

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900 USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86) OMB No. 1024-0018

St. Sergius and Herman of Valaam Russian Orthodox Chapel Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam Chapel

Other Name/Site Number: AHRS Site No. KOD-196

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: About 1/2 mile north of Icon Bay (Monk's Lagoon) Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Spruce Island Vicinity: ___

State: Alaska County: Kodiak Division Code: 150 Zip Code: 99644

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local: ___
Public-State: ___
Public-Federal: ___
Category of Property
Building(s): X
District: ___
Site: ___
Structure: ___
Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing: 1
Noncontributing: ___ buildings, ___ sites, ___ structures, ___ objects
Total: 1

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official Date

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State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

____ Entered in the National Register

____ Determined eligible for the National Register

____ Determined not eligible for the National Register

____ Removed from the National Register

____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Religion
Funerary

Sub: Religious Facility
Graves/Burials

Current: Religion

Sub: Religious Facility

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Russian Orthodox Colonial Revival

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Post
Walls: Log
Roof: Shingle
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Chapel of Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam is located on Spruce Island, seven miles northeast of Kodiak Island, on the western side of the Gulf of Alaska. Access to Spruce Island is limited to boat, float plane, or helicopter. Upon arrival at the beach at Monk's Lagoon on Spruce Island, visitors must walk a half mile to the chapel on an unpaved trail, making a gradual ascent through the dense spruce forest. The chapel is visible in a small clearing in the trees. Along the trail to the chapel are two Russian Orthodox structures from the mid-20th century and a spring with a wooden gazebo-type covering. The trail then continues on past the Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam Chapel towards the interior of the island.

The following information is derived primarily from the Historic Structures Report (HSR), written in September 2000 by Neal Vogel of Restoric, Historic American Buildings Survey documentation from 1989, the National Register Nomination prepared by Alfred Mongin and Father Joseph Kreta in 1980, and a site visit by a National Park Service Exhibit Specialist in September, 2001. The Chapel of Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam is a simple wooden structure constructed between 1894 and 1896 and consecrated in 1898. It is built into a slope, and is oriented to the south. It consists of three sections: the center section, or nave, is the largest; the north portion housing the altar is the sanctuary, and a small narthex or vestibule makes up the south section. Entrance is through a single door into the narthex. The three sections are raised approximately four feet above the ground, and while connected, are not fully integrated: i.e. they were built separately. Three-bar Russian Orthodox crosses and the supedaneum or "onion dome" are the features that identify it to the casual observer as a Russian Orthodox building. There is no electricity, water, or heat. The chapel was repaired between 1939 and 1942 by Archimandrite Gerasim Schmaltz and people from the village of Ouzinkie, though no documentation of the repairs exists.¹ It is likely that clapboards on the exterior were added at this time, the roof reshingled, and the floor replaced. Some new floor beams were installed in 1999. The contemporary appearance of the chapel, painted white with green trim, closely resembles a photograph in the June 1965 issue of *National Geographic*. Currently the nave and sacristy are finished in clapboard, while the narthex is finished in a type of novelty siding. The roof surfaces are shingled, and the skirting is of vertical batten boards.

The walls are built of 8 by 10-14 inch hewn logs in crib construction, and examination of the northwest corner for a Historic Structures Report (HSR) revealed full dovetail joints, a feature typical of Russian log joinery. It is suggested that the logs are native Sitka spruce. Further exposure during the HSR work revealed moss chinking in the south wall of the nave. The exterior was furred with 1 by 3 inch nailers as clapboards, a practice commonly used to reduce maintenance of the chinking. No coatings or preservatives of any kind appear to have been used, even when the logs were exposed. Remaining examples of log churches and chapels dating from the Russian period in Alaska such as this are rare, so that even though the chapel does not date to the time of colonization, it is a significant representative of Russian architecture on the Alaskan frontier.

Early photographs show walls of exposed hewn-logs covered with corner boards and horizontal plank skirting composing the nave and sacristy. The floor plan of the main structure measures 21 feet 7 inches long by approximately 19 feet 8 inches wide. The original entry door apparently was in the west wall of this section. The roof is a medium angle hip, with a modest four-sided pyramid rising from the short ridge seam, and from that a small, slender supedaneum serving as the base for the single cross. The pitch of the roof is a moderate 13:12, and it rises 10 feet 8 inches to the ridge. The cupola is 4 feet high, and the supedaneum and cross another 6 feet, 3 inches. The cupola has been rebuilt to a steeple form and rotated from its original position by 45 degrees. The sanctuary measures 10 feet deep by 18 feet 7 inches wide, and is covered by a medium angle hip roof, stepped into the east face of the nave at a point lower than the main roof ridge. In early photographs, the narthex appears constructed of dimension lumber. It is a rectangular chamber 8 feet deep and 10 feet 5 inches wide. It is covered by a 9:12 pitch gable roof whose ridge abuts the eve of the west roof face of the nave.

¹ As this was a difficult period in the history of Russian Orthodoxy in the United States, it is probable that these repairs were done by Orthodox members themselves (many probably native Alaskan) with little external financial support or direction. Rather than being inappropriate alterations to the structure during a period beyond that of its original significance, these changes should be regarded as expressions of the grass-roots support for the Church in rural Alaska—the very response the construction of the chapel was meant to engender from its inception.

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The door opens onto an open porch of recent construction, with a flattened open stairway to grade. It is lighted by 6-pane lights.

No historic photographs of the interior are known to exist. Currently, the interior is paneled with light blue-painted 3 ½ inch-wide tongue and groove beaded board on the walls and gray-painted 6 inch-wide tongue and groove beaded-board on the ceiling. The ceiling height averages 9 feet in the nave, and 8 feet in the sacristy. The north wall of the nave features simple paneled doors and chamfered boards creating a vernacular *iconostasis*. The *iconostasis* is plain, with fixed doors used as part of the screen. Icons are present in the top half, and vertical beaded-board composes the lower half. The 4 foot-deep sanctuary floor area immediately in front of the *iconostasis* is raised 6 inches above the main floor, which is constructed of 3 ½ inch-wide tongue and groove boards oriented north-south over a 1 inch by 12 inch subfloor.

The roof is framed with 1 ½ by 5 ½ inch rafters. ¾ by 3 ½ inch planed nailers are under the red cedar shingles. No roofing paper was used. The shingles are fastened with galvanized nails, while the hips and cupola are flashed with galvanized steel baby tins. There is no evidence that the building ever had gutters, and none are present now. The cornice is boxed, and the eaves extend approximately 8 inches. The ceiling is framed with 2 X 6 inch rough-sawn joists supported by hewn-log top plates. The floor is framed with 2 by 8 inch joists carried by beams, and is free-floating from the rest of the structure, resting as it does on 10-12 inch diameter peeled log pilings.

Integrity

Overall, the structure suffers from the natural deterioration inherent in the damp climate of the Gulf of Alaska. The roof framing is in good condition, however the shingles need to be replaced. The fenestration is in good condition. The walls have been covered with siding for the last half century, and this factor has led to exceptional preservation of the underlying hewn timbers. The post support system underneath the chapel is in need of continuous maintenance and some efforts have been made on the part of the Church to replace support posts. Drainage around the site needs to be improved, as currently water discharge passes through the site. Other than addition of the siding and changes to cupola, the chapel retains a high degree of integrity of materials, design, and workmanship. Over the last century, the natural setting of the chapel has remained virtually unchanged. The original clearing in which the chapel was built has been kept clear of new trees, but those surrounding it have continued their natural growth and contribute to the atmosphere of the remarkable setting chosen for the chapel.

The two structures on the trail to the chapel (a small chapel and monastic cell) and the covered spring also maintain a relatively high degree of integrity. While not on Church land and not part of this nomination, they nevertheless contribute to the overall significance and setting and are visited during the annual pilgrimage to the site every August. Adjacent to the chapel and cell is a large clearing thought to be the location of gardens worked during the sites original period of habitation in the early 1800's.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X
Statewide: ___ Locally: ___

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B ___ C X D ___

Criteria Considerations: 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 X 8 ___

(Exceptions listed on Part 4, Pg. 17 of National Register Bulletin on the preparation of National Historic Landmark nominations at www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nhl)

NHL Criteria: 1, 4

NHL Theme(s): Creating Social Institutions and Movements
Religious Institutions

National Register Areas of Significance: Architecture, Religion, Social History

Period(s) of Significance:

Significant Dates: 1894-1951

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Demedoff, Timofa

- NHL Comparative Categories:
- II. European Exploration and Settlement
 - D. Other European Exploration and Settlement
 - 3. Russian
 - IV. Westward Expansion
 - B. The Fur Trade
 - 3. Northwest and Pacific Coast Fur Trade
 - IX. Society and Social Conscience
 - A. American Ways of Life
 - 3. Ethnic and Religious Minorities

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**Statement of Significance**

The Russian Orthodox Church has been an enduring institution in America since its representatives arrived in Russian Alaska in the late 1700s. However, its history in the United States has not been without difficulty. A period of particular crisis took place in the decades following the 1867 sale of the Alaska Territory to the United States as the Orthodox clergy in Alaska struggled to adapt to the changes that came with a new government and ever-increasing autonomy from Church administration in Russia. Their strategy for maintaining the position of the Church in the United States was to launch the first in what was to become a series of revitalization movements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Because of the pivotal political changes at the end of the 1800s, however, this first movement proved to be a defining moment in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States. The chapel of Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam was built during this first revitalization movement in commemoration of the centennial of Russian Orthodoxy in the New World, and as such performed an essential role in the revitalization effort as a symbol not only of Church history, but of the values and goals of the Orthodox Mission as a whole. Its symbolic potency was assured by its style of construction, which invokes the strong traditions of Russian Orthodox Church architecture, and by its location over the grave of Father Herman, a member of the first party of monks to come to Alaska from Russia, himself a figure representative of the principles and ethics of the Russian Orthodox Church and the first Russian-American saint. While there are three churches built in the 1890s to commemorate the centennial still extant, this is the only surviving chapel from the first revitalization effort and the only North American pilgrimage site for the faithful of the Orthodox Church worldwide. The Saints Serguis and Herman of Valaam Chapel was determined to be of national significance when it was listed on the National Register in 1980, and was selected as one of the Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties in Alaska for the year 2000 by the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation. It meets the requirements for designation as a National Historic Landmark in accordance with National Historic Landmark Exception 7. Though the chapel is a religious property, its significance lies in its role as commemorative building reflecting a major movement in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska and the United States.

The Russian Orthodox Church in United States Alaska

The Russian Orthodox Church was established in the New World as an integral part of Russia's economic endeavors in the Alaska Territory during the late 1700s and early 1800s. While financial support was not always as generous as could have been desired, the church persisted in its mission to oversee the morality of the Russian fur traders and introduce and foster the growth of Orthodox Christianity among the Alaska native peoples.² Church efforts gradually gained momentum, and the period from 1840 to 1867 saw growth in the American mission from four churches and four priests to nine churches, a cathedral, and 35 chapels under the administration of thirty-two Russian clergy. The success was cut short by changes at the political level in 1867 with the sale of Russian Alaska to the United States. There were many reasons for this decision. The Crimean War had raised the awareness of the limitations of Russia's resources, and defending a remote outpost was beyond its means. While Russia's recent opponents had leaned toward supporting the Confederacy in the recent United States Civil War, Russia had supported the Union. Tsar Alexander and President Lincoln had freed serfs and slaves, respectively, and Russian-American relations were warm. The deal was a way to prevent Britain from seizing the territory, a way to add badly needed

² The Russian Orthodox Church in America was meant to be a permanent institution from its inception, and not a temporary endeavor to care for Russian people until they returned to Russia (Bogolepov, Alexander, Toward an American Orthodox Church: The Establishment of an Autocephalous Orthodox Church, [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001 (1963)], 89).

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money to the Russian treasury, and a gesture of friendship to the United States.³ The treaty was signed on March 30, 1867.

While the treaty document provided for the Orthodox Church to retain ownership of its property, many Russian clergy were withdrawn or chose to leave, and by 1870, only three churches remained in full operation. In spite of the optimism on the part of some Orthodox clergy that the sale represented an opportunity to spread Orthodoxy into the United States, the Alaskan Orthodox Church underwent a significant decline. It had lost much of its financial resources when the monopoly charter for the Russian-American Company lapsed in 1863, and the loss of its priests and leadership coupled with the appearance of new missions previously active only in the United States challenged Orthodox Church efforts to maintain a foothold in Alaska. In 1870, the native Orthodox priest J. Shaiashnikov wrote that:

The present situation of our parishes in Alaska is a most difficult one. For the whole of Alaska there are only four priests: two are in Sitka, one in Unalaska, and one more in Kodiak. To such a sad picture can be added that the administrative center of the Church is far away in Siberia (in Blagoveschensk), and also that non-Orthodox missions have begun to appear at this time in Alaska.⁴

Competition between the Orthodox Church and the Presbyterians reached such a level that even funerals became opportunities for the assertion of one faith over the other. In several instances, the bodies of Orthodox individuals were taken and buried in Protestant coffins with accompanying rites irrespective of their own or their families wishes. Having dealt with just such an instance himself, Hieromonk Anatolii of Sitka wrote a long letter to Bishop Nicholas, in which the politicized nature of the event is evident in the following statement:

Who would ever imagine that, without any reason, the body of a Christian woman who had died peacefully would be treated like that of an animal, all but dragged by the feet along the street, without any regard for the lamentations and cries of her relatives, to whom this body is so dear. In addition the body is being transferred from one coffin into another at the whim of strangers trying to achieve certain goals...⁵

In a more well-known case, a Protestant woman set up the Jesse Lee Home for students attending a public school, but used tactics that amounted to kidnapping, falsifying charges of alcoholism against native parents, and other means to fill the home with children she meant to convert from Orthodoxy.⁶

The struggle remaining Orthodox clergy faced was compounded by the fashion in which the United States was governing its new territory, for no civil government was instated until seventeen years after the Alaska purchase. Alaska was under army and navy rule until a civil government was instituted in 1884, and until that time its inhabitants were treated "as if they were a conquered population in an enemy land".⁷ Individuals of mixed Russian-Native Alaskan descent who had been a relatively privileged class under the Russian regime suddenly found themselves treated as "contemptible half-breeds".⁸ There are accounts of military men robbing objects of value from Orthodox churches, and eager settlers established

³ Oleksa, Michael J., Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1992), 163.

⁴ Afonsky, Bishop Gregory, A History of the Orthodox Church in Alaska (1794-1917), (Kodiak: St. Herman's Theological Seminary, 1977), 76.

⁵ Kan, Sergei, Trans., Tlingit Indians of Alaska, by Archimandrite Anatolii Kamenskii, (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1985), 129.

⁶ Oleksa, Orthodox Alaska, 173-177.

⁷ Black, Lydia, Orthodoxy in Alaska (Berkeley: Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, 1996), 100.

⁸ Black, Orthodoxy in Alaska, 103.

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land claims even in areas where Russian or Alaska native settlements had already been established.⁹ Paper land titles had seldom been issued under the Russian government, and such documents as did exist were openly subject to challenge in United States courts. In short, the entire area was treated as “Indian Territory”, and subject to the same drive towards acculturation by the United States government that the other western regions were. Under the first general agent for education in Alaska, Sheldon Jackson (a Presbyterian minister who received a salary from the Presbyterian Church through 1907), areas of Alaska were even assigned federally funded Christian missions in the same fashion as other Native American reservations in the United States, even in communities where the Orthodox Church had been active for nearly a century.¹⁰ The primary reasons Orthodox communities were targeted even more than the unconverted native populations by Protestant missionary efforts are the following. First, Orthodox ritual was unfamiliar, and services were conducted in Slavonic, Russian, or Native languages. Second, the calendar of the Orthodox Church varied from the Gregorian one, creating a conflict between Protestant work and school schedules and Orthodox holidays. Third, many denominations saw acculturation (including exclusive adoption of English) as the first step toward conversion, and took a dim view of the Orthodox Church’s relatively tolerant approach toward native languages, beliefs, and customs.¹¹ In light of these facts, it is clear that conflicting priorities surrounding acculturation and assimilation were in fact at the heart of the struggle for Native souls.¹²

In spite of the obstacles of economic hardship, reorganization within the Church structure, and adversarial relationships with competing denominations, the Church worked to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by the sale of Alaska. In 1868 the Holy Synod established the first Orthodox parish in San Francisco, with Father Nicholas Kovrigin as its pastor, and authorized funds for the construction of a church. In 1870, The Holy Synod moved the episcopal see to San Francisco in order to oversee ecclesiastical administration of the Orthodox Church in the United States, partially in response to a growing national Orthodox immigrant communities outside of Alaska, but soon realized the impact on the leaderless and suddenly advocate-less native Orthodox congregations in Alaska and returned the see to its previous location in the 1880s.

Throughout this period, little financial support was forthcoming from Russia, where the Church had assumed the burden of providing for the missions when the Russian-American Company lost its charter. As a result, Church leaders in America turned toward the same strategies their predecessors had used in the early days of the Orthodox mission when Company support had been less than adequate. In particular, they increased efforts to recruit native Alaskans for training as clergy to staff the more remote churches and chapels, and continued their advocacy on behalf of the local Alaskan populations with political authorities. The efforts of the Orthodox clergy were greatly bolstered by the arrival of Nicholas Ziorov, who was appointed Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska in 1891. A graduate of the Moscow Theological Academy, Bishop Nicholas was given the specific task of revitalizing Church life in Alaska.¹³ His missionary zeal earned him the epithet “the Apostle of Orthodox America”¹⁴, and by the time of his departure in 1898, the number of priests in Alaska had quadrupled, two new schools and 26 new parishes were opened, and the *Russian Orthodox American Messenger* was established. Bishop Gregory reports that “at the end of the 19th century, the Orthodox Church in Alaska and the United States, having experienced in the past many spiritual, economic and social difficulties, began again to prosper and this time on a much greater scale.”¹⁵

⁹ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰ Oleksa, Orthodox Alaska, 171.

¹¹ Black, Orthodoxy in Alaska, 109.

¹² Ibid., 115.

¹³ Afonsky, A History of the Orthodox Church in Alaska (1794-1917), 83.

¹⁴ Ibid., 84.

¹⁵ Ibid., 85.

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Part of the efforts to rejuvenate the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska included the celebration of the Centennial of the first mission. Funds for the construction of two new chapels and two new churches were approved, and Bishop Nicholas selected the grave site of Father Herman for the location of one of the chapels.¹⁶ So committed to the project was he that he donated his own money for the construction.¹⁷ According to a letter from the Dean of the Sitka District, dated July 10, 1895, the designer was Timofa Demedoff, about which little is known. Completed by 1896 and consecrated in 1898, this new chapel was dedicated to Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam, the Orthodox saints that established the Valaam monastery in Russia where Father Herman was trained, and is the most significant of the five commemorative structures.¹⁸ The choice of location was not coincidental; a formal inquiry into the life of Father Herman had been initiated in 1867, and a formal biography was published by the Valaam monastery in 1894¹⁹. Although Father Herman was not to be glorified as a saint until 1970, the significance of his contributions to the Orthodox mission were already obvious, and Bishop Nicholas recognized the value of his legacy for his task of invigorating Russian Orthodoxy in America.²⁰ In constructing the commemorative chapel on Father Herman's gravesite, Bishop Nicholas was following the Church tradition of honoring an important member of the Church by dedicating a building to his memory, and was invoking the symbolic power of the most steadfast and beloved member of the original party of missionaries that came from Russia to the New World.

Father Herman and the Russian Orthodox Mission in Russian Alaska

The groundwork for the spread of Russian Orthodox Christianity in America was laid by the first *promyshlenniki*, or fur-seeking seamen and ship captains, who followed in the footsteps of the 1741 Bering expedition from the Kamchatka Peninsula to the Gulf of Alaska. Beginning in 1745, these men began performing baptism and taking a few native children with them for a time on their voyages. Such children were given Russian names that reflected those of the men who took them under their wing. Native people willing to consider baptism were also those most amenable to entering into economic relationships with the Russians. Soon, baptized natives came to be considered a submissive and reliable labor force, and intermarriage between Russian men and native women was a relatively common occurrence as well.²¹ Russian merchant presence in Alaska was stronger than that of the Russian military because Russian state resources and manpower were focused on endeavors in Europe at the time.

The first Russian to form a permanent company for sponsoring longer voyages for fur trading in Alaska was Grigory Shelikhov, who established the Shelikov-Golikov Company (later the Russian-American Company) in 1778. His wife, Natalya Alexyevna, niece of his partner Ivan Golikov, became the first

¹⁶ The other chapel was the St. Sergius Chapel or the Little Russian Mission (also known as Chuathbaluk) built in 1891 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places 6/6/80 in the same multiple property submission listing the Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam Chapel. The churches included St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church built in Juneau in 1893 and listed on the National Register 9/19/73, and the Church of the Ascension built in Unalaska in 1894 and listed as a National Historic Landmark 4/15/70.

¹⁷ Black, Lydia, "Chapel of Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam: History and Significance of the Site", (Manuscript on file at St. Herman's Seminary, 2000), 3.

¹⁸ Lydia Black, personal communication, September 25, 2001.

¹⁹ A modern printed edition was produced by the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood through the St. Herman Press of the New Valaam Monastery in 1989.

²⁰ "Glorification" differs from the Roman Catholic "canonization" in that canonization is necessary for people to become saints. Orthodox glorification does not render a person a saint; rather it is a recognition of a person's saintliness, which exists whether official glorification ever takes place.

²¹ Kan, Sergei, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad: The case of Siberian and Alaskan Indigenous Peoples", in *Of Religion and empire: Missions, Conversions, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. R. Geraci and M. Khodarkovsky, pp. 173-200, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 181.

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white woman to visit Alaska when they launched their first expedition in 1783.²² By the end of 1786, he had established temporary trading stations on Kodiak Island, Afognak Island, Kenai or Cook Inlet, and Cape St. Elias, and the company continued to grow as hunting for furs continued year round. It was Shelikov who petitioned Catherine II to allow Russian Orthodox missionaries to travel to the colonies at the expense of the company in an attempt to convert more natives and thus expand his labor force of native and mixed native-Russian workers. His request was granted. The first representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church arrived on Kodiak Island in 1794. The original group of men consisted of Archimandrite Joasaph Bolotov, Hieromonk Makarii, Hieromonk Juvenaly, Hierodeacon Nektary, Hieromonk Afanassay, Hieromonk Herman, Hieromonk Michael, a novice named Stephen (who became a Hierodeacon), and another novice known as Joasaph.²³ All were from the Valaam Monastery on the archipelago in Lake Ladoga, which had a reputation as a very religiously conservative, traditional community. The monks were charged with overseeing the morality of the Russians as well as converting the native Alaskans.²⁴

In spite of a written order on the part of Catherine the Great to Shelikov directing the Russians to treat the Alaska natives “with as much tenderness and good will as possible,”²⁵ the men were not always kind to the Alaskans they encountered. Indigenous men became more and more obligated to hunt for the Russians when what began as relations of “kinship” between *promyshlenniki* and their native protégés swiftly disintegrated into more exploitive and manipulative labor practices as labor shortages and concerns over profits escalated. Government regulations prohibiting abuse were often ignored. There is also evidence of great loss of native life by massacre, epidemics, and resettlement by the Russian American Company that separated Aleut males from their families and enslaved them.²⁶ Aleuts were also used as an auxiliary military force in confrontations with the Tlingit.²⁷ The problem was only worsened by the policies of Shelikoff’s manager, Aleksandr Baranov, who arrived in Alaska in 1791. When Catherine II banned the existing *iasak*, or fur tax, he replaced it with compulsory labor. In another instance, a Russian crewmember amused himself by tying twelve Aleut men in a row in order to test how many a musket ball would pierce.²⁸ In spite of such cruelties, the Russian-American Company received a renewable charter for monopoly rights in the region in 1799.

The newly arrived monks on Kodiak Island quickly became aware of the abuses of the company, and within a year of their arrival began sending letters protesting the company treatment of natives and the general conduct of the Russian men back to Petersburg. Father Herman himself wrote that, “...the wasteful slaughter of the sea animals was equaled only by the brutalizing of the natives.”²⁹ Reports such as this marked the beginning of tensions between the missionaries and the fur company that had brought them that were to last for decades. Angered by the missionaries’ criticisms, Baranov threatened them

²² Bobrick, Benson, East of the Sun: The Epic Conquest and Tragic History of Siberia, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1992) 226.

²³ Afonsky, A History of the Orthodox Church in Alaska (1794-1917), 21-24.

²⁴ According to Mousalimas, the native people occupying the Kodiak area are the Alutiiq. They are distinct from the Aleuts (though the term “Aleut” generally includes the Alutiiqs in common usage), and their language is classed as “Eskimoan” because it is related to Yup’ik and Inupiaq (Inuit) languages. In some Russian documents, they are referred to as “Koniag”. (Mousalimas, S.A., The Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska, [Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995], 1-2, 58).

²⁵ Ivanov, Vyacheslav, The Russian Orthodox Church of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands and Its Relation to Native American Traditions—An Attempt at a Multicultural Society, 1794-1912, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1997) 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 26.

²⁷ Kan, “Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad”, 180.

²⁸ Bobrick, East of the Sun, 216.

²⁹ Smith, Barbara Sweetland, Preliminary Survey of Documents in the Archive of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska, (Boulder: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1974) 8.

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with arrest and expulsion. So great was the Company's misconduct that in 1796, Monk Makarii left his post for St. Petersburg without authorization to plead the cause of the natives directly before the Holy Synod. He was rebuked for his action but his complaint was noted and, in 1798, Archimandrite Joasaph and Hierodeacon Stephen were summoned to Irkutsk to provide eyewitness accounts. There Joasaph was consecrated Bishop of Kodiak, but the two men, joined by Makarii, were drowned at sea on the return voyage in 1799 and never reached Kodiak Island. Monk Juvenali had been martyred at Quinhagak in 1796 (he was glorified as a saint by the Orthodox diocese of Alaska in 1977), and no new bishop or any other church personnel were sent to the region following the deaths of the four monks. However, their reports on the treatment of the natives had not gone unnoticed, and the church dispatched a monk known as Gideon to observe the conditions on Kodiak first hand. Of the four men remaining at the Kodiak mission, Monk Herman was the only one who had remained in command of himself and retained the respect of the Company when Gideon arrived in 1804. Despite his instructions to maintain cooperative relations with Russian-American Company officials, Gideon agreed with the assessment of Company practices by the members of the New Valaam missionary party. When he departed in 1807, he left Herman in charge of the mission, and described him: "Enlightened and laborious, of great worthiness with unique qualities of mind and heart, the elder is overflowing with meekness and humility. With his kind and gentle attitude toward the native people, he created friendly relationships among them and taught them to lead a more productive life."³⁰

Meanwhile, animosity toward the monks on the part of the Russian-American Company continued unabated. Baranov wrote the following of Herman in 1800:

We have a monk here...worse than Makarii...He is a great talker and likes to write. Even though he keeps to his cell most of the time, not even attending services out of fear of worldly temptations, he knows nevertheless everything we think and do, not only during the day, but also at night. By means of pious cajoling, he extracts the information he wants from students and from among the servants here, and sometimes even from our own men.³¹

A visiting Russian named Golovnin recorded Herman's opinion of the company in 1818:

The main accusation against the company is that it exhausts the Aleuts by work. Besides the yearly program of hunting parties, they were sent on remote hunting expeditions lasting several years, where they died of hunger and privations, while in the villages their families, left without a hunter, were underfed and died prematurely...Company agents were accused of taking away wives and daughters to make concubines of them...[T]he company has never given the necessary material to keep registers of births and deaths; that women are indeed suffering greatly from the unrestricted domination of local managers over the Natives and no measure has been taken to protect piety and ethics, and that there has never been any justice; the will of one man decides everything and inflicts punishment.³²

Realizing that his work among the Alaskans would be better accomplished at a greater distance from Baranov, Father Herman left Kodiak to establish a hermitage on Spruce Island sometime between 1806 and 1808. He built a dugout shelter to live in the first summer, and by winter had constructed a hut, which he lived in until his death. A little distance away were constructed a wooden chapel, a small house for use as a school, and a guest house. He was reputed to be extraordinarily strong, and wore nothing but a smock of deerskin, boots, his cassock, a patched and old *rais*a or outer cassock, and his monastic *kobluk* (cylindrical head coverings), even in the coldest weather. Unknown to those around him, he wore a sixteen-pound chain about his body that was discovered upon his death and is now kept in a church in

³⁰ Afonsky, *A History of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska (1794-1917)*, 39.

³¹ Oleksa, *Orthodox Alaska*, 122.

³² *Ibid.*, 122.

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Kodiak.³³ Several miracles have been attributed to him since his death: a rescue at sea in 1842, a visionary chastisement for drunkenness in 1903, healing from tuberculosis in 1907, divine Easter visitations in 1927 and 1935, the rescue of an archpriest from persecution by Stalin in the Soviet Union in 1936, the miraculous preservation of his possessions during the burning of a church in 1943, a healing from cancer in 1951, and a miraculous fragrance of incense in his cell in 1961 and 1962.³⁴ During his life he was attributed with the ability to predict and even influence the weather, heal the sick, befriend animals, and predict the future, all qualities that were valued by the Alutiiq people.³⁵

Father Herman was born outside of Moscow in 1756 to merchant class parents, and entered the Troitsky-Sergiev Monastery at the age of 16. Five or six years later, he moved to the Valaam Monastery, attracted by its isolated location. The monastery had been founded on the Valaam archipelago in Lake Ladoga by the Saints Sergius and Herman, Greek monks whose biographies have since been lost. Although not specifically founded for the purpose of missionary work, Valaam was particularly successful in spreading the Russian Orthodox faith among the nomadic peoples of the region. Father Herman was one of the first to volunteer when the Holy Synod organized the Kodiak mission in 1793. He called his Alaskan island off of Kodiak “New Valaam”, perhaps because of its climatic similarity to the Valaam archipelago, and soon established an orphanage and school. He was aided by a woman variously represented as fully Aleut or of mixed Russian-Aleut parentage named Sophia Vlasova (also called Sofia Volkov in some accounts, and “Maria” in others). The exact origins of the orphanage are unclear; however, it is believed that it was founded following an epidemic and that the children in his care were taught agriculture, reading, writing, and religion. The orphans began to call Father Herman “Apa”, or grandfather, and the same term is still for him used today by the native people of the Kodiak area. By 1834, Father Herman was 78 years old and blind, though still quite active. He passed away on December 13, 1837. He was buried in a place that housed the gravesites of Monk Ioasaf, another member of the original group of monks, and Sophia Vlasova as well.

At the time of Father Herman’s arrival on Spruce Island, two approaches to evangelization were common within the Orthodox Church. The first placed more emphasis on eliminating “pagan” practices, and viewed missionaries both as messengers of the Church and as representatives of the Russian state, bound to hasten the incorporation of natives peoples into the Russian empire. The second took a more gradual approach, tolerated the less objectionable indigenous customs, encouraged the use of native languages, and tried to keep natives from adopting “harmful” Russian practices or abandoning “useful” indigenous economic and social traditions.³⁶ In addition, the charter for the Russian-American Company clearly forbade the imposition of Orthodoxy.³⁷ Father Herman and the other missionaries in the area took the latter approach and in doing so, took the first steps in ensuring the longevity of the Russian Orthodox faith among their indigenous followers. An oath instituted in 1821 and required of all new missionaries read:

I will earnestly perform the work of God which has been assigned to me and to my utmost mental and physical strength, without hypocrisy and avarice, avoiding all threats, deceit, extortion, and other unlawful acts, and without any force or violence; but sincerely, disinterestedly, kindly, considerately with true meekness and Christian love, keeping in mind the glory of God and the

³³Ibid., 119-120.

³⁴ Golder, Frank A. Father Herman, Alaska’s Saint, (San Francisco: Orthodox Christian Books and Icons, reprinted 1968 [c. 1915]), 31-55.

³⁵ Williams, Ann Elizabeth, Father Herman: Syncretic Symbol of Divine Legitimation, (Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 1994), 37 and 40.

³⁶ Kan, “Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad”, 173-4.

³⁷ Znamenski, Andrei A., Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820-1917, (Contributions to the Study of World History, No. 70. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 256.

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salvation of people's souls as the final aim of all my thoughts, words and acts, seeking not my own, but that which is of our Lord Jesus.³⁸

In addition to the moderate approach taken by Russian Orthodox missionaries, Father Herman and the other members of the original Orthodox mission among them, a variety of other factors are responsible for the acceptance of Orthodoxy by the Alaskan natives, some of whom made it a part of their cultural identity still important over 300 years later. First, all the monks that made the initial journey to America came from a single monastery. Thus the mission was a more cohesive effort than previous endeavors in Siberia. Consistency was maintained in subsequent years under the ideas and activities of a single influential organizer and thinker, Ivan Veniaminov.³⁹ Second, due to the large size of the territory and the small number of Russian clergy that were available, the Russians helped develop a local lay leadership and a cadre of Native clergy to perform some ceremonies in remote areas in the absences of the missionaries themselves.⁴⁰ This promoted a more voluntary adoption of the faith by native Alaskans that might have been the case if the Russians had been more exclusive. In addition, the church had the responsibility of educating native children and developing a written alphabet for native languages.⁴¹ Translated catechisms and primers promoted both literacy and conversion. Church teachings were thus made more accessible and available, promoting at least partial adoption of Russian Orthodox practices and beliefs on the part of native peoples. Third, the identification with Native concerns exhibited by the missionaries, particularly with respect to freedom of religious expression, and the appreciation of the cultural shock they were experiencing fostered a more trusting and open relationship than would have been the case if more aggressive and less sympathetic attempts at conversion had been attempted.⁴² Fourth, Russian Orthodoxy was the principal religious influence for 140 years, facing no other competition until after the Alaska territory was sold to America. Upon the sale of Alaska to the Americans, the Church provided a stable tradition for people still coping with the upset caused by the arrival of the Russians only two or three generations earlier.⁴³ Fifth, some have argued that Orthodoxy was easily combined with traditional practices. "...Orthodox icons, holy water, and other sacred objects and substances made a great deal of sense to the Tlingit and other Native Alaskans...whose own indigenous spirituality centered on and was expressed through ritual action rather than abstract theology."⁴⁴ In societies such as those of native Alaska in which shamans continuously had to prove their power, there was room for a dialogue with Christianity when their indigenous followers became disillusioned with traditional healing methods or simply wanted additional forms of physical and spiritual aid. In situations of radical change, shamans' powers and prestige were called into question.⁴⁵ The distinction between correspondence and equivalence has been made, and aspects of Russian Orthodoxy

³⁸ Afonsky, A History of the Orthodox Church in Alaska (1794-1917), 67.

³⁹ Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad", 175. Veniaminov arrived in Unalaska in 1824 at the age of twenty-seven. In addition to constructing a church, devising a timetable to control the hunting of sea otter so that the animals would have time to reproduce, convincing the Tlingits to submit to life-saving smallpox vaccinations during the epidemic of 1836, and making great strides in developing native alphabets and translating church writings into native languages, Veniaminov began to train local residents for priesthood and worked to create a body of laymen who could conduct weekly worship services. Veniaminov was consecrated bishop in 1840. The first Orthodox priest of Alutiiq descent, Iakov Netsvetov, was a student of Veniaminov.

⁴⁰ Smith, Barbara Sweetland, Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska: A History, Inventory, and Analysis of the Church Archives in Alaska with an Annotated Bibliography, (Alaska Historical Commission, 1980b) 11. This effort to train native parishioners is one explanation for the proliferation of chapels in the Alaska territory, which could be visited only infrequently by Russian priests.

⁴¹ Smith, Preliminary Survey of Documents on the Archive of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska, 13

⁴² Smith, Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska, 11.

⁴³ Williams, Father Herman, 107.

⁴⁴ Kan, "Russian Orthodoxy Missionaries at Home and Abroad", 1978.

⁴⁵ Znamenski, Shamanism and Christianity, 253-5.

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and Father Herman's behavior have been recognized as corresponding to some characteristics of native Alaskan culture, but not as equivalent by either party.⁴⁶

The degree to which this correspondence was true and to what extent any correspondence influenced the adoption of Russian religion and culture on the part of the native Alaskans is not without controversy. Some researchers feel that the relationship between the Russian missionaries and the native Alaskans has been romanticized:

In some recent publications...there is a tendency to describe the situation of the previous century in a nostalgic, romantic manner. A new myth of the original native culture mixed with the Russian Orthodox religion...may be perceived from these works. Unfortunately, the main aspects of the traditional culture had already been lost by that time, especially in the area where the Russian influence was particularly strong.⁴⁷

While the history of the adoption of Russian Orthodoxy by native Alaskans may not be a simple one, other researchers point to the special regard still held for Father Herman by members of native communities and the particular role he played in introducing Christianity to the native Alaskans. Perhaps the most valuable service he performed was that of intermediary, positioned as he was between Russian and native worlds. In this light, the idealism associated with the introduction of Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska is not simply modern nostalgia; figures such as Father Herman were symbolically significant at the time they were alive:

The symbolism of Father Herman and a group of native orphans moving to an uninhabited island and creating a school and gardens, learning scripture and hymns: creating order from nature in a wilderness, and order in new culture in a time of chaos is reflective of their creation of a new reality, and new identity born of Alutiiq and Russian origins...a selective reinterpretation facilitated by Father Herman. He was a figure who could be seen through native terms, thus he confirmed native cosmology and simultaneously facilitated its reinterpretation in terms of both Russian Orthodox and Alutiiq worlds.⁴⁸

In either case, complete acceptance of Russian Orthodoxy was rare; more often shamanistic native religions were mixed syncretically with Christianity. In other cases, indigenous groups would revert to their traditional religion, and indeed, a partial revival of shamanism occurred at the turn of the 20th century. Social and economic changes were factors, as was the competition between different Christian denominations that lessened the importance of each of them. Ultimately, the mix of shamanism and Russian Orthodox faith proved to be the most enduring.⁴⁹ The degree to which the native Alaskans did incorporate Russian Orthodoxy into their lives is, however, a reflection of the efforts of the missionaries and not just the result of continued Russian occupation. A comparison of the Alutiiq with the Kashaya Pomo Indians who interacted with Russians in the environment of Fort Ross, California is instructive. Their relative lack of adoption of Russian Orthodox practices could be attributed to the mercantile rather than religious emphasis of its Russian occupants, and the relatively brief period of Russian occupation (only twenty-nine years). The circumstances at Fort Ross have been described in the following way:

While a Russian Orthodox chapel was built at Fort Ross, and occasional services were held in the structure, there is little evidence that the church had any long-term influence on the Kashaya Pomo...While the Russians were sometimes brutal in 'recruiting' local natives as agricultural workers, the general policy of the Russian-American Company was not to produce Russian-

⁴⁶ Mousalimas, The Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska, 219.

⁴⁷ Ivanov, The Russian Orthodox Church of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, 30.

⁴⁸ Williams, Father Herman, 88-89.

⁴⁹ Ivanov, The Russian Orthodox Church of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, 32.

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Orthodox neophytes. Rather, they allowed the native workers to live in their own communities and to observe their own customs, taboos, ceremonies, and subsistence practices.⁵⁰

As a result, “Changes in traditional Kashaya ceremonies in the nineteenth century were not stimulated by Euro-American religions...”.⁵¹ Neither did many of the changes in technology and material culture they were exposed to persist much beyond the withdrawal of the Russians and native Alaskans from the fort in 1841.

The contrast between the degree to which fur company merchants and Orthodox missionaries invested time, energy, and resources in the native communities is clear. It was the commitment, the advocacy, and the investment in native communities that Father Herman so clearly embodied, making him an important symbol both for the commemoration of the Orthodox Centennial and for the revitalization of the Orthodox Church in a period of adversity. This first period of decline and revitalization in the second half of the 19th century were followed by others, and the significance of Father Herman is born out by the symbolic role he played in later rejuvenation efforts as well. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 effectively ended Russian financial support, and a Sobor held in Moscow in that same year established the mechanisms for the North American diocese to carry on independently. By 1924, the North American clergy declared their administrative independence, though this meant that it was laymen who conducted weekly worship in many cases. The following four decades were difficult ones, involving additional competition from other faiths, and culminating in a fire that destroyed St. Michael Cathedral in 1966. The destruction proved to be a rallying point, and one that American-born Bishop Theodosius used to strengthen a new campaign to revitalize the Orthodox Church in the United States. A drive to rebuild the cathedral was successful, the journal *Orthodox Alaska* was launched, church leaders designated themselves the “Orthodox Church of America”, and in 1970, Father Herman was glorified as a saint and his remains temporarily moved from Spruce Island to Kodiak, where they are today.⁵² He is the only saint whose relics remain in the western hemisphere.⁵³ On the occasion of Father Herman’s glorification, the Church reissued the biography that had been assembled by the Valaam monastery in 1894. The new publication included the Akathist (a long, liturgical poem composed specifically upon the occasion of the glorification) for Father Herman.⁵⁴ This Akathist is currently celebrated every Thursday by the congregation of the Ouzinkie community (the village considered to be derived from the original town founded by Father Herman), as Thursdays are Saint Herman’s Day.⁵⁵ The glorification ceremony was also the occasion for a pilgrimage from Kodiak to Spruce Island, a tradition that began during Father Herman’s lifetime and has become an annual event with pilgrims from all over the world taking part.⁵⁶ The Chapel of Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam is the only Russian Orthodox pilgrimage site in the United States, and in August, 2001, 400 Orthodox faithful made the journey to Spruce Island.⁵⁷

Russian Orthodox Architecture in Alaska

As Russian economic development in the Alaska Territory solidified during the latter part of the 18th century and the early 19th century, the Russian Orthodox Church formally entered the Territory in

⁵⁰ Lightfoot, Kent G., Thomas A. Wake and Ann M. Schiff, *The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Fort Ross, California, Volume I, Introduction*, (Contributions of the University of California Archaeological Research Facility No. 49. Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 150.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵² Smith, *Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska*, 7-11.

⁵³ Kreta, Joseph, “Survey of the Russian Orthodox Churches in Alaska”, in *The Church in Alaska’s Past*, (Miscellaneous Publications, History and Archaeology Series No. 23, Anchorage: Office of History and Archaeology, Division of Parks, 1979), 128.

⁵⁴ Russian Orthodox Church, *Saint Herman of Alaska*, (Wildes-Barre, PA: Llewellyn Bros., Inc., 1970).

⁵⁵ Williams, *Father Herman*, 12. The work Ouzinkie comes from the Russian *uzinki*, or narrows.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁷ Lydia Black, personal communication, September 25, 2001.

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response the Shelikov-Golikov Company's request for the conversion of more native peoples enabling expansion of the available labor force. While many structures had already been constructed by the fur traders, Russian Orthodox Church architecture was not yet present in any formal sense. With the arrival of the first Russian Orthodox mission to Kodiak in 1794 came also the legacy of Russian Orthodox architecture. In successive years, the Russian Orthodox Church constructed numerous chapels, churches, and cathedrals in nearly all regions of Alaska, thereby establishing a permanent presence.

The origins of Russian Orthodox Church architecture may be traced to pre-Christian Russian wooden architecture. By the end of the 10th century, the basic building type was the *izba*, a simple rectangular log structure with interlocking corners. The *izba*, or peasant house, often had three cells: the living area, the storage area, and a connecting hall. The roofs of each cell of the *izba* were individually gabled and occasionally the *izba* had a second story. The form of the *izba* is inherent in all Russian wooden architecture and the first Russian churches followed the tri-partite form.⁵⁸ The three parts, or cells, of the early churches were the sanctuary, nave, and the narthex. The naves of early tri-partite churches were of two general plans: rectangular or square with a gabled roof, and octagonal with an octagonal-spire roof upon which was placed the small bulbous 'onion dome'.⁵⁹ While the rectangular shape descended from the *izba* and the square plan derived from the both the *izba* and the Byzantine Orthodox churches, the octagonal shape may have been derived from fortification watchtowers.⁶⁰

From their simple early forms, Russian Orthodox churches developed into complex, ornate structures incorporating a variety of forms with multiple domes and adjacent or incorporated bell towers providing strongly vertical elements linking to the divine. Four distinct forms of Russian Orthodox churches emerged within Russia prior to the colonization of Alaska: the rectangular plan, the square plan, the octagonal plan, and the cruciform plan. The colonization of Alaska saw the introduction of Russian Orthodox structures incorporating all four of these forms. In addition the introduction of church structures into Alaska also followed a general chronological progression within which small crude log chapels were constructed first by the early missionaries as a temporary houses of worship and were then replaced by larger more permanent churches which conveyed a sense of style and the need for the development of public facilities. Occasionally churches were later replaced with even larger cathedrals.⁶¹ Examples of this progression may be found in the first of several chapels built at Ouzinkie on Spruce Island adjacent to Kodiak Island which was replaced in 1906 with the larger Nativity of Our Lord Church, and in the Saint Michael the Archangel Cathedral in Sitka which replaced the original church designed by Father Veniaminov, later elevated to Bishop Innocent, and built in 1848.⁶²

Russian Orthodox Churches in Alaska are always aligned on a magnetic or true east-west axis with sanctuary on the east, the nave in the center, and the narthex on the west side. The east-west alignment represents a directional duality in which the east symbolizes light, good and truth, and the west symbolizes darkness, error and evil. Worshippers would enter the chapel or the church from the dark and wickedness of the west and pass into or be shown the light and virtue of the east.⁶³ The narthex is rectangular in plan and varies from a small porch to the entire width of the nave. The sanctuary may be rectangular or polygonal, The polygonal form is usually present if the construction of the sanctuary is

⁵⁸ Lidfors, Kathleen, "The Russian Architectural Legacy in Alaska's Orthodox Churches", (Paper presented to the Alaska Historical Society Nov., 10, 1989) 1-4.

⁵⁹ Beyer, Faensen Uvanov, Early Russian Architecture (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 40.

⁶⁰ Hoagland, Alison K., Buildings of Alaska, (Buildings of the United States Series, Society of Architectural Historians. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 44.

⁶¹ Peterson, Steven, "Russian Colonial Architecture", (Manuscript on file at the National Park Service Alaska Support Office, Anchorage, n.d.), 2, 14.

⁶² Hoagland, Buildings of Alaska, 185, 286-287.

⁶³ Sokolof, D., A Manual of the Orthodox Church's Divine Services, (Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 1968), 9.

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integrated with the construction of the nave. While the sanctuary, nave and narthex may vary significantly in form and size, they typically have the same roof pitch.⁶⁴ Taken together, the plan and elevation views of the sanctuary, nave, and narthex resemble the form of a ship. An explanation of the symbolic significance of the ship form is as follows:

By giving their churches such a shape, Christians express the thought that, as a ship, under the government of a good helmsman, carries men through the stormy seas into a peaceful harbor, so the Church, governed by Christ, saves men from drowning in the deep waters of sin and brings them into the Kingdom of Heaven...⁶⁵

The interior spaces of the early churches had differing functions as defined by Orthodox liturgy. The narthex was considered a more secular space and was often used as a place where travelers could seek shelter. The nave is where the congregation would assemble for services, and the sanctuary was the place where the clergy emerge at the beginning of the service. In the early Orthodox churches the nave and sanctuary were separated by an *iconostasis*, a low partition or screen, separating the altar in the sanctuary from the congregation in the nave. As the Russians adopted the Orthodox liturgy, the *iconostasis* was heightened and finally closed off (penetrated by three doors) to reflect the severe distinction between sacred space of the sanctuary, and the nave where the congregation would await the delivery of the divine word. The *iconostasis* itself is ascribed with particular religious significance within the Russian Orthodox Church, and original *iconostases* are frequently incorporated into reconstruction or preserved during comprehensive remodeling.⁶⁶ Examples of this may be found at the second St. Seraphim Chapel in Lower Kalskag built in 1936, and the second Little Russian Mission at Chuathbaluk built in 1955.⁶⁷ The passage of the clergy between the sanctuary and nave was made through the royal doors in the center of the *iconostasis* and were situated to so that the clergy would dramatically emerge from the holy sanctuary to transmit the divine word with undisputed authority.⁶⁸

The arrival of the missionaries to Alaska saw the construction the first formal Russian Orthodox mission buildings in the New World. A small chapel had already been built at Kodiak under the direction of Shelikov-Golikov Company, which by 1793, was petitioning the Metropolitan Gabriel of St. Petersburg, Russia to send a priest to provide religious leadership and institutions at Company's expense.⁶⁹ When the mission was finally approved and dispatched to Kodiak in 1794, one of its first goals was to build a formal church to replace the chapel built by the *promyshleniki*. The missionaries, like the *promyshleniki* who had already established Kodiak as a commercial center, brought with them the traditions and remembrances of Russian architecture, and by 1795, they had constructed first Russian Orthodox-style church in Alaska at the Kodiak mission.⁷⁰

New churches were also built to replace the chapels at Sitka in 1808, Unalaska in 1825, and Atka sometime after 1828.⁷¹ Along with the church at Kodiak, these buildings served as the parish centers whose boundaries corresponded with the four Russian American Company administrative sections

⁶⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁵ Sokolof, A Manual of the Orthodox Church's Divine Services, 8.

⁶⁶ Lidfors, Kathleen, and Steven Peterson, "'Unlike Anything Else in America': The Architectural Legacy of Russian America", (Manuscript on file at the National Park Service Alaska Support Office, Anchorage, n.d.), 12.

⁶⁷ Hoagland, Buildings of Alaska, 276-277.

⁶⁸ Lidfors, "The Russian Architectural Legacy in Alaska's Orthodox Churches", 6.

⁶⁹ Afonsky, A History of the Orthodox Church in Alaska (1794-1917), 18-19.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 46-47.

⁷¹ Ibid., 42-44; Smith, Barbara Sweetland, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory Form for Holy Ascension Orthodox Church", in Russian America Theme National Historic Landmarks, compiled by S. Faulkner, W. Hanable, and R. Spude. (Anchorage: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Alaska Region, 1987) 202.

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established around 1828. Prior to 1828 some local parishes had already been established around the Kodiak and Sitka churches, and within the Kodiak parish, Father Herman constructed a small chapel on Spruce Island. It is not known if or how many other chapels were constructed in the Kodiak and Sitka parishes during this time. The administrative sections created by the Russian American Company in 1828 were further divided into sub-sections and numerous chapels were built within these sub-sections helping to stabilize the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska.⁷²

After Father John Veniaminov was elevated to bishop (Innocent) in 1840, Russian Orthodox architecture in Alaska came into a new period of development. Veniaminov, who supervised the building of Church of Holy Ascension at Unalaska in 1825, himself finishing the *iconostasis*, drew upon his previous experience and designed and directed the construction of four new churches, a cathedral, and numerous chapels before being elevated again to archbishop in 1850.⁷³ Veniaminov's efforts to invigorate Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska led to the transformation of the few small traditional tri-partite parish chapels and churches to a grand network of Russian Orthodox buildings throughout the vast regions of Alaska displaying both the traditional form of the earlier churches as well as new metropolitan influences. However, in 1867 when Alaska was purchased by the United States, the growth of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska started by Veniaminov came to an abrupt end.

Shortly after the transfer of Alaska to the United States, the diocese of Alaska was created to alleviate the administrative difficulties imposed by having the diocesan seat in Siberia. In 1872, the diocesan seat was moved to San Francisco in order to develop new parishes in the United States and Canada to embrace the large numbers of immigrants beginning to arrive there from Slavic and Southern European countries.⁷⁴ During this time few new Russian Orthodox buildings were constructed in Alaska, and those that had been were left under the care of the local parishes with little outside support. Left alone and with limited means, the local parishes made up primarily of creole and native clergy persevered in their efforts to strengthen the Church in Alaska and met with some success. Conversions to Orthodoxy increased as native peoples realized that they need not abandon their traditions upon conversion as other Christian denominations required. The needs of these growing parishes in Alaska became more apparent to Church leaders outside Alaska and by the early 1880s the diocesan seat was returned to Alaska.⁷⁵

Though funding for the Alaska diocese was substantially increased in 1872 and 1874 as a result of the sale of Alaska to the United States, the financial support needed to sustain the growth of the parishes in Alaska was still not adequate. Another increase in appropriations did not come until 1894, when the Holy Synod of Russia appropriated seventy-four thousand rubles, an overall increase of forty percent. Financial support for the Alaska diocese continued to grow and by 1900 appropriations had reached over ninety thousand rubles.⁷⁶ With a renewed commitment of financial support from the Church in Russia, the diocese of Alaska could then began to rebuild and strengthen its infrastructure through new construction and the correction of deferred maintenance of existing church buildings.

While revitalization movement of the 1880s and 1890s in Alaska was influenced by both the continuing arrival of eastern Orthodox immigrants in the continental United States from Europe, and the growing number of new Alaskan parishioners, its success was not guaranteed. The Bishop of Alaska, Nikolai, understood that the key to the successful revitalization of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska and continuing support for diocese of Alaska was the recognition by Orthodox Christians in the United States

⁷² Afonsky, *A History of the Orthodoxy Church in Alaska (1794-1917)*, 43-44.

⁷³ Smith, Barbara Sweetland, *Orthodoxy and Native Americans: The Alaska Mission*. (Syosset, NY: Orthodox Church in America Department of History and Archives, Historical Society Occasional Papers No. 1, 1980a), 16; Afonsky, *A History of the Orthodoxy Church in Alaska (1794-1917)*, 9.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Orthodoxy and Native Americans*, 17.

⁷⁵ Black, *Orthodoxy in Alaska*, 105.

⁷⁶ Oleksa, *Orthodox Alaska*, 167-168.

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and Alaska that the diocese of Alaska was the mother church. To achieve this state of recognition he began preparations to celebrate the arrival of the first mission to Alaska with the construction of several new commemorative chapels and churches. These chapels needed to symbolize the primacy of Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska throughout Orthodox America by emphasizing the most important aspects of the struggles and successes of pre-1867 Russian Orthodox Alaska. The Church found these symbols in its humble beginnings at Kodiak and Sitka with their crude log chapels and the glory of the grand design of the original St. Michael Cathedral in Sitka. These older forms were utilized in a new series of structures designed to at once call upon the long-standing traditions and history of the Russian Orthodox Church of the motherland embodied in simple tri-partite *izba* form, the early colonial chapels also influenced by the *izba* form, and the buildings of the Veniaminov period which elevated the *izba* form by incorporating contemporary architectural elements.

Between 1892 and 1896 the Church authorized the construction of the Little Russian Mission (also known as Chuathbaluk) constructed in 1891 and replaced by a new structure in 1955, St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church built in 1893 at Juneau, the Church of the Holy Ascension built in 1894 on Unalaska (officially designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970 for its association with Father Veniaminov), the Holy Assumption Church built between 1894-1895 in Kenai (also officially designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970), and the Sts. Serguis and Herman of Valaam Chapel built sometime between 1894 and 1896 on Spruce Island.

Architectural Significance of the Sts. Serguis and Herman of Valaam Chapel

The Sts. Serguis and Herman of Valaam Chapel is already a national landmark for Russian Orthodox Americans who visit the site by the hundreds every year in August. It was the last structure built to formally commemorate the centennial of Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska during the centennial revitalization movement and is the only chapel from the movement which sought to glorify the Church by exulting the dedication and selflessness of one of the most influential of the first missionaries to arrive in Alaska, Father Herman.

The chapel is strongly differentiated from the other three extant churches built during the revitalization period by its traditional design features, which are reminiscent of the simple chapels constructed upon the arrival of the first Russian Orthodox missionaries to the New World. In form, the chapel is a classic example of the basic tri-partite plan with a rectangular narthex, square nave, and rectangular sanctuary. With exception of the narthex, the chapel exhibits the log and dove-tail construction techniques used in the original chapels built during the Russian Colonial period though it is now covered with clapboard siding. The roof plan incorporates a gabled roof on the narthex, a pyramidal roof on the nave, and a hipped roof on the sanctuary; all of which have the same roof pitch and are still finished with cedar shingles just as they were historically. The *iconostasis* of the chapel extends to the ceiling and has two royal doors. Though the roof plan of the narthex has been changed from a simple shed roof to a slightly more complex gabled roof, and the original square 45-degree offset cupola was replaced with a steeple in the 1930s, the chapel retains its original form and setting to a very high degree. The design of the chapel fit well its commemorative role by embodying the most important physical and historical elements of buildings integral to the spread of Russian Orthodoxy from Russia and Asia to Alaska and the North American continent. The vertical emphasis of pyramidal roof, onion dome and Orthodox cross, combined with the simple tri-partite form and log construction symbolize both the early Russian *izba* chapels as well as the early Alaskan Russian Orthodox chapels of the New World.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 Previously Listed in the National Register.
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.

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 X Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # AK-52
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

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Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository): Alaska State Archives, Russian Orthodox Church (Kodiak Parish Archives), Kodiak Historical Society Archives.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: .9 acres

UTM References: Zone: 05 Easting: 538338 Northing: 6418459

Verbal Boundary Description:

The Chapel of Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam is located on .9 acres on Spruce Island owned by the Russian Orthodox Church ½ mile north of Monk’s Lagoon. According to the National Register nomination, the chapel is sited on U.S. Survey Map Sheet 470. The UTM coordinates listed above were recorded at the southeast corner of the nave with a GPS unit during the 2001 site visit.

Boundary Justification:

While there are other potentially eligible structures and landscape features associated with the activities of Father Herman and subsequent residents nearby, they are on land belonging to the Ouzinkie Native Corporation, which has expressed its desire not to have its holdings included in this nomination. Therefore, the boundaries for the chapel property correspond to the legal holdings of the Church in Section 22 as illustrated in the attached map.

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Date: October 4, 2001

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY
September 19, 1996