first of its kind, awarded Alaska natives monetary compensation and claim to thirty-eight million acres through regional and village corporations.

Negotiations with the City of Fairbanks began in 1940, and for \$1.00 the lot, library and contents were sold by the Episcopal Church to the city with one restriction, that the site always be used for a public library. Fire damage destroyed about one-third of the collection in October, 1949. Local clubs provided money to refurnish the library, and contributions from individuals and libraries in the states replaced many books. On March 1, 1968 the Fairbanks North Star Borough assumed operation of the library. Today, the building looks almost exactly as it did in August, 1909. The collection includes 6,500 books, a pamphlet collection and a special collection on geology and mining. Upon request, the library continues to loan books by mail to individuals in isolated areas.

Recognition of the George C. Thomas Memorial Library was given on February 23, 1972 when the site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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Stuck, Hudson. The Alaska Missions of the Episcopal Church.  
New York: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 1920.