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PRESS RELEASE

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The “Old Timer” at Chena Townsite is a National Historic Place

(Fairbanks, AK) – The Chena Building was listed by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places in Washington, DC, on December 16, 2024. A rare example of a commercial-style false-front building in Interior Alaska has been nationally recognized for its association with gold rush era settlements and architecture.

“Because the Chena Building was moved, returned to its original townsite – and is now near where it is believed to be the historic location – the property has significant and rare interpretive value for telling the story of the long-forgotten town of Chena,” **said Director of Alaska Parks and Outdoor Recreation Ricky Geese.**

State Historic Preservation Officer Judith Bittner agrees: “While the rescued property continues to face significant environmental and human-caused threats and requires extensive rehabilitation,” said Bittner. “The historic Chena Building is believed to be one of the last remaining buildings from the Chena Townsite in the Fairbanks borough.”

The small, narrow, false front, wood-frame building was most likely constructed sometime after 1905 in the now non-existent town of Chena, situated approximately 9 miles downstream from Fairbanks, Alaska, near the confluence of the Chena and Tanana Rivers. The historic Chena townsite served, alongside Fairbanks, as a central transportation hub for Interior Alaska between 1903 and 1920, serving all the Tanana Basin gold-rush communities via the Tanana Valley Railroad, the first operating railroad in Interior Alaska. Noted as a store in Chena, the Chena Building’s architectural style reflects the conditions and visual language of early 20th-century boomtown commerce. The Chena Building likely moved from the Chena townsite to Fairbanks City around the same time as the liquidation of Tanana Valley Railroad (1917), marking the final chapter in Chena's brief history.

In Fairbanks, the Civil Aviation Authority repurposed the Chena Building as an administrative office associated with housing and placed it on the periphery of the now non-existent Weeks Field, once Fairbanks' main civilian airfield. Fairbanks resident Alaska Linck moved The Chena Building to a private lot on 10th Avenue in the 1950s. According to a longtime friend of the Linck family, Bob Darling, Alaska Linck had mentioned that her old building originated in Chena and was one of her most “prized possessions.” Alaska Linck’s son, Jim Moody, affectionately dubbed the historic building “Old Timer,” underscoring its historical value to the local community.

After Moddy’s passing in 2018, the Lincks/Moody estate, local historians, and preservationists brought the “Old Timer” to the attention of the Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation and

donated the building to the State of Alaska. Alaska State Parks returned the building to the historic Chena Townsite, situated partly within an existing facility, a combined-use public access site, and a boat landing.

Over the past 120 years, human and natural processes have nearly obliterated the historic Chena townsite as the braided channels of the Tanana River have changed their courses and eroded much of the town's Front Street and commercial district. Of the few buildings that may have survived, the Chena Building is the only one that has been returned to the location of the historic Chena townsite, much of which now lies within Alaska State Park lands.

Today, the Chena Building is the last building from historic Chena still standing at the original townsite and represents one of a handful of pre-World War I structures in the Fairbanks region.

"It is one of only a handful of false-front-style buildings from interior Alaska, the only known false-fronted building remaining from Chena, and the last standing remnant from the townsite listed in the National Register of Historic Places," **said State Historian Katherine Ringsmuth.**

Meanwhile, geospatial analysis, archeological surveys, excavations, and Ground-Penetrating Radar imaging have revealed extensive preservation of intact features and assemblages at the Chena Townsite. According to Archaeologist Joshua Reuther, "The current multi-year project conducted by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the University of Alaska Museum of the North and local researchers are working to ground-truth Chena's tangible resources with historic mapping, generate Chena's ethnographic story through archeological, archival and oral history sources, and nominate the Chena Townsite Historic Archaeological District to the National Register of Historic Places."

The Chena Building National Register nomination was prepared by State Historic Preservation staff, with assistance from local historians Martin Gutoski, and Patricia Peirsol and archeologists Justin Cramb and Joshua Reuther. The Joint City of Fairbanks and Fairbanks North Star Borough Alaska Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the nomination on July 30, 2024, and confirmed by vote that it met the National Register criteria for listing. On October 3, the Alaska Historical Commission voted unanimously to submit the nomination to the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. The building was listed on December 16, 2024.

Learn more: <https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/oha/ohablog.htm>

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