

Valdez-Fairbanks Trail Roadhouses  
Sullivan Roadhouse  
Fort Greely  
Southeast Fairbanks  
Alaska

HABS No. AK-11-A

HABS  
AK,  
19-FOGRE,  
1-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington DC 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

VALDEZ-FAIRBANKS TRAIL, SULLIVAN ROADHOUSE HABS No. AK-11A

Location: East bank of Delta Creek, Fort Greely, Alaska.

Present Owner: U. S. Army, Fort Greely.

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Significance: The Sullivan Roadhouse was one of the log rest stops along the dog sled and horse sledge trail which connected the port of Valdez with the interior of Alaska at Fairbanks. The simple structure represents the type of essential shelter for winter travelers. John Sullivan and his wife were typical sourdough roadhouse operators found in Alaska from the turn of the century to the 1930s. The structure and its setting reflect the isolation of the Alaska frontier.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: circa 1906. The improvement of the Valdez-Fairbanks trail and the clearing of the Donnelly cutoff in 1906 suggest the construction date of 1906. The roadhouse operation was well established by the time of the first published trail guide in 1910.
2. Architect: Not known. It can be assumed that John Sullivan built the log structure with local assistance.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The land on which the Sullivan roadhouse stands was not patented; the land remained in federal ownership. It became part of Fort Greely during World War II.
4. Builders, suppliers: Not known. Structure constructed of local spruce logs with corrugated tin roof placed over original sod roof.
5. Alterations and additions: The structure appears to have been built in sections, over an undetermined period of time. The rear wing has collapsed and was presumably the original roadhouse followed by a dog trot cabin constructed in front of it. The dog trot was later filled in and another room was added to the east of the building (see drawings, sheet 2).

B. Historical Context:

The Sullivan Roadhouse was built as one of the overnight stops located every twenty miles along the Valdez-Fairbanks trail. The trail was the main land route to Alaska's interior circa 1906-1923, the latter the year of completion of the Alaska Railroad. Log roadhouses provided meager shelter, food and lodging, but also provided a social atmosphere important to and remembered by the residents of the far North. Besides the roadhouse, the Sullivan stop included a meat cache, barn, and blacksmith shop, all ruins. The Sullivans were representative sourdoughs who came north with the gold rush of 1898 and remained the rest of their lives. The completion of the Alaska Railroad signalled the end for the winter trail to Sullivans and the summer automobile route bypassed the roadhouse. It has been vacant since the 1930s.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This log, single-story roadhouse was a welcome sight to wintertime travelers on the Valdez-Fairbanks trail. It typifies the log roadhouses once found throughout Alaska.
2. Condition of fabric: Sill logs have rotted and the rear wing has collapsed to ruin. The roof has minor leaks inbetween the corrugated tin. Interior features are deteriorated, decorative printed fabric is falling from the walls, and the original wood stoves have been removed.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The standing portion of the one-story log structure measures 73'-9" x 20'-6 1/2".
2. Foundations: Spruce logs, approximately 10" diameter.
3. Wall construction: 8" average unpeeled logs, double saddle-notched.
4. Structural framing: log.
5. Chimneys: Wood frame, no longer used. Present chimney is metal pipe.
6. Openings: Two doorways, crudely framed with original doors missing. Seven windows, four of two fixed panes and three single pane (see drawings).

7. Roof: Originally sod, the roof has been covered by corrugated tin.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: four rooms, in a row, no halls.
2. Flooring: 1 1/8" x 7 7/8" milled spruce plank flooring nailed to 5" log stringers which rest on grade. Storeroom floor has been removed.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Bare log except in front and guest/dining rooms which have fabric wall covering.
4. Heating: Original wood stoves removed. One barrel Yukon stove in front room.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The structure faces north, parallel to the former trail. The Delta Creek bench rises just to the east and south, with the flat to the creek to the north and east.
2. Outbuildings: None of the original buildings stand. The former barn and the blacksmith shop once stood to the north. A meat cache was carved into the creek bench to the southeast.
3. Landscaping, enclosures: Former corral shown in historic photographs was located to the northeast, near the barn.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Historic photographs. Rasmussen Library, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

H. E. Bundy. The Valdez-Fairbanks Trail. Seattle: Alaska Publishing Company, 1910.

Erica Z. Kracker and Edward B. Kiker, "Sullivan's Roadhouse," National Register Nomination, 1978.

Michael E. Smith. Alaska's Historic Roadhouses. Alaska Division of Parks, 1974.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Sullivan Roadhouse along the Valdez-Fairbanks trail within Fort Greely was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), a division of the National Park Service, in cooperation with the Alaska District, Corps of Engineers. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of HABS/HAER, and John Cook, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during the summer of 1982 by Robert Spude, Project Director, Steven Peterson, Historical Architect, and Jet Lowe, Photographer.