

NOTIFY: Senators Ted Stevens, Mike Gravel; Congressman Don Young

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received SEP 10 1980

date entered DEC - 3 1980

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic The Pioneer School House (AHR-ANC-244)

and/or common

2. Location

street & number N.W. Corner of Third Avenue and Eagle Street not for publication

city, town Anchorage vicinity of congressional district Alaska at Large

state Alaska code 02 county Anchorage Division code 020

3. Classification

Category Ownership Status Present Use
district X public X occupied X agriculture X museum
X building(s) private unoccupied commercial park
structure both work in progress educational private residence
site Public Acquisition Accessible entertainment religious
object in process X yes: restricted government scientific
being considered yes: unrestricted industrial transportation
no military X other: recreation

4. Owner of Property

name The Municipality of Anchorage (907) 264-4224

street & number Pouch 6-650

city, town Anchorage vicinity of state Alaska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. District Recorder

street & number 941 West Fourth Avenue

city, town Anchorage state Alaska 99501

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Patterns of the Past: An Inventory of Anchorage's
title Heritage Resources has this property been determined eligible? X yes no

date 1979 federal state county X local

depository for survey records Planning Department, Municipality of Anchorage

city, town Anchorage state Alaska

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>c. 1920 and 1965</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Pioneer School was designed and built in 1915 by the Alaska Engineering Commission, (A.E.C.), the Federal agency (U.S. Department of Interior) which constructed the Alaska Railroad. The two-story building served approximately ninety elementary and high school students in 1915 and 1916. Two classrooms were located on each floor of the building. A handful of teachers used those rooms in teaching consolidated classes (for example, third and fourth grades were in the same room). In its era, the school was labeled "entirely inadequate," "insanitary," and was characteristically "of an order of the early eighteenth century." The school lacked paint, restrooms, running water, a satisfactory heating system, and a solid foundation. The unheated, outdoor toilets did not meet townsite standards. Despite the shortcomings, the school was able to launch public education in Anchorage.

Like most of the buildings constructed by the A.E.C., the hip-roofed structure (30'4" by 58'4") was frame and covered with shiplap siding. Each classroom had four to six large sash windows (38 by 60 inches) to provide light and ventilation; the upper sash of each window was small (17 1/2 by 38 inches) and decorated with a symmetrical pattern of small rectangular panes.

Entrances and exits of the building were provided on the front side in a corner of the building, on the side and on the rear at the second floor level. Another entrance, a diagonal one on the front side, another stairway was added after 1940.

The building originally stood on the School Reserve, a full square block (300 by 300 feet) which was platted by the A.E.C. in creating the Anchorage Townsite. After the completion of the second school (1917), the school was moved across the street to the southwest corner of Sixth Avenue and E Street.

The Pioneers of Alaska (Igloo 15) used the building as their social hall from the 1920's to 1964. (The Pioneers are a social organization whose membership requires long-term residency in Alaska.) The Pioneers were instrumental in a number of changes to the building. Early on, they converted the upstairs into a dance floor: its hardwood floor is set in a concentric, rectangular pattern, and a chair-ledge surrounds the dance area. Other modifications include the addition of a kitchen and alternations to the first floor for public meeting space.

Following the 1964 Earthquake, the building was saved from demolition through the efforts of the Anchorage Women's Club. It was moved eleven blocks to the eastern edge of the Original Townsite in 1965. It was set on a cinder block foundation; a basement was provided under the structure. The setting of the school is Ben Crawford Memorial Park, named after Ben Crawford, who along with his wife (president of the Women's Club in 1965), was active in its preservation. The school, now owned and maintained by the Municipality of Anchorage, is used for public meetings.

# 8. Significance

DEC - 3 1960

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1915 **Builder/Architect** Alaska Engineering Commission

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The city of Anchorage saw its educational system come to life through this school. The town was created by the Alaska Engineering Commission (A.E.C.), a Federal agency, in 1915 to serve as headquarters in constructing the Alaska Railroad. Besides railroad building, the A.E.C. laid out and managed railroad towns, and built many public facilities. The foremost of its towns was Anchorage. In addition to its railroad building and terminal yards, the A.E.C. had constructed a post office, Territorial Marshall's office, Telephone and Telegraph Office, Municipal Building, hospital, as well as the school building. That educational facility, now known as the Pioneer School, is the only one of those early public buildings still in existence.

The fact that the school was developed during Anchorage's first year of growth was remarkable. Provisions for townsite management were drawn up so hastily during the summer of 1915 that the A.E.C. overlooked means by which a school could be financed. When the lots were sold, it was understood that the lots could be assessed to finance such public services as water and sewer utilities, fire protection and garbage pick-up. Somehow, schools had not been included in the list of items for which assessments could be made. Because Anchorage was a government town, the Commission had to accept the responsibility for public education.

The dilemma of providing a school took months to solve. In June 1915, before the first auction, the local editor called for a school. "If we are to retain the families, and they compose the backbone of any community, we must provide the children with adequate school facilities. It is highly important that this should be done without undue delay..."

Under the laws which affected school operation in the territory, Anchorage was to receive few benefits. The so-called Nelson Law of 1905 provided financing through the "Alaska Fund" for schools in non-incorporated areas. However, that fund was based on local receipts from Federal licenses on businesses located in unincorporated areas—a large part of which was liquor licensing. It has been pointed out that because Anchorage did not have any saloons that the territorial governor was probably reluctant to give the government town those funds. Had he done so, Anchorage would have received far more than its share. Not more than a thousand dollars were received from the territory that first year.

In August 1915 a school board was elected to oversee the development of a school and the hiring of teachers. Its members were: A. J. Wendler, Mrs. W. T. Normile, and M. Finkelstein.

The question of who was to finance the school remained unanswered. With the interest in public education, the Women's Club was formed that first summer. Also formed that first year was the Parent-Teacher's Association.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Carberry, M. Patterns of the Past: An Inventory of Anchorage's Heritage Resources.  
Municipality of Anchorage, 1979.

# 10. Geographical Data

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property 1.0

Quadrangle name Anchorage (A-8)

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1: 63 360

### UMT References

A 

0	6	3	4	5	7	00	6	7	9	0	5	0	5
Zone		Easting					Northing						

B 

Zone		Easting					Northing						

C 

Zone		Easting					Northing						

D 

Zone		Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone		Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone		Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone		Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone		Easting					Northing						

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Acre Lot 1, Block 37 B, East Addition

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael E. Carberry, Senior Planner, Municipal Planning Department

Historic Landmarks Preservation Commission

organization Municipality of Anchorage

date

street & number Pouch 6-650

telephone (907) 264-4224

city or town Anchorage

state Alaska 99502

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Douglas R. Regier

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

date 8-21-80

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for W. Ray Juice  
Keeper of the National Register

date 12/3/80

Attest: Linda Hunt McClelland

Chief of Registration

date 12.2.80

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Finally, in late September the Federal government solved the problem through the efforts of Commissioners William C. Edes and Frederick Mears. By their request, the Comptroller General issued funds for the construction of what is now known as Pioneer School. The first allocation of Treasury Department funds was made possible in that the broad power of the Alaska Railroad Act was liberally interpreted.

The school was not completed until November 1915. The A.E.C. constructed the building to serve about 90 pupils during the first school year. The most notable of the first five teachers, Miss Orah Dee Clark, also acted as principal that year. She was "identified with every movement towards the school's progress and by her consistent work has aided materially in making the school year an avowed success." She served in Anchorage as a teacher until her retirement in 1944. (Clark Junior High School is named after her.)

Andrew Christensen, the Townsite Manager, was ordered by Edes to take over the responsibility of "school director in addition to your other duties." In December, 1916, he inherited three major problems: personnel, the construction of a new school, and permanent financing. The school board was apparently relieved when Christensen took over. The services of Mrs. W. T. Normile and Mr. A. J. Wendler during the first year had been admirable. Starting from nothing, they had developed the school and oversaw its operation. However, by the middle of the fall term of 1917, enrollment had doubled to over 200 pupils and management problems were surfacing. Besides the petty bickering, there was a severe teacher shortage. One teacher had 70 primary students and was teaching them in half-day shifts.

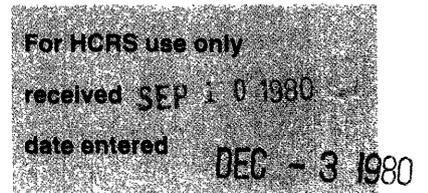
Because of the growth in Anchorage's population, a new school was desperately needed when the second school year was underway. The Pioneer School as well as rented space was still in use until the second school was finished in December 1917. (That school was torn down in 1938.) Some classroom space within Pioneer School continued to be used on a periodic basis during the 1920's and early 1930's.

The Pioneer School House remains as a symbol of Anchorage's early public facilities and the pioneer spirit which established the city's public educational system.

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Atwood, E. Anchorage: All America City, Portland, Oregon: Binfords and Mort, 1957.

Wilson, W.H. "The Founding of Anchorage: Federal Townbuilding on the Last Frontier,"  
Pacific Northwest Quarterly, July 1967.

"Clerk Wendler Makes a Report," Anchorage Daily Times, July 21, 1916.

"Public School is Needed," Cook Inlet Pioneer, June 19, 1915.