

Richard H. Allen Memorial Hall: Landscaping, Drainage, and Archaeology 2016

This project was to install site drainage around the Richard H. Allen Memorial building, and to restore character-defining features and improve safety by installing sidewalks around the front and sides of the building.

Landscaping Goals

Historic preservation has as its the goal the preservation of the character of a place, and maximum retention of actual historic materials. The goal of the landscaping was to bring back the front of Allen to its character in the period of significance, the early 20th century, and to make necessary changes for its new, public, use, with the Odess Theater on the main level; to incorporate federal accessibility requirements; to facilitate future maintenance with pavement that can support a lift truck; and to drain water away from the building's foundation.

During the college years, random plantings and unplanned landscaping obscured the character-defining features such as the open view to the south and central focus. Landscape architect Monique Anderson, in consultation with the Fine Arts Camp Building Committee, which includes historic preservation experts, used the following resources: Historic Preservation Plan (2004), National Historic Landmark Nomination (2001), the Historic American Buildings Survey of the campus (1996), and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation, Rehabilitation to come up with a plan.

Drainage

Drainage is essential for a building's longevity, especially in this rainy climate. The building is built on deep muskeg over a pan of silt, which tilts down in a northward direction. To compensate for this challenging substrate, the building was originally constructed with a 6-foot deep concrete perimeter foundation, and interior pilings. Those pilings were replaced in the 1950s, when the floor developed dips and hills. (Some of the students we interviewed told about the challenges of roller skating in that building before the floor was leveled!) Because of this design, in spite of being built on muskeg, the 2004 HABS architecture students found the building had settled only an inch or two anywhere.

Site drains, "drain tile," which are porous plastic pipes, are placed at the base of the foundation, to gather water that would otherwise get inside the foundation. Allen has very deep footings, so excavation went down to that level on the sides leading to the storm drains under John Brady Drive (which themselves are very deep). Additional excavation was necessary to remove muskeg and clay encountered on the west side.

Archaeology

Because this is a historic site, with thousands of years of occupation and use by Native people, we did thorough research before excavation, including

- “Archaeological Overview and Potential” report in 2004 Historic Preservation Plan
- Historic, and current utilities plans
- maps, plats of historic campus
- historical research including historic photographs

In addition to documentary research, another tool we did not utilize but is recommended, is to dig test holes in places where there may be intact archaeological resources.

What is archaeology, what information can we get from it, and why is it important?

“Archaeology is the study of the ancient and recent human past through material remains.” (Society of American Archeologists) - an important tool for learning about the past because we get clues to how people lived – what they wore, what they ate, their technology - and what they valued, as well as where and when and how many people lived and how they organized themselves.

The thing that most people are aware of in an archaeological site is the objects: artifacts, features, and ecofacts, which are, respectively, things people made, non-portable artifacts like soil stains, and the remains of plants and animals people used.

The importance of archaeological context

While the objects are interesting, the important information, and their scientific value is in context – where things are, in relation to each other and telling when they might have been deposited (whether lost, discarded, or abandoned).

When a site has been disturbed, that is, when things moved around from where they were originally deposited, most of the information about the site is lost.

The 2004 "Archaeological Overview and Potential" report indicated that the area around the building has low potential for archeological sites, because of the amount of disturbance it has seen over the years.

What we found: nearly all "disturbed" soils

Previous ground disturbance was related to the construction of these buildings in 1910, which entailed excavating for foundations; landscaping; attempts to improve drainage; and utilities. In 2003 there was a major utility upgrade on campus, and as part of that project they mapped out existing utilities in the spring of 2000, which shows a spiderweb of utilities around the building, and it turned out there were even more than had been mapped.

In addition to the utilities around the building, historic photos show the landscape in front has been changed more than once, including different walkways, a mound garden, and trees. Two trees were removed for this project, probably both volunteers dating from the early 1970s, and in the 1950s there were six trees flanking the walkway to the front door of the building.

The original plan was to go only 18 inches down, which does not require a building permit in Sitka. But the soils they found were soft and disturbed, so the contractor wanted to go deeper to make a solid base for the new concrete walkways. (The new walkways are designed so that equipment for maintaining the buildings can drive on them.)

Concrete utilidors carried steam pipes and communications wires, all defunct. All the buildings used to be heated from the Power Plant (Laundry Building), up until the early 1980s when they switched over to getting heat from the city garbage incinerator on the north edge of campus. That was shut down around 1996, and the campus switched over to heating the buildings individually.

There were some utilities that were not on the 2000 survey. A heavy duty 12" welded pvc pipe runs underneath the addition to Allen NW-SE. It takes water from Indian River to the Sage Building.

And, very deep, is a large steam pipe, also under the Allen addition, running from the former incinerator site located on the Sawmill Creek Road edge of the campus, to the Laundry Building/Power Plant for distribution. This must have been placed when the incinerator was built in the 1980s.

We knew beforehand to expect the entire area had been extensively disturbed, which was what we found except to the immediate west, where there were the remains of a shed, that appears in photographs of the campus right after it was completed in 1911. This area, the only part of the excavation that had not been heavily disturbed before, was monitored, photographed, and mapped as the excavation proceeded.

History of disturbance:

The disturbance to the site was mainly from the construction of the campus in 1910/11, when deep foundations were dug for the campus buildings, and underground steam heat pipes. This work distributed the remains of the sheds and workshops and discards that had been in this area before.

More disturbance came with generations of utility work and landscaping, and the excavation found layers of gravel and old turf, as well as the old electrical, water and sewer piping.

Another major disturbance had come with digging the foundation for an addition to Allen on the east side (with elevator, restrooms and reception rooms, in the early 2000s).

And, as part of the 2003 utility project, fuel-oil contaminated soil had been excavated, aired out so the contamination could disperse, and reburied, just to the east of Allen Hall. And, work on the foundation of Whitmore Hall also resulted in disturbance in that area, which was the richest in artifacts.

Artifacts

While the only intact context was the shed remains to the east of Allen Hall, we did learn something from the objects from the disturbed portions of the site, that we found by digging in the dirt that was excavated. Several of us dug into the piles of dirt, and a few objects came to light while it was being spread.

That shed area to the west of Allen Hall had a layer of boards from where it was apparently knocked down; posts, that you can see in the same 1911 panorama photograph, of unknown purpose; and board walk that you can see in photos from the 1950s-70s. This was probably an attempt to make a walkway over the swampy ground (you could also see layer after layer of gravel, which the college used to try to deal with the same problem); and,

most interestingly, many offcuts of wood, and sawdust, that indicated that the shed may have been a workshop during construction of the campus.

There were also pieces of firewood; why that would have been discarded, we don't know, but it probably was not as useful after the new campus was built. The 1911 campus was built with a central steam heating plant, where the earlier campus buildings were heated with many small heating stoves.

Most artifacts were things like brick shards and generations of pipes and conduit. Another common artifact was portions of iron stoves, which would have been used throughout campus before the central steam heating plant was installed in 1911.

We did find a few more interesting artifacts, including two ceramic marbles, parts of leather shoes and ceramic shards, two horse shoes, and the remains of a pocket watch.

Interpretation

We were extremely fortunate to have the Alaska Anthropological Association conference on campus in March of 2016, which brought archaeologists from all over the state, including Mike Yarborough, who oversaw archaeological monitoring during the 2003 utility work. He gave us his thoroughly-researched plan for monitoring for that massive 2003 utility upgrade, which complements the research we already had, and some correspondence and notes from the monitoring in 2003. Through word of mouth, we got back some of the artifacts from the 2003 monitoring, which had been taken by a volunteer for safe keeping. Those artifacts from 2003 were almost entirely relatively recent glass jars and bottles, from a trash dump in the path of the utilities.

Michael Yarborough had been frustrated by the lack of support for his work; he proposed a final report, but it was not funded. We are planning a future exhibit that will finally preserve and present this work for the public.

We were also extremely fortunate to be able to consult with historical archaeologists who were also here for the 2016 AAA meeting. Historical archaeology is archaeology of the documented past, as opposed to prehistoric archaeology, which is on people who did not leave written records. From these experts, we learned that all of the artifacts fit with the period between the original school buildings in 1884 and the new campus construction in 1911.

With these artifacts and analysis, and Mike Yarborough's and our research, notes, photographs, we have an excellent picture of the use of this area around Allen Auditorium in the period between 1884 and 1910.

From photographs and plats, we know that the area around Allen Hall was a utility and farm yard. Somewhere, probably where North Pacific Hall is now, there was a shoe shop; worn-out shoes and scraps of leather were found distributed throughout the west side of the excavation. At some point there must have been a trash pile, also disturbed by the campus construction in 1910, as there were many shards of plain china.

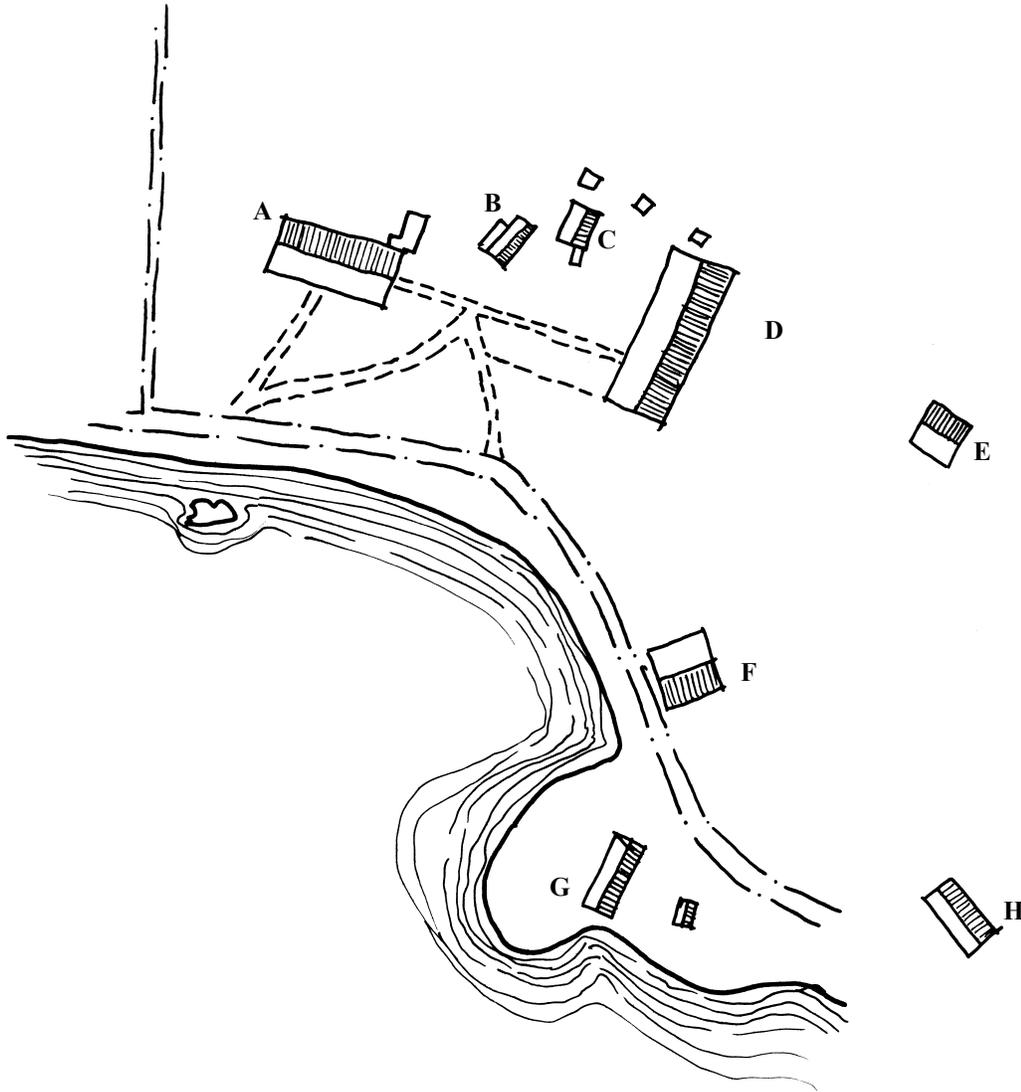
The most common artifact, other than pieces of old utilities, were shards of brick. There were no intact bricks, and they were distributed throughout the site.

The only bricks we found were partial, which tells us that larger bricks were probably reused. The scarcity of artifacts, and their plain character, tells us about the frugality of the missionaries. The toys – marbles and an ice skate – remind us that children lived here.

The goal of historic preservation is to gain a better understanding of the past, through contact with authentic places of historic significance. Sheldon Jackson history is complicated and difficult. It is a National Historic Landmark for its association with the Alaska Native Brotherhood founders; but, it also symbolizes the pressure on Native people to assimilate, and the loss of language and culture. Our goal is to create an exhibit using the artifacts and photographs from the site to open up some of these issues for a better understanding of and discussion of our history and how it has an impact on us today.

ILLUSTRATED SITE TIMELINE

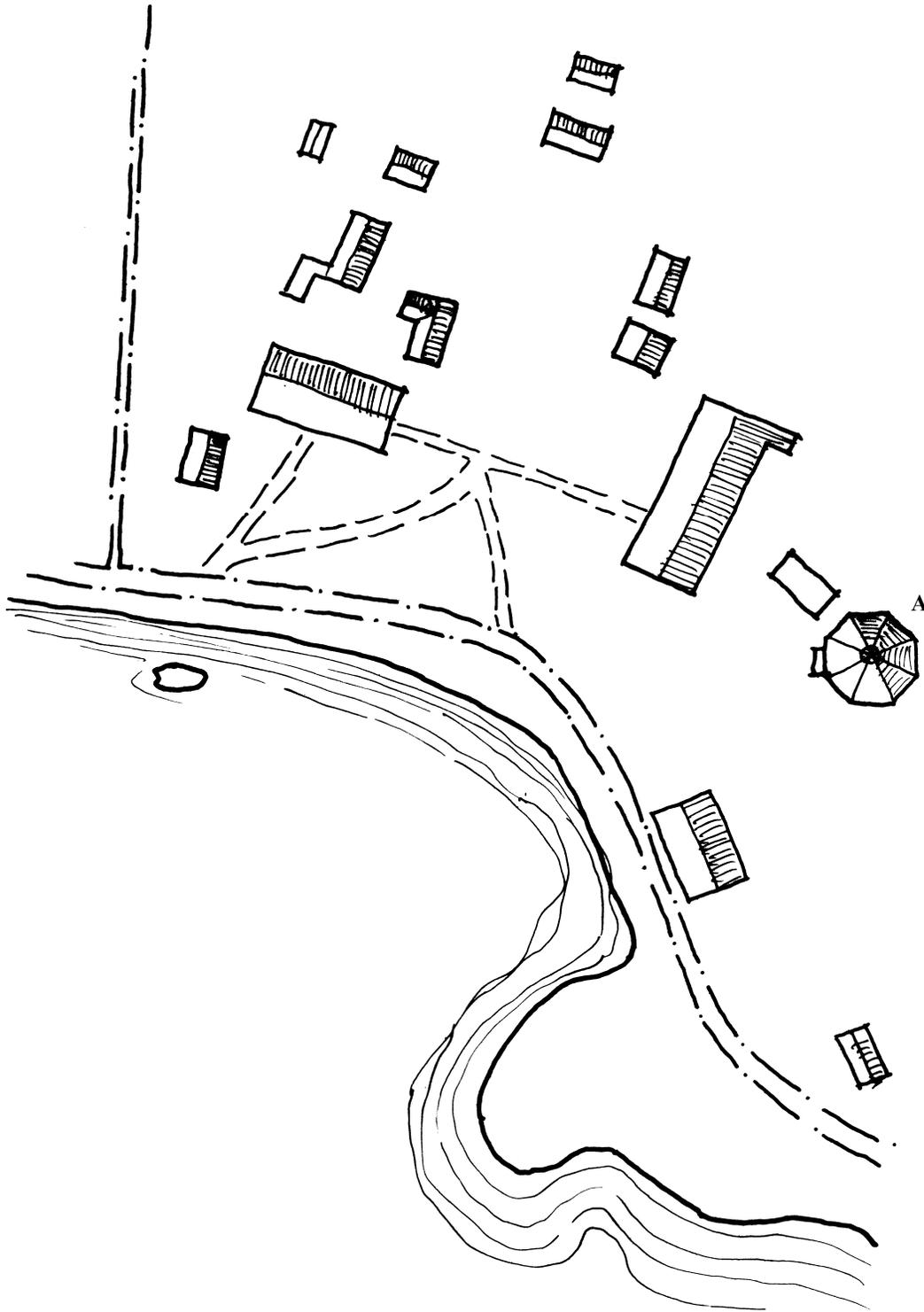
1884



Construction Dates Unknown

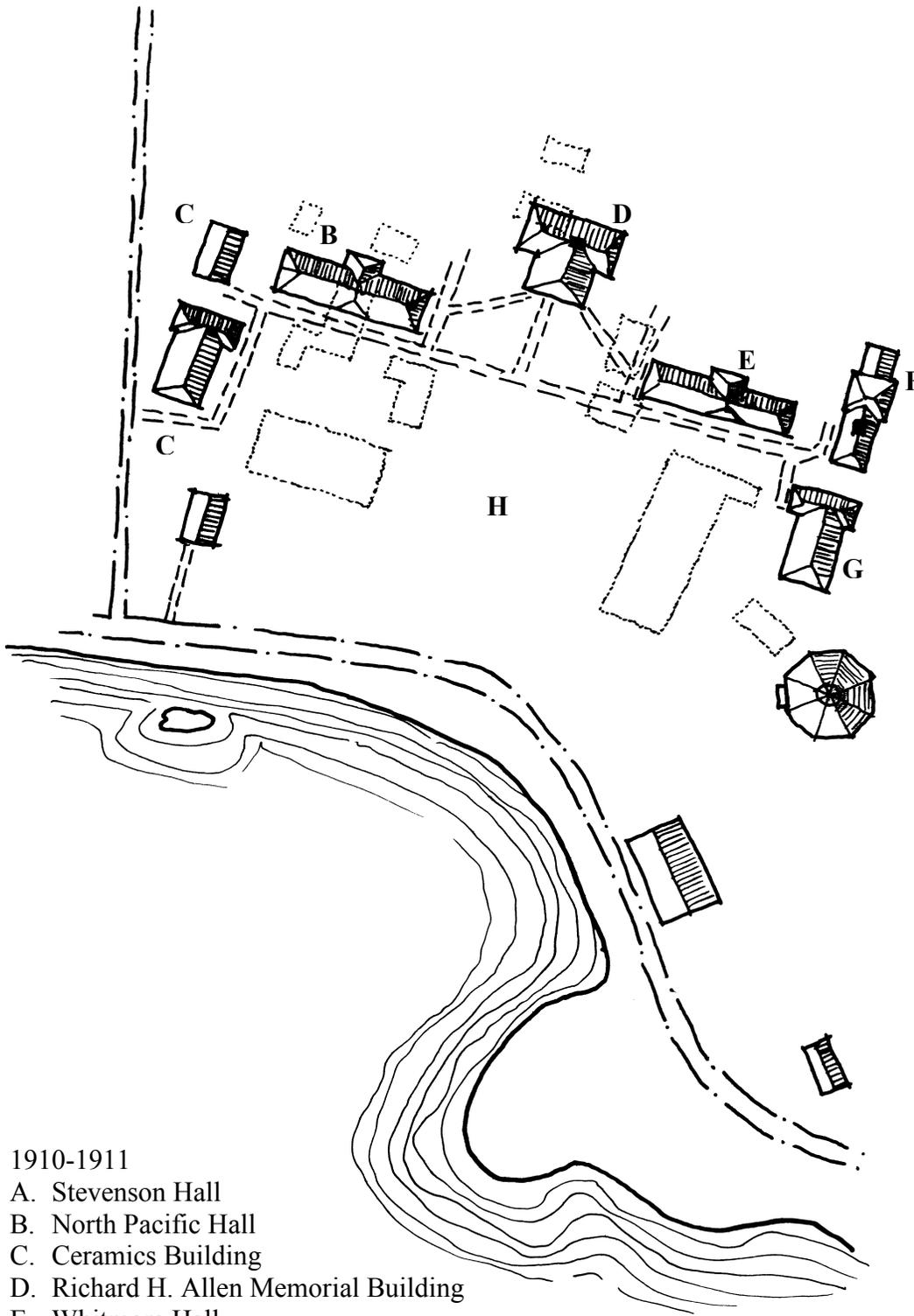
- A. Boys Residence
- B. Wood House
- C. Bakery
- D. Girls Residence
- E. Girls Home
- F. Chapel
- G. Industrial Building
- H. Girls Hospital

1900



- A. 1889 Sheldon Jackson Museum
- B. 1900 North Cottage (location unknown)

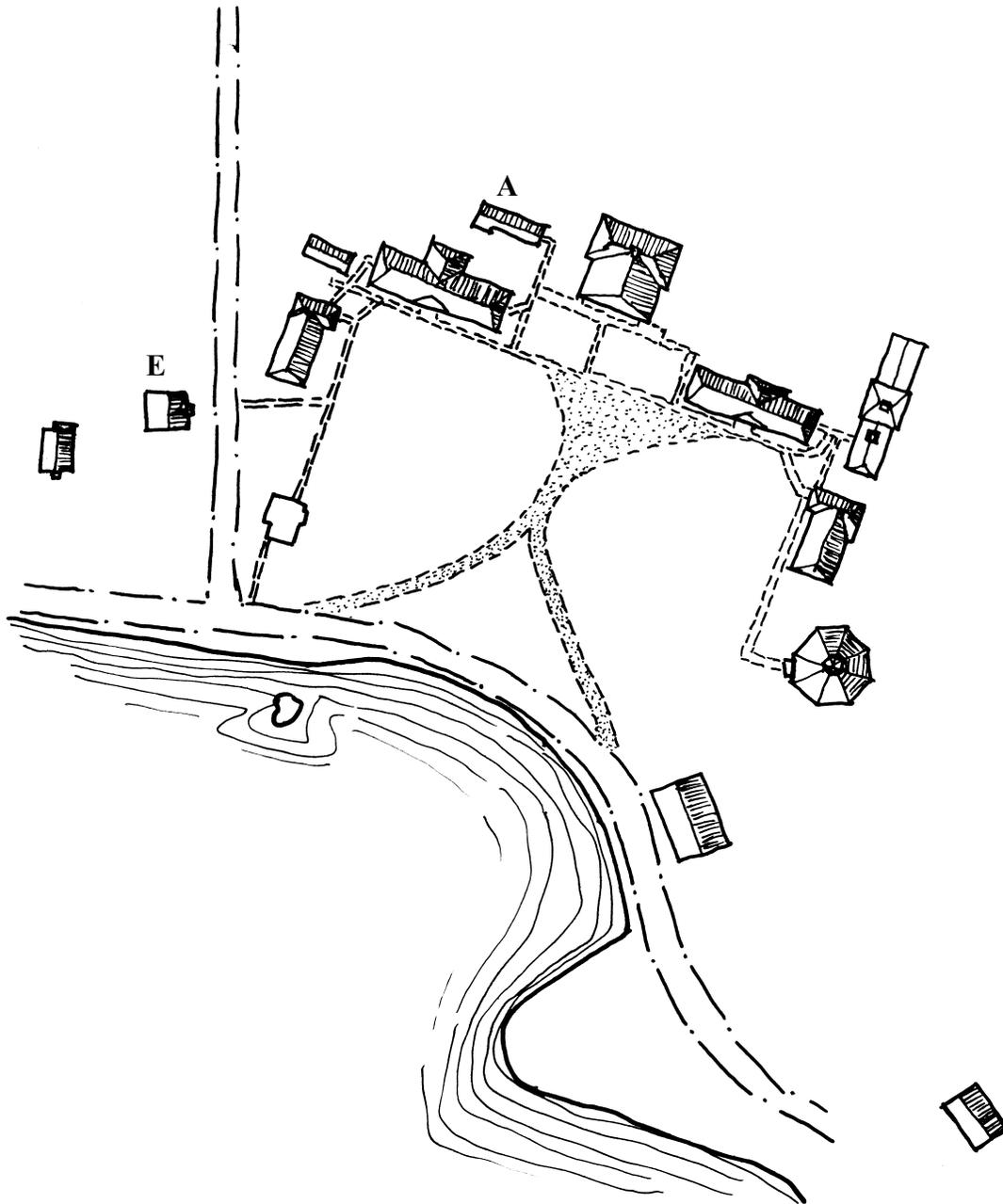
1912



1910-1911

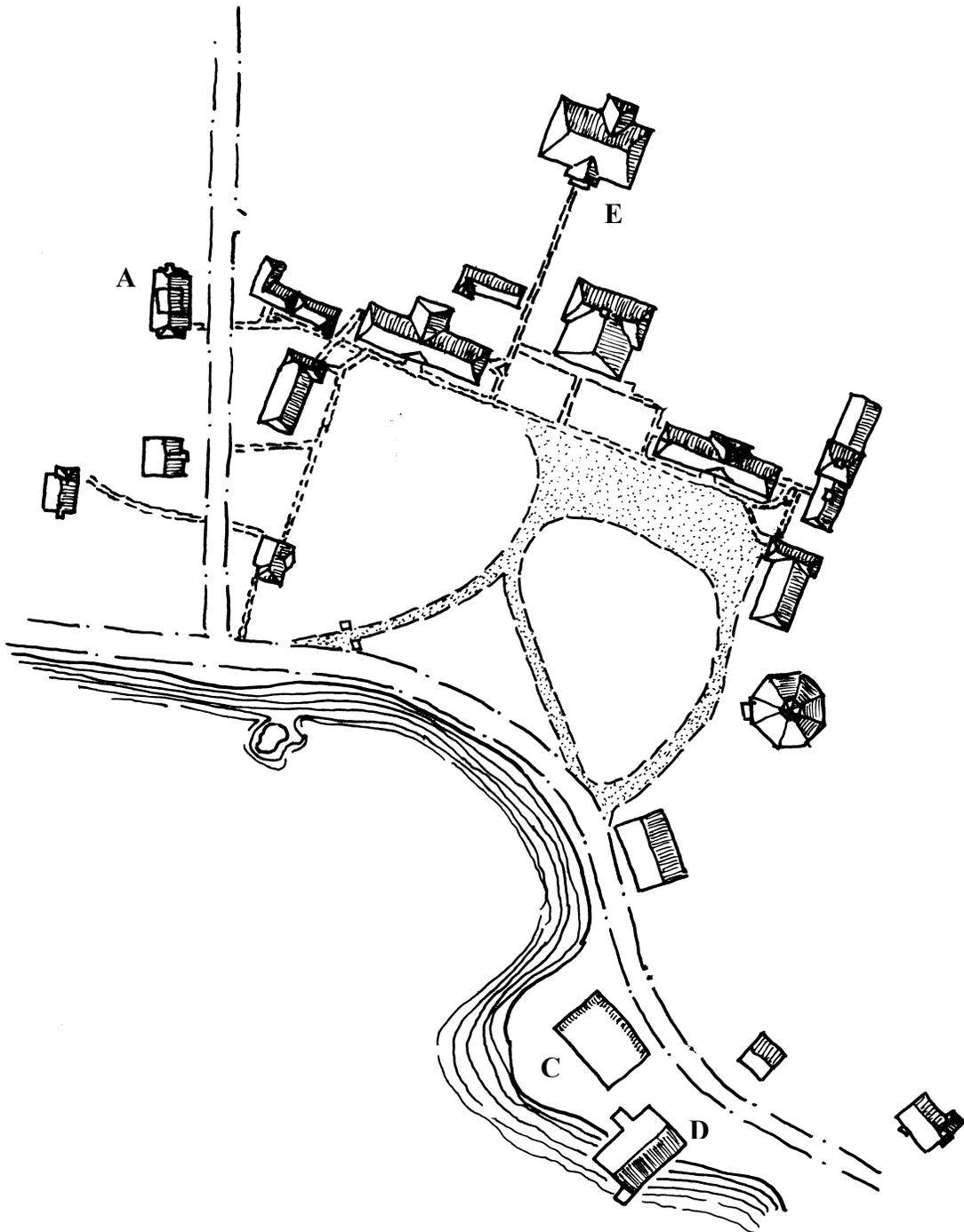
- A. Stevenson Hall
- B. North Pacific Hall
- C. Ceramics Building
- D. Richard H. Allen Memorial Building
- E. Whitmore Hall
- F. Power Plant
- G. Fraser Hall
- H. Quadrangle

1920



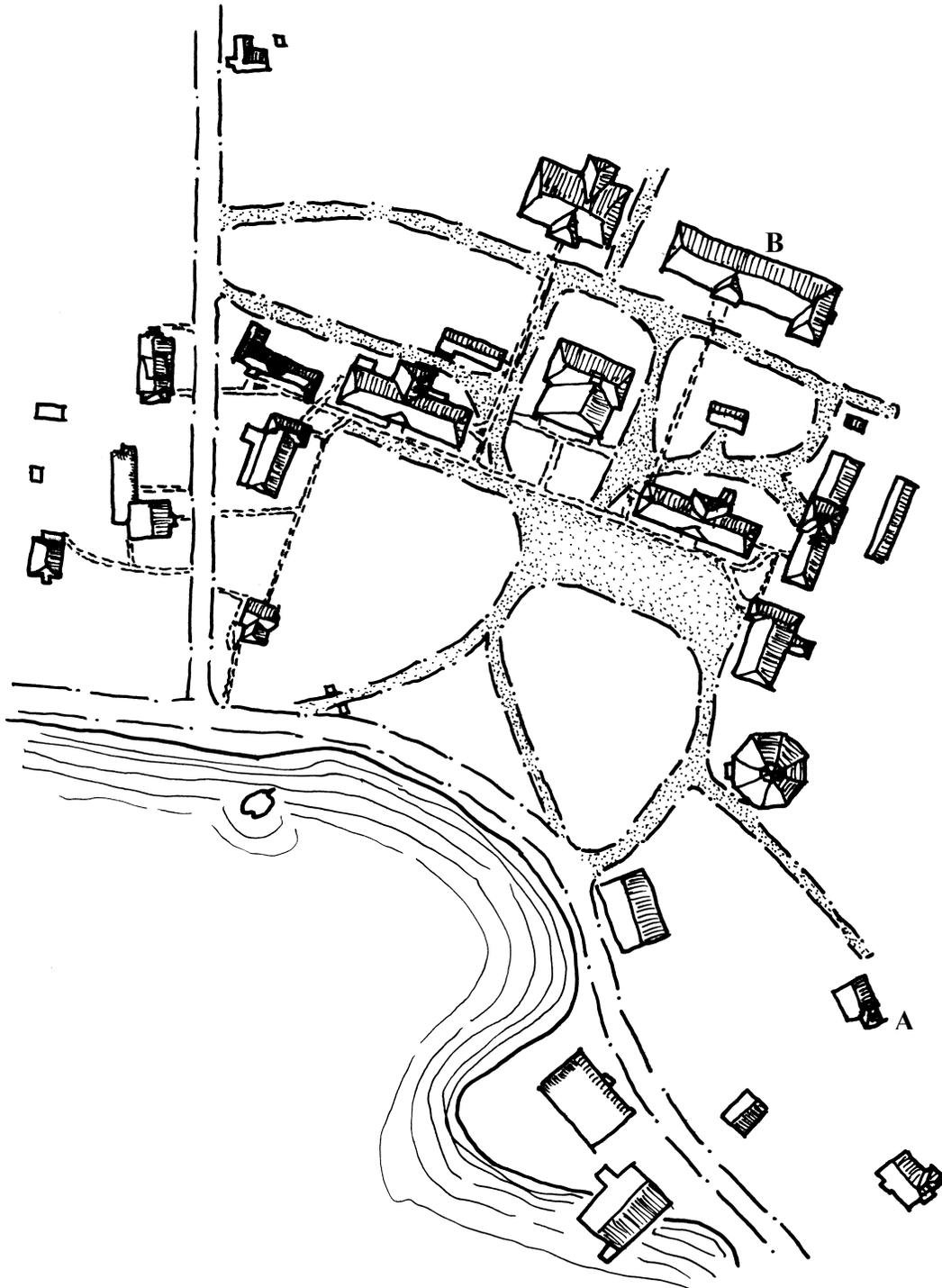
- A. 1913 Store House (now Ceramics Building)
- B. 1914 Presbyterian Manse / Ocean Vista Cottage (location unknown)
- C. 1914 Nancy Craig Cottage (location unknown)
- D. 1915 West Cottage
- E. 1918 Houk House (rebuilt after fire in 1928)

1930



- A. 1926 Tillie Paul Manor
- B. 1926 Ada F. Pears Cottage (location unknown)
- C. 1929 Sage Building
- D. 1930s Sawmill (rebuilt after fire in 1940)
- E. 1930s Gymnasium

1960



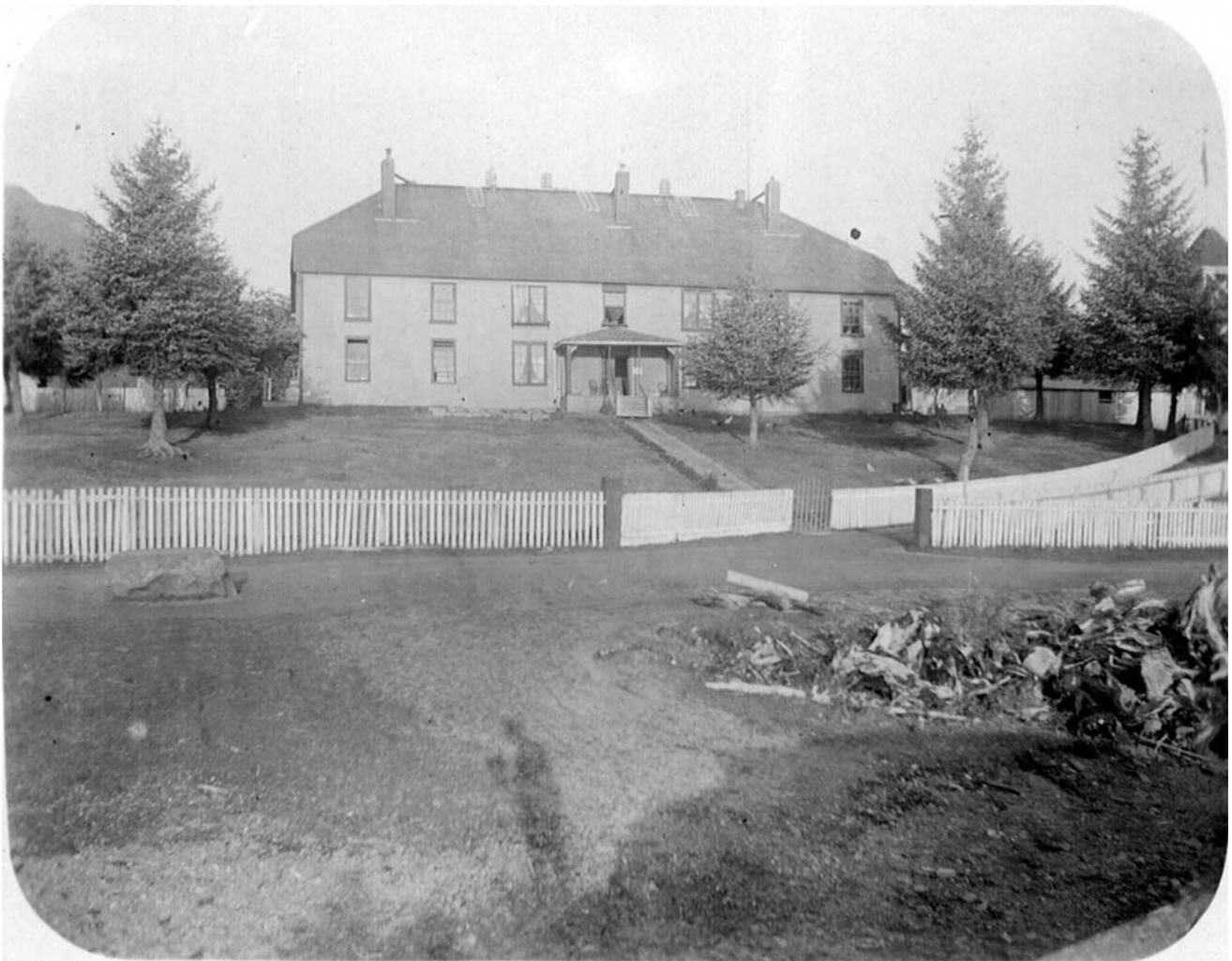
A. 1957 Austin House (President's House)⁵³

B. 1955 ca. Yaw Hall

⁵³ The dates up to this point are based on information in the National Historic Landmark Nomination. The dates beyond this point were gathered from sources in the Sheldon Jackson College library



Artifacts: remains of a rifle, a recent mop, and ice skate, and ceramics. Right: we found fragments of cast iron stoves and shards of brick. Photographs Rebecca Poulson.



Boys' dormitory. "Lincoln Street" is in the foreground. View northeast. Sitka Historical Society, Photograph 1679. From Michael Yarborough's Plan for Archaeological Monitoring, 2002.



Boys' and Girls' dormitories. View east from "Lincoln Street." "Indian Training School, Sitka, Alaska, ca. 1888." University of Washington Libraries NA2511. From Michael Yarborough's Plan for Archaeological Monitoring, 2002.



Combination of two photographs of outbuildings north of the boys' dormitory: "Mt. Shea from 'Bachelor's Hall'" and "View NE from 'Bachelor's Hall.'" Sitka Historical Society, Photographs 1680 and 1682. From Michael Yarborough's Plan for Archaeological Monitoring, 2002.



Sheldon Jackson School campus looking at the back of the buildings toward the water. Allen Hall is on the left. This was during construction of the new campus, in 1910-11; the original buildings, the boys and girls dormitories, are still standing. Sitka Historical Society photo 89.19.25.



A panorama of the campus taken shortly after it was constructed in 1911. Photo by E. W. Merrill, collection Rebecca Poulson.