

= Rika 's Landing Roadhouse =

Rika 's Landing Roadhouse , also known as Rika 's Landing Site or the McCarty Roadhouse , is a roadhouse located at a historically important crossing of the Tanana River , in the Southeast Fairbanks Area , Alaska , United States . It is off mile 274 @. @ 5 of the Richardson Highway in Big Delta .

The roadhouse is named after Rika Wallen , who acquired it from John Hajdukovich and operated it for many years . It became a hub of activity in that region of the interior . With the construction of the ALCAN (now Alaska) Highway and the replacement of the ferry with a bridge downstream , traffic moved away and patronage declined . The roadhouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 , and is now a centerpiece of Big Delta State Historical Park , also listed on the National Register .

= = Background = =

The Richardson Highway , an important route through the Alaska Interior that contributed significantly to development and settlement of the region , began as a pack trail from the port at Valdez to Eagle , downstream on the Yukon River from Dawson . It was built in 1898 by the U.S. Army to provide an " all @-@ American " route to the Klondike gold fields during the gold rush . After the rush ended , the Army kept the trail open in order to connect its posts at Fort Liscum in Valdez , and Fort Egbert in Eagle . The Valdez @-@ to @-@ Eagle trail , and its branch to Fairbanks , became one of the most important access routes to the Alaska Interior during the Fairbanks ' gold rush of 1902 , and the 1903 construction of a WAMCATS telegraph line along the trail . This was accomplished by men of the U.S. Army Signal Corps , directed in part by then @-@ Lieutenant Billy Mitchell , who later rose to the rank of general .

Many roadhouses , some 37 in all and some now listed on the National Register of Historic Places , were built along this trail for the convenience of travelers . These roadhouses offered meals , sleeping quarters , and supplies . They were typically located about 15 to 20 miles apart .

= = Early activity = =

The Tanana River was one of the major rivers to be crossed by travelers along the Valdez @-@ Eagle trail . A ferry was established just upriver of the Tanana 's confluence with the Delta River , at a location then called Bates Landing . Bates Landing was about 12 km (7 @. @ 5 mi) north of the current settlement of Delta Junction , in the area known now as Big Delta . The government collected a ferry toll on the south side from all those traveling northbound . The WAMCATS telegraph line was relocated to parallel the trail after a fire . McCarty Station was established at the line 's crossing of the Tanana in 1907 to maintain the telegraph . Several log cabins housed the telegraph office , a dispatcher , two repairmen and their supplies .

A trading post was constructed on the south bank of the Tanana , at Bates Landing in April 1904 by a prospector named Ben Bennett on his claim of 80 acres (32 ha) , but Bennett sold the post and land to Daniel G. McCarty in April 1905 . However since E.T. Barnette , the founder of Fairbanks , and McCarty 's former employer , had financed the goods in the post , Barnette retained ownership of them . The post property , now being used as a roadhouse , soon became known as McCarty 's . Another prospector named Alonzo Maxey , and a friend , built Bradley 's Roadhouse to compete with McCarty 's and by 1907 , McCarty 's had been transferred to Maxey .

= = Hajdukovich era = =

In 1906 , or perhaps sometime after , Jovo ' John ' Hajdukovich (Montenegrin : Jovo Hajdukovi? , ???? ?????????) , an entrepreneur who had come to Alaska from Montenegro in 1903 , sensed a business opportunity and purchased the trading post and roadhouse from Maxey . Hajdukovich built a new and bigger roadhouse in 1909 using logs floated downriver . He continued to use the old

trading post to store his gear .

Hadukovich had other business interests , including prospecting , freighting , acting as a hunting guide by taking hunting parties into the nearby Granite Mountains , and trading with , and advocating for , the Athabaskan natives . (Later he was instrumental in founding the Tetlin Reserve .) After he was appointed as US Game Commissioner for the area , he could no longer personally operate the roadhouse full @-@ time . As with many informally managed roadhouses , Hadukovich asked travelers to " make themselves at home and leave some money on the table " for what they used . Despite this informality , the operations prospered .

Starting in 1904 , the trail was improved and upgraded . In 1907 , By 1910 , the Alaska Road Commission completed the upgrade , making the trail usable as a wagon road . Major Wilds P. Richardson led the project and later became the namesake for the highway . He was promoted to general later in his career .) Stages plied the road , using horse @-@ drawn sledges in winter and wagons in summer . By 1913 the roadhouse was a local center of activity for gold prospectors , local hunters , traders , and freighters .

Meanwhile Erika ' Rika ' Wallen , born Lovisa Erika Jakobson in 1874 on a farm near Örebro Sweden , immigrated with her sister in 1891 to the United States . They traveled to Minneapolis , Minnesota to join their brother Carl Jakobson . There they changed their last name to Wallen to distinguish themselves from the many other Jacobsons and Jakobsons . After Carl died in an accident , the sisters moved to San Francisco , which they heard was booming . Rika took a job as a cook for the Hills Brothers coffee family , which lasted until the 1906 San Francisco earthquake .

In 1916 Rika Wallen traveled to Valdez , reportedly " because she thought Alaska would be like Sweden " .

= = Rika Wallen takes over the Roadhouse = =

After jobs cooking at the Kennecott copper mine and for a Fairbanks boarding house , Rika Wallen made her way to Big Delta . In 1917 , or 1918 , she was hired by Hadukovich to manage operations at his roadhouse , then still known as McCarty 's .

Although Hadukovich had many business interests , he was not always solvent . For example , in later years he failed to be paid for timber he supplied to the ALCAN Highway project due to not keeping adequate records . In either 1918 , or 1923 , he transferred ownership of the roadhouse to Wallen for " \$ 10 @. @ 00 and other considerations , " presumably in lieu of back wages . Their friendship and partnership continued for many years ; historians and writers have not been able to define their relationship . Following local custom of naming places for people , the roadhouse was soon named Rika 's . At that time , the roadhouse had eleven bedrooms , a living room , and a large kitchen / dining area .

By 1925 , Wallen had applied for US citizenship , and filed a homestead claim on 160 acres (65 ha) . She began growing food and raising livestock , including sheep , chicken , and goats . Sheep provided wool that she wove , and the goats provided milk , from which she made butter and cheese . She also raised silver fox , ducks , geese , rabbits and honeybees . She cultivated grain by using a yoke of oxen for plowing . Rika was a talented farmer , and she successfully grew crops where others failed . She developed a heating and ventilation system for her stable to protect the livestock through the harsh winters .

When Wallen bought the roadhouse , it still had packed dirt floors and rough wood walls . To improve the interior , she scavenged wallpaper , sometimes using different patterns on different walls of the same room . She made a hardwood parquet floor from wooden kerosene crates collected from the freighters and boatmen who patronized the roadhouse . Her ability to grow crops and to make a pleasant space transformed the inn and its offerings . For meals , she provided fresh milk and eggs , berries , fish , game , and produce picked from the garden and nearby orchard . Afterward , travelers could go to clean , comfortable beds in the multi @-@ story building . A 1929 travelogue of the Richardson Highway described Rika 's by the following : " a commodious roadhouse boasting of such luxuries as fresh milk and domestic fowls . "

About 1926 , Rika added a wing , which she used for additional living space , a liquor store , fur

storage , and the Big Delta (then known as Washburn) Post Office . She was appointed as the US postmaster and served until 1946 . Eventually Wallen also homesteaded an adjoining piece of land , bringing her holdings to 320 acres (130 ha) .

= = End of an era = =

The construction of the Alaska Railroad was completed in 1922 , but by the 1930s , due to effects of the Great Depression , freight traffic declined on the railroad . In 1935 , the Alaska Road Commission tried to force shippers to use the railroad , and raised the toll at the Tanana ferry crossing to almost 10 dollars a ton . The truckers rebelled at this , with some violent skirmishes . Pirate ferry operations were started , lasting until the start of World War II .

With the coming of the war and construction of the ALCAN Highway , which connected to the Richardson south of Big Delta , road traffic waned further . The ferry crossing was replaced by a wooden bridge , and later , a larger steel bridge was constructed downriver . This caused rerouting of the highway away from the roadhouse , drawing off traffic and travelers . Wallen operated the roadhouse through the 1940s and early 1950s , although in later years guests were by invitation only . John Hajdukovich died in 1965 , and Rika Wallen died four years later in 1969 .

= = Big Delta State Historical Park = =

According to Judy Ferguson in *Parallel Destinies* , a biography of Hajdukovich and Wallen :

" For fifty years , Rika was a stake in the ground for the roaming John . While John traded and prospected , Rika ran the hub of the Upper Tanana 's cross @-@ roads . Her establishment was " town " to the three hundred people who walked the trails to the Alaskan @-@ Canadian border . John and Rika were the history of the Upper Tanana Valley . "

Rika 's Roadhouse , the adjacent outbuildings , and property are preserved as the Big Delta State Historical Park . In 1976 the roadhouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places , and the entire cluster was listed as the " Big Delta Historic District " in 1991 . The structure was restored in 1984 by Stanton and Stanton Construction (owned and operated by brothers , Eldon and Richard Stanton) . It was placed on a new foundation using original timbers , and in some areas , the packing crate floor was restored . It is now operated as a " house museum " ; some rooms have been fitted with 1920s @-@ 1930s period furniture and accessories donated by local residents . The property also has a food service facility called the " Packhouse Pavilion " operated by a local concessionaire .