

# A bit of history

## Tonsina Roadhouse

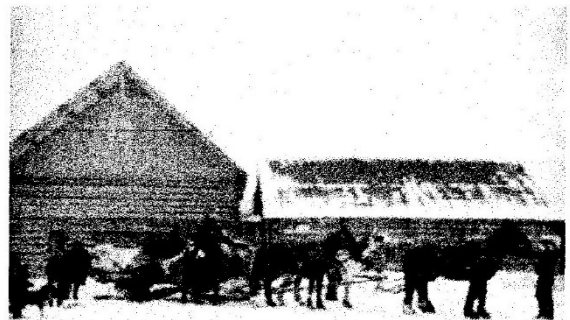


*View of Tonsina Roadhouse, a group of log buildings in a clearing, a sign hanging over the smaller log building reads, in part: "Fred and Jake Tonsina Road House" and a horse stands next to the building. A canvas tent is visible in the background and a dog stands near building at right. [Frederick John, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage UAA-hmc-0379-series2-v2-63a]*

Historian and author Kenneth L. Marsh shared a few early travelers' comments in his book about the early days of the Richardson Highway, **The Trail** (Sluice Box Productions, 2008). In 1904 one noted "At supper (Tonsina Roadhouse) we had fresh red radishes, lettuce and turnips out of the only garden in Alaska we saw. They were fine." Two years later another traveled reported "....the one bright spot beyond the Copper River valley was the night we spent at the Tonsina Roadhouse.

The Tonsina Roadhouse was built around 1900 by Jim Donaldson, and for the first few years it carried his name, the Donaldson Roadhouse. It was located at the junction of the Government trail from Valdez, built by Capt. William R. Abercrombie's men in 1899, with the Nizina Indian Trail, which accessed the rich Kennicott copper country to the east of the broad Copper River. Utilizing only hand tools, Abercrombie's soldiers built a 93-mile packhorse trail from the coastal community of Valdez to the Tonsina River, and then built a bridge across the river. The Army Signal Corps constructed a telegraph station at the site in 1902, and a post office was established in 1903. It was discontinued in 1916, re-established in 1930, and discontinued again in 1933.

In 1902 Jake Nafstad and Fred A. Martin added onto the main roadhouse building, added a second livestock barn, and changed the name to the Tonsina Roadhouse. It would later be changed again, to the Upper Tonsina Roadhouse, and it could provide accommodations for up to 60 guests.



A Tonsina Roadhouse, 1903

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31 travelogue brochure has been uploaded to Murray Lundberg's expansive **ExploreNorth** website for travel and history fans, and it includes an interesting entry for what was by then known as the Tonsina Lodge, at mile 80: "Here you may be assured of an excellent meal, or night's lodging, and should you have the time, good trout fishing is found in the stream by the roadside."



Tonsina Lodge, 1920's