Paxson Inn & Lodge

Mile 185 Richardson Highway, Gakona, AK (907) 803-3035

License Issued: June 20, 1941 to Russell M. Keith **CLOSED December 14, 2013**

Amenities: Pool table, TV, deck, food

Web Site: None

History and Notoriety: According to Alaska historian Kenneth Marsh, Alvin J. Paxson built a large two-story log roadhouse along a new section of the Valdez-Fairbanks trail in 1906. The area was known for excellent hunting and fishing, and there were mines to the east and west. Before long, a trading post, telegraph station, and post office were built near the roadhouse. Al sold the roadhouse in 1913 and it burned down in 1923. It was rebuilt, initially as a single story. The lodge would be relocated to at least four slightly different locations over the years, but always retained the original name.

In 1934 Russell Keith and his wife Alverra bought Paxson'. A visitor in 1938 described the interior of the lodge as "…half hidden by trophies: bear, moose, sheep and other heads and skins…somehow I was reminded of the head hunters of the Amazon." Russ obtained a liquor license in 1941 to better serve the travelers, hunters, and fishermen that

frequented his establishment. By 1944, John & Wilma Windust and partner C.J. Newlin had become the new owners.

The Valdez-Fairbanks trail/road eventually became the Richardson Highway. Travelers continued to rely on the highway roadhouses, and during the winter of 1949-1950, the Richardson was kept open for the first time. Paxson' got a lucky break in 1957 when the Denali Highway was completed, connecting the area with Cantwell on the Parks Highway. This provided tourists on the Alaska Highway with a short-cut to Mt. McKinley (Denali) National Park. John & Wilma decided to build a new lodge, which is the current building. The grand opening was on Memorial Day weekend of 1958, with over 3,000 motorists stopping by.

John & Wilma sold the lodge to Stanley & Wanda Brown of Fairbanks in June of 1959. In the late 1960's the cocktail lounge was known as the "Grayling Room." The Brown family (they had eight kids) owned Paxson' for 37 years, selling the lodge to Chester & Karen Eldridge in 1996.

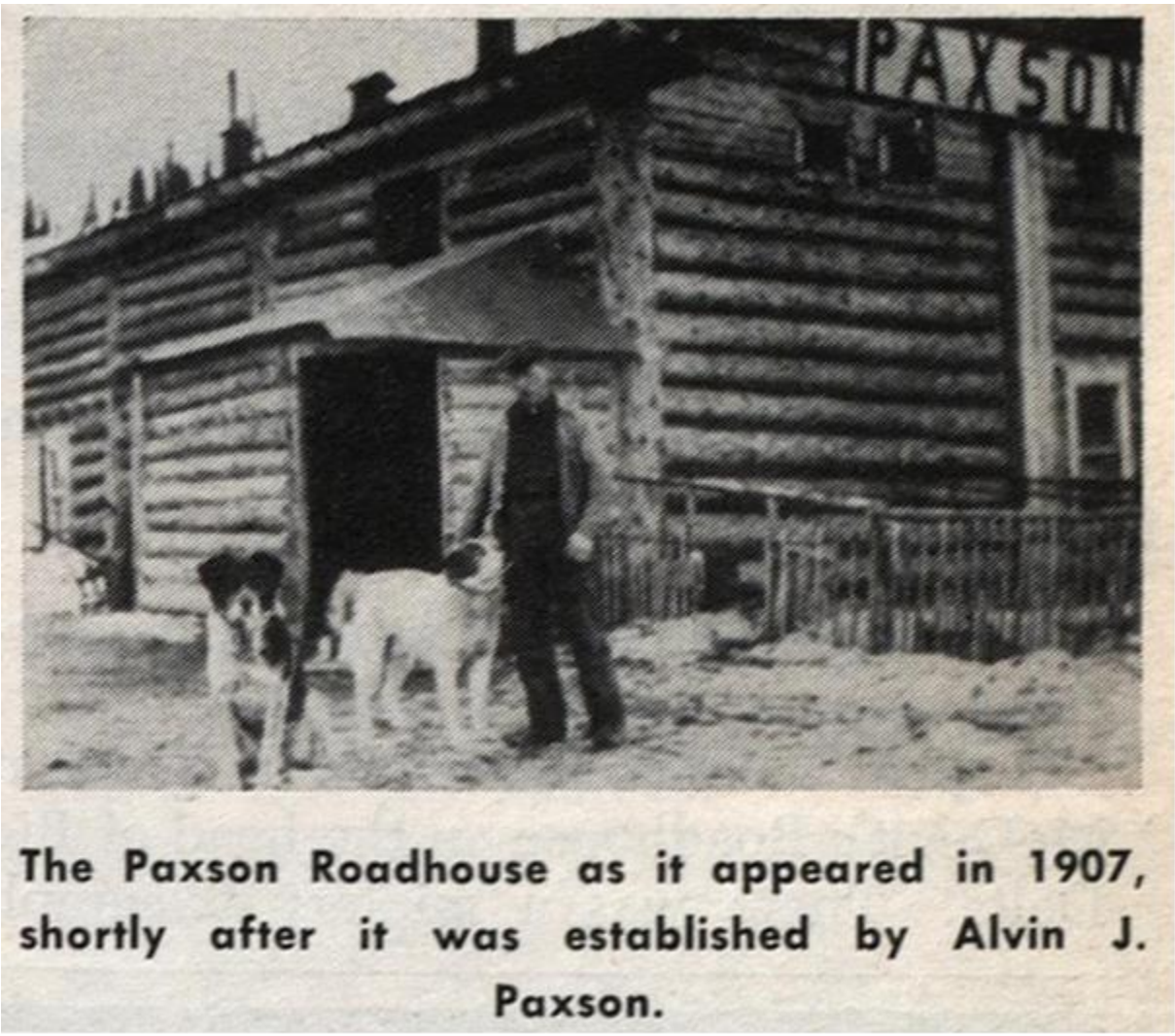
The Paxson Lodge remains popular with hunters and fishermen, but the bar is particularly well known with the winter sports crowd.

Visiting the Paxson Inn: "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we may have to go to Fairbanks" proclaims a sign on the wall. The bar is cozy, but folks can have drinks in the restaurant and out on the deck, which is a big draw on a sunny day. Snowmobilers can be found in full force here on weekends during the winter months. The Gin Gin 200 sled dog race in December, the Copper Basin 300 sled dog race in January, and the Arctic Man snowmobile/ski race in April, are popular times to be at the Paxson Inn.

http://fm.kuac.org/post/paxson-lodge-closes-slow-business-mounting-fuel-and-maintenance-costs

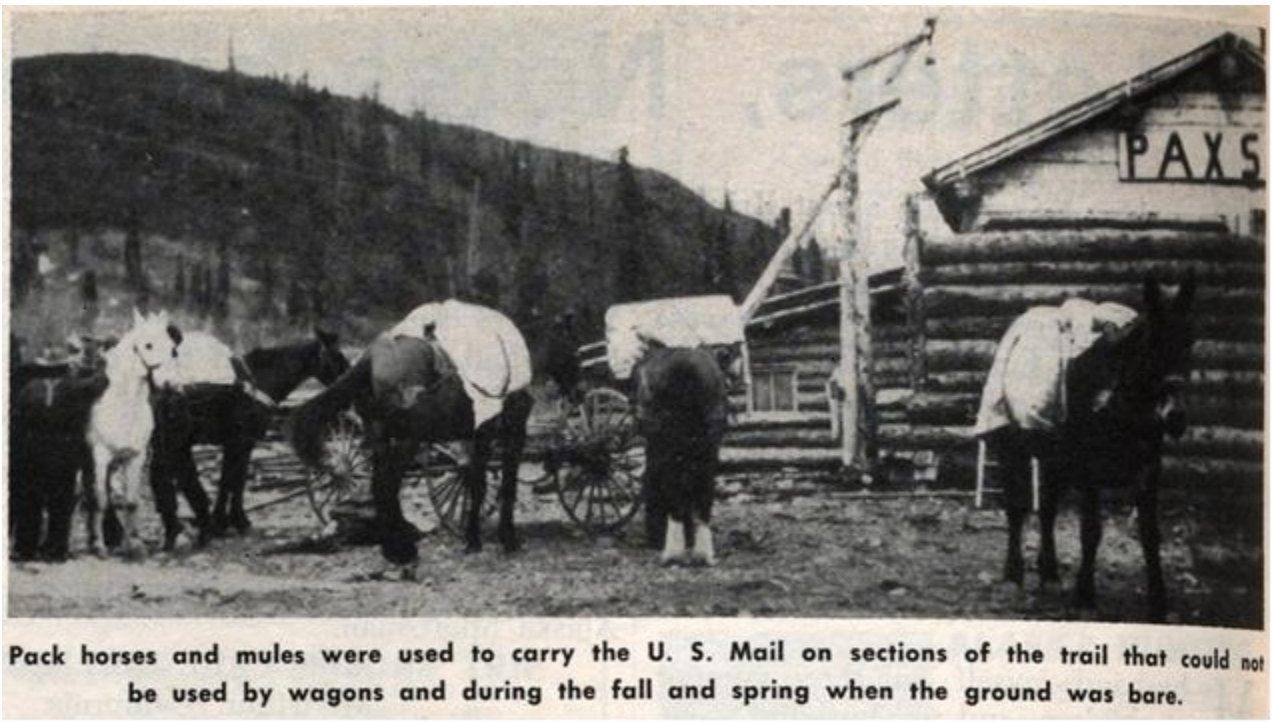
http://www.newsminer.com/news/local_news/paxson-lodge-shuts-its-doors/article_e46ef6ac-9f8a-503a-8515-405cb23eb480.html

http://www.adn.com/alaska-travel/article/paxson-lodge-closes/2013/12/20/



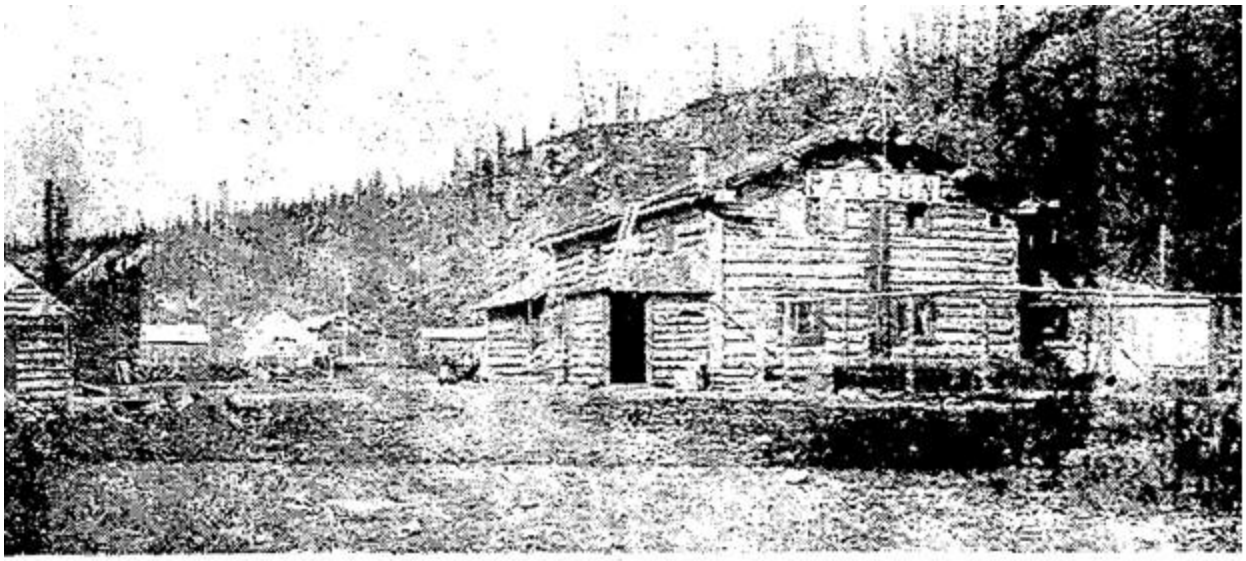
The Paxson Roadhouse as it appeared in 1907, shortly after it was established by Alvin J. Paxson.

Paxson Lodge 1907: From *Alaska Sportsman* – July 1964



Pack horses and mules were used to carry the U. S. Mail on sections of the trail that could not be used by wagons and during the fall and spring when the ground was bare.

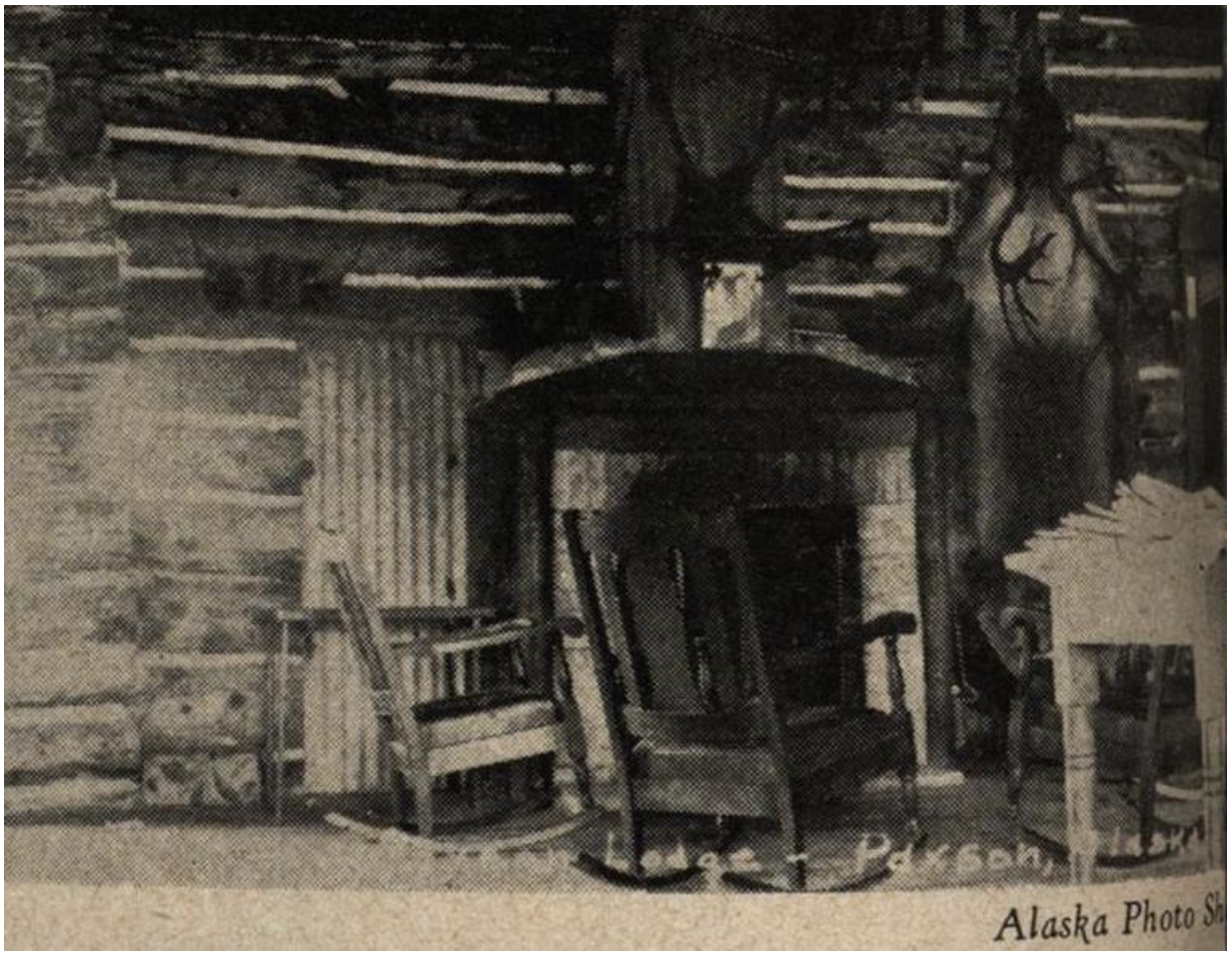
Paxson Lodge 1907: From *Alaska Sportsman* – July 1964



ROCKY ROAD—Traveling by car or sled over Alaska's "highways" in the early days was no easy matter—and often a slow one. This "trace" with rocks on it is the Richardson Highway leading past the old Paxson lodge, now a modern building passed by a paved highway. This picture was taken in 1921, some 17 years after road building started in the territory.

—Musser Collection

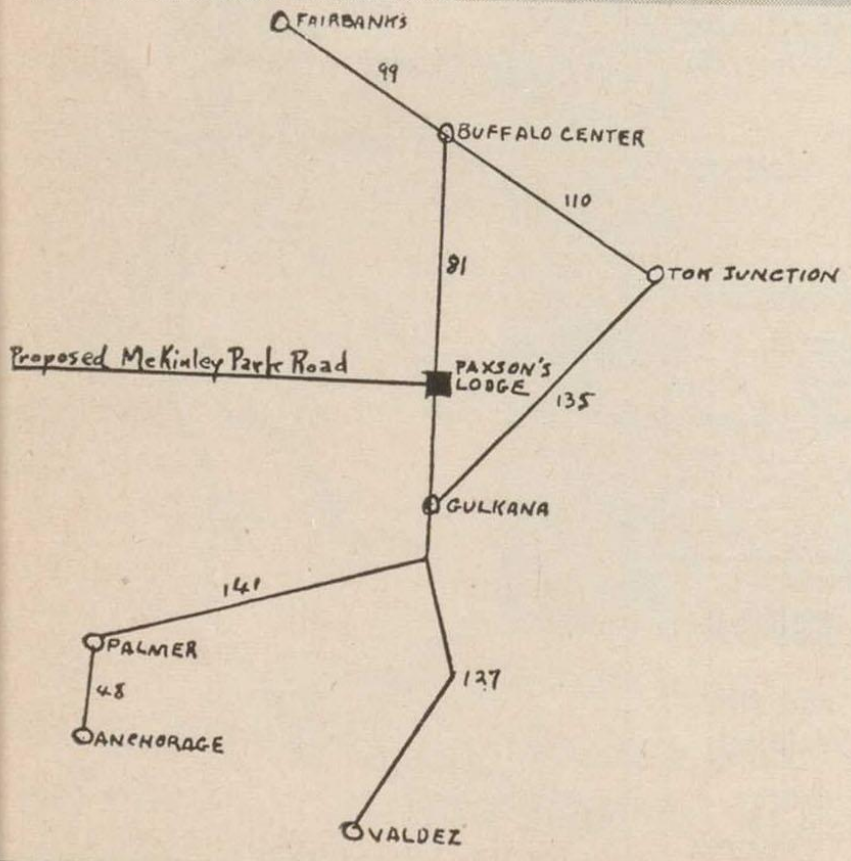
Fairbanks Daily News Miner – July 18, 1958



"Lobby view of popular Paxsons's Lodge on Richardson Highway"
From *Alaska Life* magazine – January 1945

Welcome To Famous

PAXSON LODGE



MILE 190, RICHARDSON HIGHWAY

In the Center of Interior Alaska's Road System

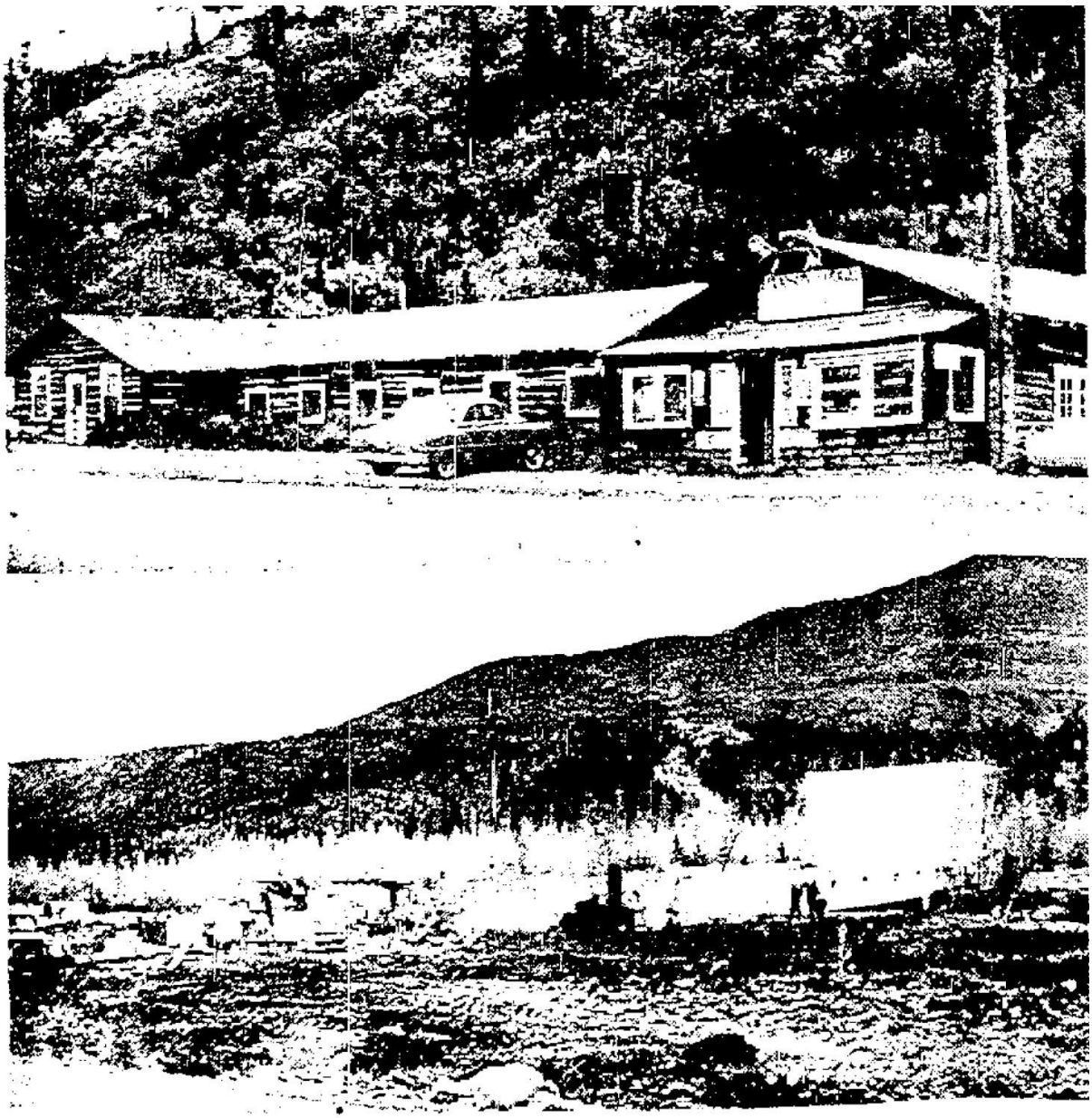
Situated in the middle of a triangle and in one of the best fishing areas in Interior Alaska, historic Paxson Lodge offers the best opportunity for recreation in the Alaskan style.

Paxson Lake gives up the Mackinaw trout and its streams abound in grayling. Nearby lakes, accessible by plane or boat, offer the best in Alaska fishing.

In the fall moose, caribou and sheep are within reach of the sportsman's gun. Guide service is available and accommodations are of the best a modern day hostelry can offer. A complete line of supplies is on hand.

MR. AND MRS. JOHN WINDUST, Proprietors

From Lou Jacobin's *Guide to Alaska and the Yukon* – 1947 and 1953 (same ad)



FROM OLD TO NEW — Historic old Paxson Lodge 178 miles south of Fairbanks on the Richardson highway, soon will have a new home. Owners John and Wilma Windust are constructing a modern 20-room lodge, shown in the lower picture. The old lodge will be turned into a museum, with the moose, caribou and other wildlife specimens on exhibit. The new building will have all modern conveniences, including a bath with each room. The old lodge, built between 1908 and 1910, has been a familiar landmark over the years to highway travelers.

(News-Miner Photo by Phil's Studio

***Fairbanks Daily News Miner* – September 13, 1957**

PAXSON LODGE OPERATORS — Wanda and Stanley Brown of Fairbanks, who have taken over operation of the new Paxson lodge on the Richardson at the junction with the Denali highway. This photo was taken in the coffee shop of the new building completed last year. In addition to 32 guest rooms in the old lodge, the new building offers 19 modern rooms with private baths, attractive lounge and lobby, as well as ultra-modern coffee shop and restaurant. The new facilities rank among the finest road-side accommodations in Alaska, and are comparable to any throughout the states. Paxson Lodge is open 24 hours the year around.

Fairbanks Daily News Miner **– July 2, 1960**

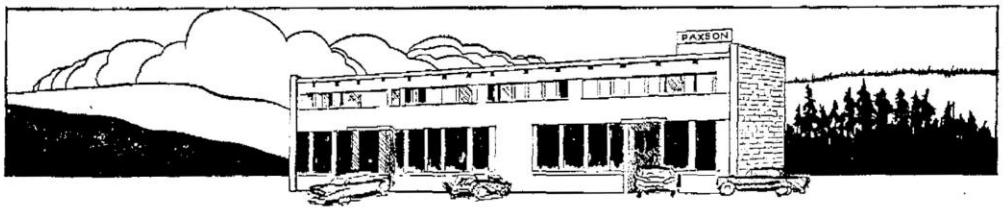
In the heart of . **ALASKA'S VACATION LAND**

PAXSON LODGE

ESTABLISHED 1905

GATEWAY TO MT. McKINLEY NATIONAL PARK

• MILE 186 RICHARDSON HIGHWAY AT JUNCTION OF DENALI HIGHWAY •



A modern resort with old time Alaskan hospitality

ROOMS WITH BATH
DINING ROOM
COCKTAIL LOUNGE
SOUVENIR AND
GIFT SHOP
PACKAGE & LIQUOR
STORE

IN FAMOUS BIG GAME
AND TROUT FISHING AREA

• 24 HOUR •
SERVICE ALL YEAR

CHEVRON PRODUCTS & CREDIT CARDS
ADJACENT 3000 FT. AIR STRIP

Address: PAXSON LODGE, GAKONA, ALASKA

STANLEY F. BROWN, Manager

Fairbanks Daily News Miner – **November 15, 1961**

PAXSON LODGE

185 · Richardson Hiway
Paxson, Alaska

STANLEY F. BROWN
Resident Manager

VALDEZ - 185 FAIRBANKS - 179

DINING ROOM — MODERN ROOMS
WITH BATH — COCKTAIL LOUNGE
GIFT SHOP
POST OFFICE
GROCERY & PACKAGE STORE
Hunting - Fishing Licenses & Supplies
STANDARD OIL PRODUCTS

— 81 MILES FROM DELTA JUNCTION TO PAXSON LODGE

From *Alaska Highway Sketches* by Connie Silver - 1963

From Lou Jacobin's *Alaska Travel Guide* – 1967

Fairbanks Daily News Miner – **May 28, 1968**

PAXSON LODGE

(ESTABLISHED 1903)

In Heart of Alaska's Vacationland • Gateway to Mt. McKinley National Park

MILEPOST 185.5, RICHARDSON HWY. • AT JUNCTION OF DENALI HWY.

A MODERN RESORT WITH OLD-TIME ALASKAN HOSPITALITY

24-hour service all year

ROOMS WITH BATH • DINING ROOM • COCKTAIL LOUNGE

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Address:
Paxson Lodge, Paxson, Alaska

For Reservations
PHONE 822-3330

Stanley F. Brown,
Manager

The Milepost – 1972

The Paxson Lodge Bar – 2011
Doug Vandegraft photo

Deck at the Paxson Lodge – 2011
Doug Vandegraft photo