

Cape Nome Roadhouse (Continued)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

area some 80 miles distant, came into being in 1900 and played its part in the peak excitement of the next few years; and then in the more orderly mechanized mining which developed and continues to this day as the Peninsula's principal industry.

Following its intimate interrelationship to the gold rush, Cape Nome Roadhouse continued to serve as a major stopover for dogteams traveling the historic Nome to Fairbanks trail, and soon also the Iditarod Trail, originating at the open seaport of Seward. Had the trails, tribulations and adventures of thousands of travelers been logged or recorded at Cape Nome during the stopovers, they would provide a rich and colorful source history of Sourdough Alaska in the first three decades of the 20th century. In any event, being 14 miles from Nome--considered a good day's travel--Cape Nome was a popular first or last day stop for countless travelers.

One of the dramatic events, well documented, occurred in 1925. A diphtheria epidemic struck Nome. The only way to get serum to that winter-isolated place was by relays of crack dog teams and mushers racing from Nenana, 650 miles away. The last stage of the race was run by Leonard Seppala, one of the great dog trainers of the North, who twice won the All-Alaska Sweepstakes. Two of Seppala's teams which ran the final 200 miles were Togo and Balto. The later dog, immortalized by the press, had a monument erected in his honor in New York's Central Park. Cape Nome is the only surviving roadhouse used by Seppala in that event.

Inside profile is a modified New England "salt box" design, except for the functional practicalities. For here, unlike a true salt box, the front and side elevation features (doors and predominant windows) are reversed. It is doubtful if the design was premeditated. The largest expanse of roof section, sloped from two stories to one was probably a concession to heavy roof snow, drifting snow, and prevailing winds rather than to any aesthetic consideration. The appearance is uncommon for Arctic Alaska at any time--but was even more so in the early part of this century. As an Alaskan roadhouse, Cape Nome is definitely unique and atypical.

Initially the interior was barracks-like; to provide a maximum of sleeping accommodations in two large, unpartitioned rooms which utilized most of the space; plus a smaller dining room and kitchen. Eventually, more partitioning was added. Other slight modifications were made when the use changed to merchandising rather than provision of room and board; and more recently as essentially a family residence. But despite the absence of known floor plans, drawings, and interior photographs, sufficient visual evidence exists to enable identification of the early roadhouse features.

To cope with an overwhelming trade demand, the initial 1900 crude basic log structure was enlarged in 1901 with sawed timber framework and elevated in its dominant section of two stories. Manufactured doors and windows were added and the entire unorthodox-shaped structure was covered with milled horizontal siding shiplap.

With the exception of the cottage-like residential wing added at the rear, the general exterior profile impression has remained essentially unchanged. Paint, trim and more windows and doors added over the years--particularly in the past decade--provide a more contemporary appearance that was seen in the gold rush period, or through the dogsledding era.

Although Cape Nome Roadhouse gives the impression of being larger, the roof peaks at 21 feet, the width is 44 feet, and the length (heightened visually by the elongated sloping roof) is 55 feet.

No photographs of the original 1900 long structure have been found, but it has been described as squat, sturdy, and convenient. Heavy demand coupled with better availability of lumber and other prefabricated building materials, undoubtedly brought about the early enlargement. Except for modifications noted, the building in situ, has existed for three-quarters of a century.

With the exception of the highway and the World War II reminders, the surrounding terrain appears to have changed very little since 1900.