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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PRELIMINARY STUDY

OF

ST. MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL

SITKA, ALASKA

BY

JOHN A. HUSSEY

REGIONAL HISTORIAN

Region Four Office
San Francisco, California
March 23, 1955

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I. Analysis of the Site.

A. Name. This site is generally known as "St. Michael's Cathedral." This name is given on the copper historical plaque affixed to the building and is employed on the sales literature dispensed at the site.

However, the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America, which administers the structure, refers to it officially as "St. Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral" (Yearbook of American Churches: 1955, pp. 44-45). In common parlance, the church is frequently termed "the Sitka Cathedral." Certain guide books give the name as "Cathedral of St. Michael."

B. Location. The site is in the Town of Sitka, which is on Baranof Island in southeastern Alaska. More precisely, it is located on a small "island" in the center of the town's main thoroughfare, Lincoln Street, opposite the head of Maksoutoff Street, in the heart of the business district. Lincoln Street divides to permit traffic to flow past both sides of the cathedral.

The location is indicated on the attached vicinity map (Map I).

C. Description.

1. Land. The property on which the Cathedral stands is roughly elliptical in shape. Its major axis is approximately 114 feet in length, its minor axis about 79 feet. Its boundaries are shown on Map II.

This small plot of almost level ground is nearly all occupied by the cathedral structure, and it is entirely surrounded by the pavement of Lincoln Street. In fact, the paving virtually touches the exterior corners of the building on all sides. The area not covered by the structure has been landscaped with shrubs in recent years.

2. Building. St. Michael's Cathedral is a structure of arresting architectural interest and beauty. Though modest in size, it commands attention by its graceful proportions and by the obvious oriental inspiration of its design.

The building is constructed of wood, one story in height, with floor plan in the shape of a cross. At the front of the structure rises a four-story bell tower which is surmounted by an eight-sided belfry and a tall carrot-shaped steeple, with an elaborate gilded cross above all. The center portion of the church is covered by a large dome, atop which is a turnip-shaped cupola and another cross.

The base of the building is black; the exterior walls are stone gray; the trim oyster shell white; and the roof green. On the front of the third story of the bell tower is a large clock, with black face and gilt numerals and hands.

In more detail, the cathedral rests on a stone foundation. The extreme length of the building, from the front of the bell tower to the rear wall is 97 feet. A porch at the front entrance projects an additional 6.7 feet. The width of the church is slightly more than 66 feet.

The exterior is covered with heavy 1 1/4" x 10" siding, beaded on the lower edge and slightly lapped; corner boards are 6 inches wide. The floor joists are 14-inch logs placed with centers 6 feet apart. The roof rafters are 12 inches in diameter with 7 1/2-foot centers. Over these rafters are 3" x 3" sheathing boards placed horizontally with 8-inch centers, and on top of these is solid vertical sheathing.

The entire roof was originally covered with metal. By 1907, however, only the dome, steeple, and porches had metal covering; the main roof was shingled. Today the larger part of the roof is covered with green asphalt shingles, while the dome, steeple, and porches have galvanized iron roofs. It is interesting to note that visitors as early as 1879 remarked about the "emerald green" dome and roof.

One of the most remarkable features of the church is the heavy construction of the bell tower. The framing is of massive handhewn logs, dovetailed together. Solid tiers of horizontal logs, three or four placed together, bind the framing together at intervals.

In the octagonal belfry are eight bells, ranging in weight, it is said, from 75 to 1500 pounds. Around the top of the bell tower outside the belfry is a graceful balustrade.

At the base of the bell tower two paneled double doors open onto a small porch, from which four steps lead to the street level. The shed roof of the porch is supported at its front edge by two Roman Doric columns made of solid logs.

The interior of the cathedral, though simple in basic design, impresses the visitor as being extremely elaborate due to the rich ornamentation and the large number of paintings, icons, and sacred objects on display.

The base of the bell tower forms an entry which opens into the main room of the church. In the front half of this large room, which extends the entire width of the building, the worshipers stand during service. There are no pews in Eastern Orthodox churches. Almost in the center of the church, under the large dome, is a raised platform, called the cathedra, upon which the bishop stands while conducting services. Reaching from floor to the rather low ceiling is a three-sided square of eight Roman Doric columns which serve to support the dome and set the cathedra apart somewhat from the remainder of the large room.

Across the rear half of the large room stretches a platform, elevated three steps above the main floor. On this platform and extending across the entire width of the church is a floor-to-ceiling partition or screen with doors, called the iconostas. Behind the iconostas are three sanctuaries, each containing an altar.

The main sanctuary, dedicated in the name of Saint Michael, occupies the rear center of the main room and also the apse or rear wing of the cathedral. This sanctuary contains a number of fine religious paintings and icons, including a large representation of the Saviour, covered with silver, plated with gold, in repoussé. A Gospel bound with exquisitely worked silver, a large crucifix adorned with white Siberian topaz, and a large silver chalice are among the noteworthy sacred objects displayed in this sanctuary.

The second sanctuary, dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan, occupies the rear of the northern end of the main room. It contains the famous icon of the Virgin and the Holy Child which is popularly known as the "Sitka Madonna." The third sanctuary, occupying the rear of the southern end of the main room, is dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and Prince Alexander Nevsky.

Visitors ordinarily are not permitted to enter the sanctuaries, and thus their main interest centers upon the iconostas. This partition in St. Michael's Cathedral is extremely elaborate, with fluted pilasters and carved, bronzed doors opening into the sanctuaries. The iconostas is ornamented with twelve icons. The repoussé silver casings on these icons are said to contain fifty pounds of silver.

Hanging from the center of the dome in the main room is an elaborate chandelier, and there are several others of merit. Also noteworthy among the furnishings are a number of large silver candlesticks.

The interior walls of the cathedral are covered with cloth, now heavy with paint. The main walls are a dark cream color, and the woodwork is largely dead white. However, there are splashes of color in the decoration, with blue green, maroon, and blue grey being used in various places on the woodwork, walls, and ceiling.

D. Synopsis of History.

St. Michael's Cathedral was built in the period 1848-1850. From completion until 1872 and from about 1905 to the present time it was the cathedral and spiritual center for the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska. It is a splendid, and typical, example of Eastern Orthodox church architecture in Alaska.

E. Historical Narrative.

1. History of the Russian Orthodox Church in America. In order to place the history of St. Michael's Cathedral in its proper perspective and in order to understand the status of the religious organization which at present administers the site, it is essential to know something of the story of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Americas. Since, to the writer's knowledge, this information is nowhere available in any single source, it seems necessary to present here a brief summary of the story.

The Russian Orthodox Church is a branch of the general family of churches known as the Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church which dates back to the period of the Eastern Roman Empire and which is chiefly characterized by its use of the Byzantine rite. In 988 A.D. the Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church became the State Church of Russia, and in 1589 the Church of Russia broke away from the parent body and became, in essence, an independent church, although still maintaining its common faith and communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople. From 1721 to 1917 the Russian Church was ruled by the Holy Synod. Contrary to a widely held opinion, the Czar was not the head of the Church.

It has been claimed that as early as 1759 a Russian merchant named Glotov baptized several Aleuts of Umnak Island; and some fifteen years later the fur trader Shelikhov baptized another group of natives on Kodiak Island. This latter merchant, organizer of a powerful company trading in the Aleutians, became engaged in a bitter competition for an imperial grant of monopoly trade rights in America. Perhaps in an effort to strengthen his case, he asked Empress Catherine II for permission to erect churches and maintain missionaries in the colonies at his company's expense. On June 30, 1793, Catherine ordered this petition granted; and the Holy Synod sent a mission of eight monks under Archimandrite Ioassaf to Alaska.

The group was considerably delayed in reaching its destination and encountered numerous difficulties in starting its work. On November 21, 1794, the foundation was laid for a church at St. Paul, the present Kodiak, on Kodiak Island. Seemingly the structure was not completed until July 1796. It was the first Eastern Orthodox Church in America.

The pioneer missionaries extended their work in the Aleutian Islands and on the mainland and made many converts during the next few years. However, relations between them and the Shelikhov Company were not harmonious, and operations were not expanded as far as had been hoped. It appeared that conditions for the Church in America were going to improve when, in 1796, an episcopal see was formed and when Archimandrite Ioassaf was later recalled to Irkutsk to be consecrated as the first Bishop of Kodiak, Kamchatka, and America. But he was drowned in a shipwreck before he could put his plans for expansion into effect. Thereafter the Russian-American Company, which had succeeded to the control of the Russian colonies in America, opposed the appointment of a new bishop, and religious affairs in Alaska languished for a number of years.

The records are not as clear as could be hoped concerning the founding of additional churches in the Russian colonies; but as far as can be determined from the sources available, new religious structures appeared in the following order:

Unalaska. A small log church was built here in 1808. The cornerstone of a new church was laid by Father Veniaminov in July 1825; and in 1826 the old building was torn down and the new one consecrated. This church was rebuilt in 1894.

Sitka. This settlement was firmly established in 1804 and became the headquarters of the Russian-American Company's colonial activities about 1808, but instructions were not issued to build a church here until March 8, 1816. This structure, evidently completed during the following year, was described by a visitor of 1837 as "magnificent." It stood until replaced by the present St. Michael's Cathedral about 1850.

A second religious structure in Sitka, the Church of the Annunciation, was built by Veniaminov in 1843 in his residence. A separate church for the use of the Sitka Indians was begun in 1847 and completed in 1849. Also, there was a Lutheran Church in the town during the Russian period.

Saint Paul Island. According to one account, a church named Saint Peter's was built here in 1819. However, other records give the date as 1821.

Umnak. It is said that a chapel named Saint Nikolai was erected here in 1826.

Other early churches or chapels of which there is fairly good record were built at Atka (1830), Saint George (1833 or 1840), Kenai (1841), and Nushagak (a chapel was built in 1832; a church was ordered in 1844 and built in 1845).

A marked change in religious affairs in Alaska came after 1821. The charter granted to the Russian-American Company during that year stipulated that the firm should support church establishments throughout the colonies. New priests were sent to America, outstanding among them being Father Ivan Veniaminov. By 1840 there were four churches and eight chapels in operation.

In that year the idea of a diocese for America was revived, and Father Veniaminov was made "Bishop of Kamchatka, Kurile, and the Aleutian Islands." Included within the diocese were all of Alaska and the precincts of Okhotsk and Kamchatka. The residence of the Bishop was established at Sitka.

Under the direction of the indefatigable Veniaminov, known after 1840 as Bishop Innocent, the work of the Church expanded considerably. Among his accomplishments was the construction of a bishop's residence at Sitka which, it is said, cost the Russian-American Company 30,000 rubles. He later pushed the building of the new cathedral at the same place.

The duties of his vast bishopric made it necessary for Innocent to be away from Sitka for long periods, and by 1850 it was found advisable to appoint two vicar bishops, one for Alaska and one for Yakutsk. Soon thereafter Vicar Bishop Peter took up his residence in Sitka. Veniaminov was called to Siberia in 1855 and twelve years later was made Metropolitan of Moscow. At the time of the transfer of Alaska to the United States in 1867, there were nine churches and thirty-six chapels in the territory.

After the transfer a considerable number of the Russian residents of Alaska returned to their homeland, and several Orthodox priests went with them. As a result there followed another period of lessened interest in Alaskan church affairs. At the same time the Russian Bishop in Alaska began to assume oversight of the considerable number of his countrymen and certain other Slavic peoples of Orthodox faith who had commenced to emigrate to the United States. Partly for this reason the episcopal see was moved from Sitka to San Francisco in 1872.

Under Bishop Nicholas (1891 - 1898) there was a marked revival of religious activity in Alaska. New churches, chapels, and schools were built; and missionary work was much expanded. Several charitable organizations were established for improving conditions among the natives, creating asylums for children, and other needed projects. Many of the existing Orthodox Church structures in Alaska date from this period.

At about the same time the eparchy was enlarged to include the eastern United States and Canada. In 1905 the episcopal see was again moved, this time to New York; and the mission was raised to the rank of archdiocese, with an archbishop and two vicar bishops, one of whom presided over the Alaskan diocese. Additional bishops have been added in later years.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 profoundly influenced the Russian Orthodox Church in America. The first noticeable effect was the cutting off of the not-inconsiderable funds which the Holy Synod had been providing annually for the maintenance of the eparchy. Then, in 1923, communist elements gained control of the official church organization in Russia, and a representative of this group appeared in New York and through legal proceedings obtained possession of the Russian Orthodox cathedral.

The ruling Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church in America at the time, Metropolitan Platon, and most of his followers did not ally themselves with the communist-controlled group in the mother country but obtained a new church and carried on independently. In 1933 Metropolitan Platon "saw the impossibility of any further connections" with a Moscow controlled by communists. He proclaimed the Russian Orthodox Church in North America to be temporarily autonomous, and it still so remains.

Bibliographical Note. The account given above is based upon a number of sources, a list of which would be too long for this preliminary report. The general history of the Russian Orthodox Church in America is drawn primarily from the following: The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (13 vols., Grand Rapids, 1950); Yearbook of American Churches, Edition for 1955 (New York, 1954); United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Religious Bodies: 1936 (2 vols. in 3 parts, Washington, D. C., 1941).

Concerning the pre-1867 history of the Orthodox Church in Alaska, Hubert Howe Bancroft's History of Alaska (San Francisco, 1886) contains, as usual with his works, an astonishing amount of material not elsewhere available. In this case, however, it was possible to add considerably to the data supplied by Bancroft through notes taken by Dr. Aubrey Neasham and the present writer at the University of Alaska upon the monumental collection of translations and transcriptions of manuscripts known as Documents Relative to the History of Alaska (15 vols., typescript, Alaska History Research Project, 1936-1938).

Additional information was drawn from the excellent article by the Rev. A. P. Kashevaroff, "Ivan Veniaminov, Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna," which appeared in Alaska Magazine, I (1927), 49-56, 145-150, 217-224. The same author's pamphlet, "St. Michael's Cathedral (Juneau, n.d.), was also useful. S. B. Okun's The Russian-American Company (Cambridge, Mass. 1951), though biased, contains some information not elsewhere available in English. Also useful, particularly in regard to the histories of church structures, past and present, is

A. Arthur Woodward's report, A Preliminary Survey of Alaska's Archeology, Ethnology, and History (typescript, NPS, Region Four, Alaska Recreation Survey, 1952).

2. History of St. Michael's Cathedral. The important part of the story of St. Michael's relates to its place as the cathedral and prime church for the vast diocese which had its seat at Sitka from 1840 to 1872 and from about 1905 to the present time. The outlines of this story have already been given. The great religious and moral influence exerted from this center, particularly upon the Alaskan natives, can be observed by the large number of Orthodox communicants still existing in the Aleutians and other Alaskan coastal areas.

As for the building itself, the story is simple. Returning from Russia to Sitka with the rank of Bishop on September 27, 1841, Veniaminov set about revitalizing the affairs of his diocese. He found the Sitka church, known as St. Michael's, to be in a dilapidated condition, and he planned to build a new and larger one to serve as his cathedral. Other, more pressing projects took priority, however, and it was several years before construction could be started.

According to the information now dispensed by the Church in Sitka, the cornerstone was laid in 1844, and the building was dedicated on November 20, 1848. However, among the Russian documents turned over to the United States at the time of the transfer of Alaska and now deposited in the National Archives, there is one which states that the stone foundation for the new wooden cathedral was laid on April 2, 1848, at which time it was intended to complete the structure in two years. The main altar was consecrated May 18, 1850. The chapel dedicated in the name of the Holy Theotokos of Kazan was consecrated October 14, 1850; and that to the memory of John the Baptist and of Alexander of Neva, December 15, 1850 (Documents Relative to the History of Alaska, MS, I, 389).

The funds for the structure were supplied by the Russian-American Company. After the termination of Russian rule in Alaska, the Holy Snyod continued to give financial support to the American eparchy. It is said that $ 77,850 was allowed annually for this purpose up until the Russian Revolution.

Evidently some of this money was devoted to the upkeep of the Sitka Cathedral, since reports of travelers appear to show that the building was kept in at least fairly good repair. Since 1918, however, the support of the Orthodox clergy and churches in America has fallen entirely upon the local congregations. At Sitka, where the communicants often are subject to fluctuating economic conditions, the maintenance of the cathedral has proved a serious financial burden. It has been a struggle even to keep abreast of urgently needed emergency repairs; major rehabilitation has not been undertaken in recent years.

3. Age of Sitka Cathedral as Compared with Other Important Religious Structures in Alaska. As far as the present writer has been able to determine in the brief time available for the preparation of this report, St. Michael's Cathedral is the oldest surviving major religious structure in Alaska. It is entirely possible that certain churches or chapels constructed prior to 1848 may still be in existence in the smaller settlements, either as religious structures or incorporated in secular structures. But if so, we are not aware of any specific instances, unless perhaps the c hurches on Atka Island and at Unalaska represent rebuilt versions of structures first erected in 1830 and 1826, respectively. Also, the Church of the Annunciation, a chapel constructed in the bishop's residence at Sitka in 1843, was standing until a few years ago, but we have not been able to determine whether or not it still survives.

What data we have been able to gather concerning the ages of existing Russian Orthodox Churches in Alaska is shown in the following list:

Afognak. Existing church evidently built in 1868 by the local people.

Atka. The church standing about twenty years ago was described as "one of the first Russian churches built in Alaska." A church was built at Atka by the Russian-American Company in 1830, but we have not been able to determine whether or not the existing structure is the same building.

Belkofski. Church built by local people in 1871

Chignik. No data on existing church.

Dutch Harbor. Age of existing church is unknown. Reported as closed in 1953 but containing valuable objects.

Eklutna. From photographs the small log church appears to be fairly recent.

Juneau. Church built in 1894 by the Orthodox Missionary Society.

Kenai. The existing church was built in 1896 by the parishioners. A chapel was first built at this place in 1841; a new church, erected in 1849, stood until 1896. A memorial chapel, now abandoned, was constructed in 1907 over the grave of Nikolia Igumin, an early priest who served at Kenai. It stands on the site occupied by the original church of 1841 (see Plate VII).

Killisnoo. Church built in 1889 by appropriation of the Holy Synod.

Kodiak. The existing church is a new one, built to replace one which burned in 1943. Apparently there have been several churches at Kodiak since the first one was built in 1796. In 1872 the Holy Synod appropriated funds for a new church at Kodiak, and this structure was finally completed in 1878. This picturesque church has been described in the accounts of many Alaska travelers.

Ouzinkie. Located on Spruce Island, this settlement has a Russian church. This place may be the location of a church said to have been built on Spruce Island in 1832 and replaced by a new structure in 1840. This later structure was rebuilt by the Holy Synod in 1875 and repaired in 1930.

Ninilchik. A church was standing in 1953, but we know nothing of its age. From photographs it appears to be fairly recent.

Nuchek. Evidently a church erected here by the Russian-American Company was reported to be "very old" in 1863 and was rebuilt at that time. It was enlarged in 1890 and 1897.

Nushagak. A chapel was built here in 1832 by the Russian-American Company. A new church was built in 1845 and rebuilt in 1860. Age of the present church is unreported.

Petersburg. The Russian church here is fairly recent in date.

St. George Island. The early church here (1833 or 1840) was rebuilt in 1875. Whether or not this church still stands is unreported.

St. Michael. The existing church was built in 1886 with funds supplied by the Holy Synod. The bell tower was added in 1896 or 1897. The church was in fairly sound condition in 1951, but the natives were then beginning to pull away the boards for firewood.

St. Paul Island. The date of the first chapel here is not known, but seemingly was either 1819 or 1821. Another church was built in 1873 and dedicated in 1877. From photographs it would appear that this latter structure has been rebuilt or replaced.

Tatilek. Church built in 1900.

Unalaska. The fine and picturesque church here has on its walls some of the paintings which were in the wooden church built by Veniaminov in 1825-1826. It is stated that the 1826 church was "rebuilt again" in 1894. This rebuilt structure of 1894 evidently is the present church, but it is not clear how much, if any, of the 1826 building is incorporated in it.

There are no Protestant or Roman Catholic churches in Alaska which approach St. Michael's in antiquity. The Presbyterian Church completed at Wrangell on October 5, 1879, is generally considered to have been the first American Protestant church structure in Alaska. It is no longer standing, as far as we have been able to determine. Other early Protestant churches still standing include St. Peter's by the Sea. Episcopal Church, built at Sitka in 1899. The Jesuit mission at Holy Cross dates back to 1887.

4. Architectural Significance of St. Michael's Cathedral. The Russian Churches in Alaska, past and present, can be classified into two general architectural types: the Pskov type, built with a ground plan resembling a cross; and the vessel type, ordinarily quadrilateral in shape with a front bell tower and with a cupola dome having windows only on the sides which parallel the church walls.

The center of the Pskov (name from a Russian city) or cruciform type of Russian church, called the cube, contains the main altar. The two side wings, representing the arms of the cross, contain two smaller altars. The church at Kodiak (see Plate III) is a good example of the Pskov type church. The chapel at Fort Ross, a Russian-American Company settlement in California, is a fine example of the vessel type structure. The church at St. Michael (see Plate IV) illustrates this type of church, except that there are windows on all sides of the cupola (letter from the V. Rev. Makary A. Baranoff to Miss Ynez Haase, St. Paul Island, May 10, 1949).

St. Michael's Cathedral is a typical church of the cruciform type and thus may be said to be typical of Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska. However, the structure also has certain unique architectural qualities stemming from the fact that, as the cathedral, it was somewhat more elaborately decorated than the ordinary parish church. As far as we are aware, the iconostas of St. Michael's has no parallel for splendor in all Alaska. For purposes of comparison, views of several existing representative Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska are provided by Plates III to VII.

F. Identification of the Site.

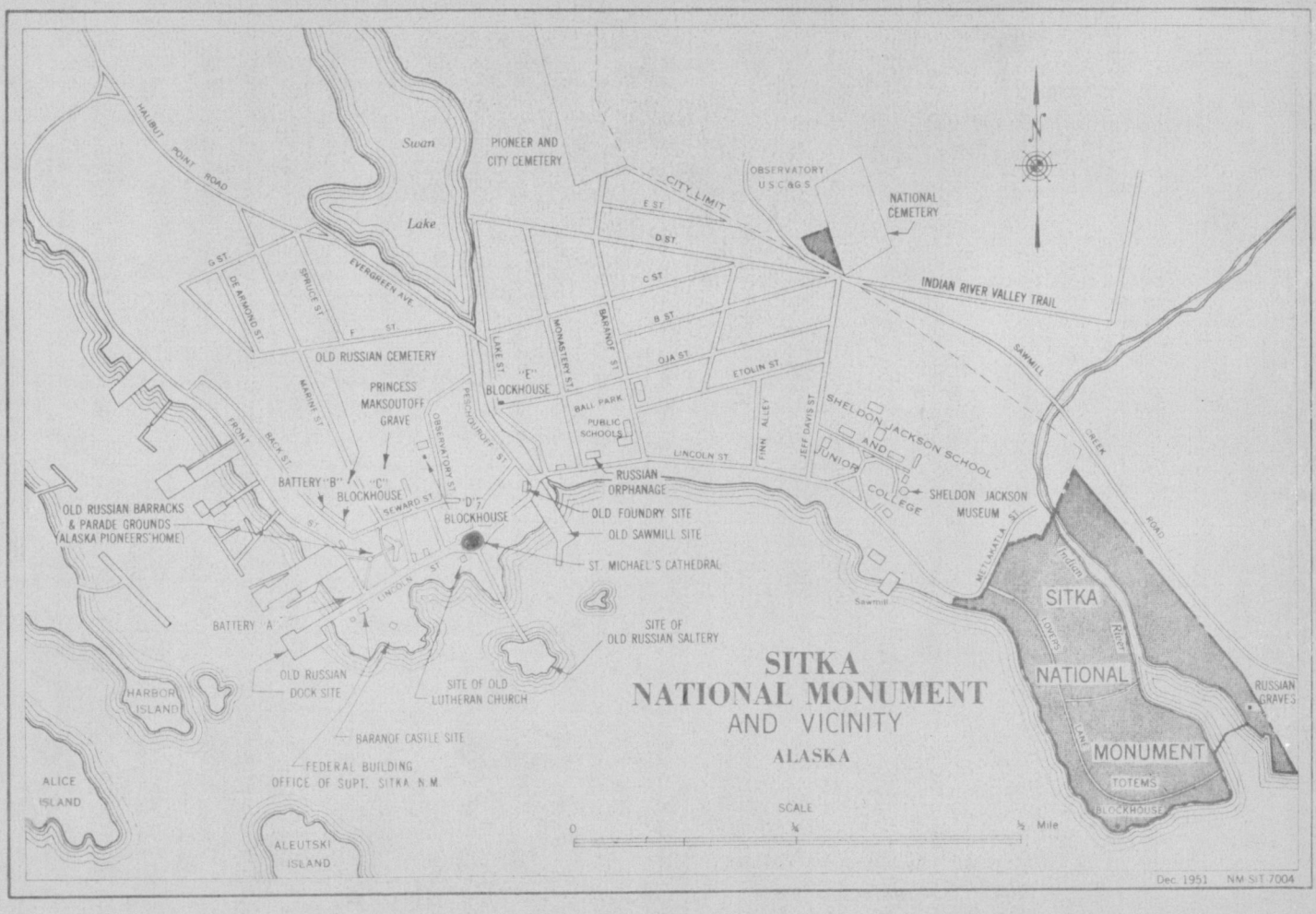
There is no question as to the identification of this site. Travelers' accounts; early drawings, maps, and photographs; church records; and tradition all combine to establish the fact that the present cathedral dates b ack at least to the early 1850's. The age and identity of the structure are so well established that there appears to be no need to present documented proof in this very preliminary report.

II MAPS

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Map I. Vicinity Map. 13

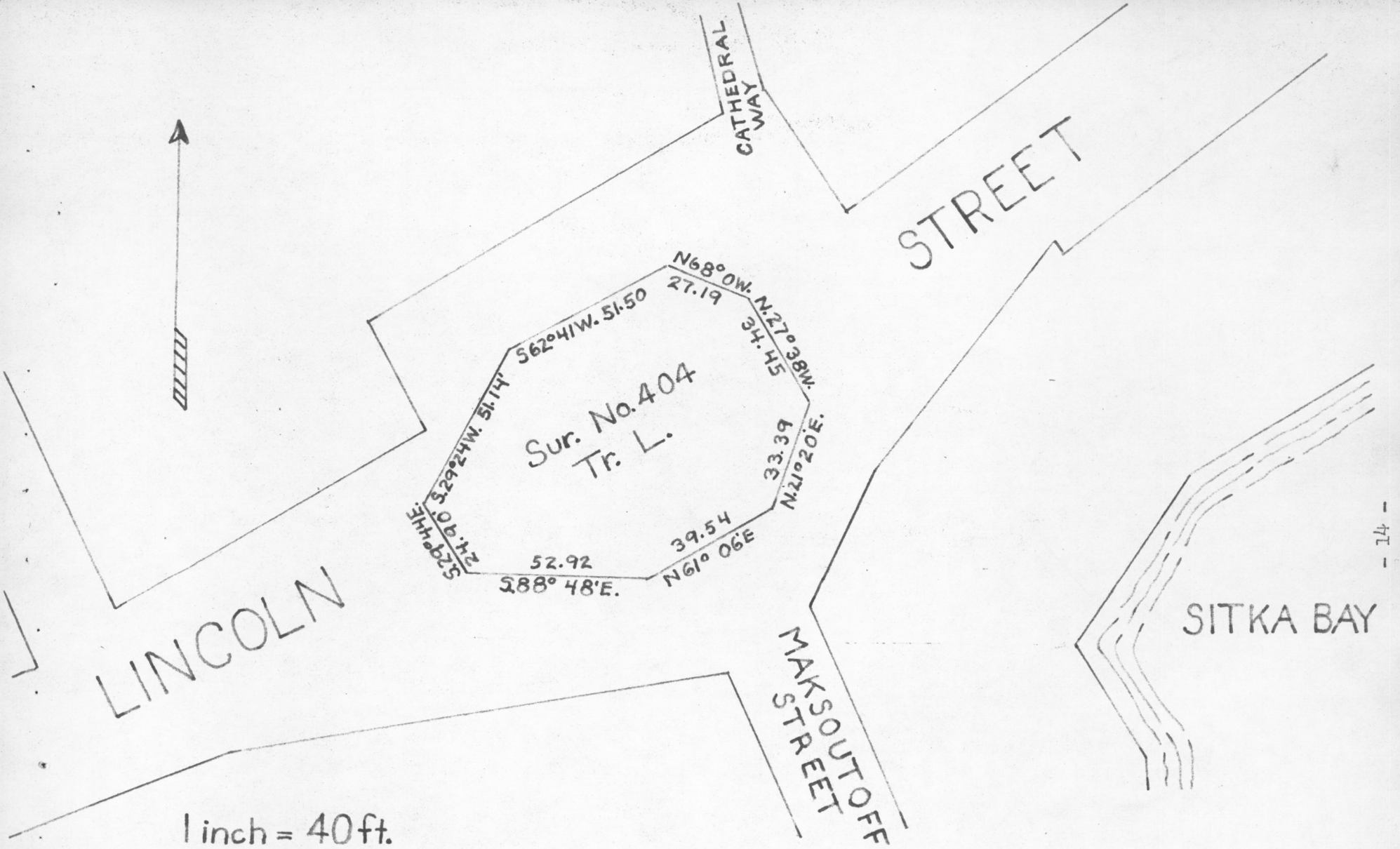
Map II. Plat of St. Michael's Cathedral property 14



MAP I

Vicinity Map

The location of the St. Michael's Cathedral property is indicated in red.



MAP II

Plat of Tract L, Survey 404, St. Michael's Cathedral Property
Adapted from
"Plat of Sitka Townsite, Alaska, U. S. Survey No. 1474, Tract A," Survey
Completed June 24, 1924, Accepted by General Land Office, July 16, 1926.

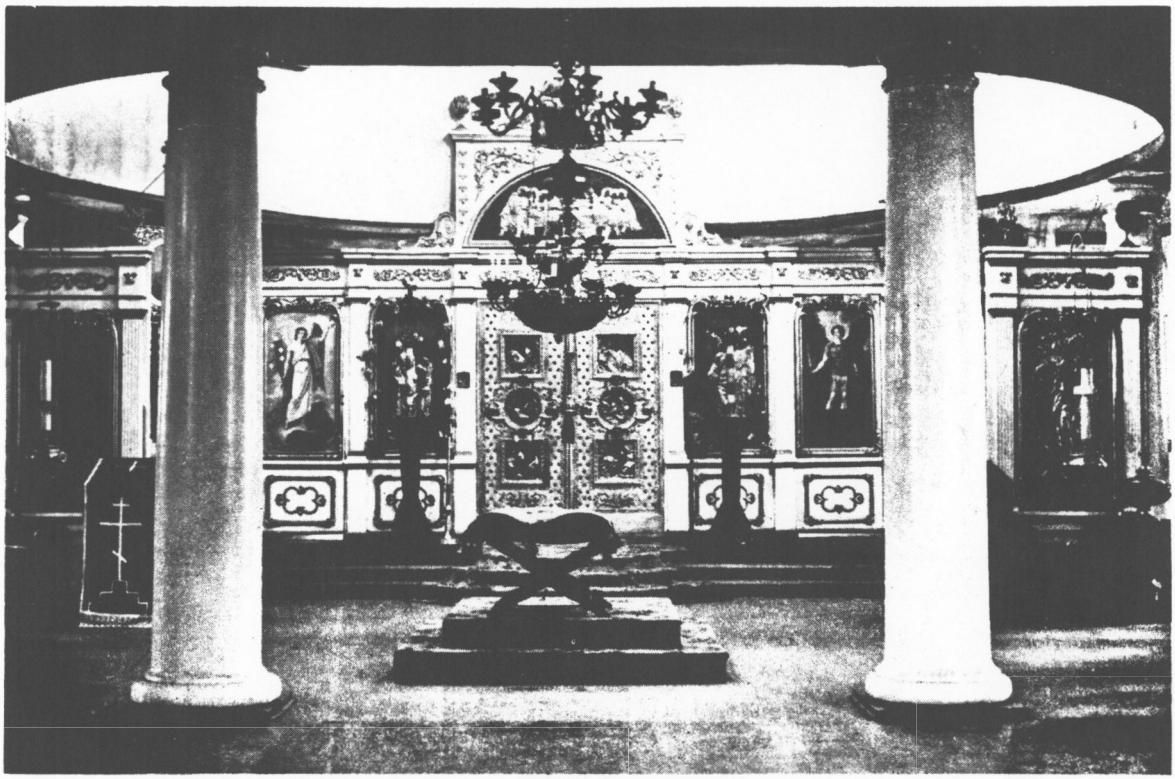
III. Photographs.

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PLATE I

St. Michael's Cathedral, Sitka
View of the front (west end) of the church
July 1953
Construction completed 1850



THE INTERIOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL

PHOTO BY JACK CALVIN

PLATE II



PLATE III

Russian Church at Kodiak
June 1951



PLATE IV

Russian Church at St. Michael
June 1951
This church was built in 1886 from timbers
brought from farther south.



PLATE V

Russian Church, St. Paul Island, Pribilof Group
August 1950

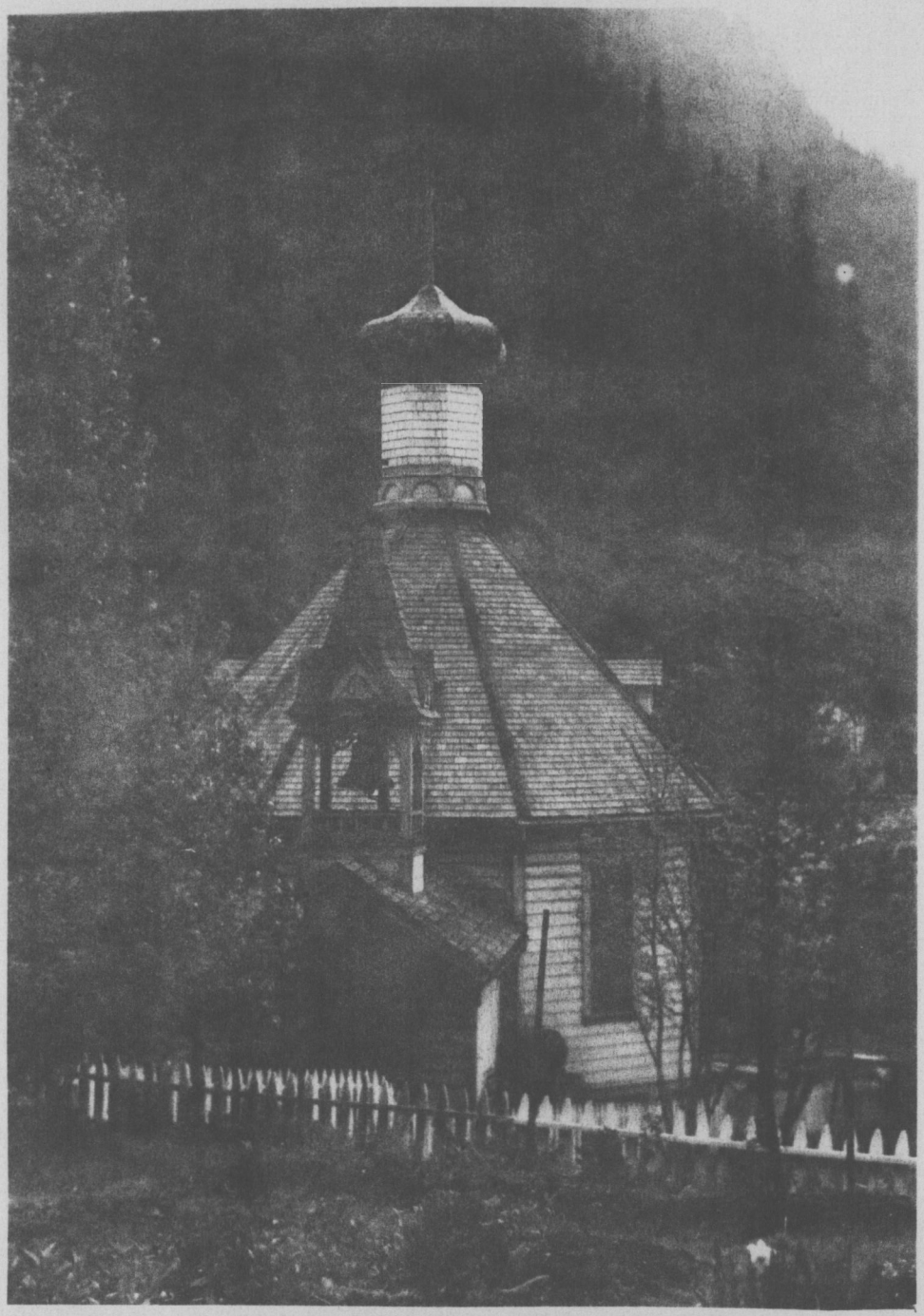


PLATE VI

Russian Church, Juneau
May 1950
Church built in 1894



PLATE VII

Russian Chapel, Kenai
May 1950
Chapel built 1907

IV. Park Data.

A. Ownership of Site. Control of the Sitka Cathedral is exercised by the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America. The ruling bishop of this organization at present is the Most Rev. Leonty, Archbishop of New York, Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of North America. His address is 59 East 2nd Street, New York 3, N. Y. The Secretary to the Metropolitan is Alexander E. Bezsmertny.

The Metropolitan Council is the permanent governing body of the Church, but it has only consultive powers, its decisions being effective only after receiving the approval of the Metropolitan. The Metropolitan Council officers are now: President, the Most Rev. Metropolitan Leonty Turkevich; Secretary-Treasurer, the Very Rev. Joseph Pishtey.

The church officer having immediate charge of the cathedral is the Rt. Rev. John, Bishop of Sitka and All Alaska, St. Michael's Russian Orthodox Cathedral, Sitka, Alaska.

The Treaty of 1867 provided that "the churches which have been built in the ceded territory by the Russian Government shall remain the property of such members of the Greek Orthodox Church resident in the territory as may choose to worship therein." Thus it may be that, legally, the title to the St. Michael's Cathedral property rests in the local parish or the local bishop. But certainly effective control is exercised by the Metropolitan.

It was not possible to check the exact status of the title in the short time allowed for the preparation of this report. The matter should be thoroughly investigated, particularly since the ownership of the property was the subject of a legal suit in 1941-1942.

B. Appraised Value. No appraised value of this property is known to this office.

C. Condition of the Site. Although seemingly sound of frame, the building when seen by the present writer in 1953 was obviously in need of repair and rehabilitation. The roof was said to leak in several places, particularly around the dome. Paint was needed on both the exterior and interior, and the inside wall covering required replacement in spots.

The tower timbers seen in 1953 appeared to be in good condition, but disquieting reports were heard concerning the foundations. It was said that the bell tower had begun to sway in high winds. Evidently there has been some rotting of the sills and other supporting members, and this condition may be fairly general throughout the underpinning of the entire building.

Another condition of the site affecting its possible use for historic site purposes is its setting in the midst of the Sitka business district. Within the last several years a considerable amount of building activity has taken place in the town, with a consequent alteration of the scene surrounding the cathedral. Structures dating from the period of Russian occupation have been gradually disappearing for years, but until quite recently Sitka had a rather picturesque, "country town" appearance. The latest wave of building, however, has resulted in considerable modernization and urbanization. A six-or eight-story apartment house recently has been constructed directly across the street from the cathedral and rather dwarfs it.

A project to built a pulp mill in the Sitka area apparently is well advanced, and the resulting real estate speculation is already bringing the prospect of more construction. It must be assumed that the vicinity of the cathedral will not remain static in the future.

D. Care. As has already been mentioned in the historical narrative section of this report, the care and maintenance of the cathedral is now practically entirely the responsibility of the local parish. In 1953 the priest and a few of the most conscientious church members were valiantly attempting to keep ahead of the dust and the effect of wear by performing themselves such tasks as cleaning, gardening, and minor carpentry. Funds for periodic painting, roof repair, and other maintenance work requiring professional labor are painfully gathered together by collecting donations and holding money-raising social affairs. The fees collected from tourists who visit the church and receipts from the sale of interpretive literature are additional sources of income.

Monies acquired by such means evidently never will be sufficient for the major rehabilitation project which now faces the parish. If the cathedral is to be saved from gradually falling to pieces, it appears that outside funds, from the Russian Orthodox Church in New York or some other source, will have to be obtained.

It should also be mentioned that the effects of time and weather are not the only dangers threatening the structure. Heating is by stoves, and fire is a constant hazard. No fire-prevention equipment was observed by the present writer in 1953, although some may have been available. Also, there are certain elements in the town which consider the church, situated as it is in the middle of the main street, as a stumbling block in the path of "progress." They would like to see the building removed to permit a speeding of the traffic flow.

E. Accessibility. Being located on Sitka's main street, the cathedral has no access problem. All municipal utilities are immediately available.

F. Possibility of Preservation. Given sufficient funds and national recognition, such as would be provided by national historic site status, there is no reason why St. Michael's Cathedral cannot be preserved indefinitely.

Pending authority to make a full-scale historic sites investigation, it has not been deemed expedient to obtain engineering estimates of the cost of rehabilitating and maintaining the structure; without such estimates any statement of probable repair costs would be meaningless. Suffice it to say that such costs undoubtedly would be large. Fifteen or twenty thousand dollars would go a long way toward supplying the painting, roof repair, and foundation improvements which are needed immediately to prevent further deterioration. Such major projects as installation of an overhead sprinkling system, bringing in steam heat from a nearby building, and an overall replacement of unsound timbers, would require a much greater sum. Annual physical maintenance would probably require at least $ 2,500 once the building had been put in sound condition.

National recognition would be required in order to give the site the prestige needed to resist possible local pressures. Such recognition would also attract more visitors and thus produce more revenue from fees and sales of publications.

There is virtually no possibility that the needed repairs can be financed locally, since the sums required are far beyond foreseeable revenue from parish donations, visitors fees, etc. There is a good possibility, however, that such revenues can be increased to the point where they can meet the annual maintenance costs.

G. Relationship to Areas Already in National Park System. The site is about 3/4 mile west of Sitka National Monument. As far as historical values are concerned, a national historic site at St. Michael's Cathedral would supplement, not duplicate, the story told at Sitka National Monument. There are no existing areas of the National Park System which commemorate the contribution made by Eastern Orthodox religion and architecture to American history and to the American scene.

H. Sponsors of the Project. As early as 1942 it was reported by the Superintendent of Sitka National Monument that certain elements among the local parishioners desired the National Park Service to "assume custodianship" of St. Michael's Cathedral. During the next year both the local priest and the chairman of the Sitka parishioners discussed the matter with the Regional Director, Region Four, at which time it was made clear that the reason the local church people wished to turn the building over to the United States was to obtain funds to maintain the cathedral, which even then "was badly in need of repairs." Further talks were held with church officials in San Francisco, but no action or formal request for national historic site status resulted from these discussions.

In 1946 Bishop Ioann, Bishop of Sitka and All Alaska, formally requested funds from the National Park Service for the repair of the cathedral. He was informed that this Service had no funds available for such a purpose. The steps requisite to obtaining national historic site status were explained, but it was made clear that such status, in non-federal ownership, would bring with it no assurance of financial support.

In 1951 Regional Historian Neasham visited Sitka and recommended that a national historic sites agreement be entered into with the Russian Orthodox Church for the preservation and interpretation of the cathedral, of which he said: "As a symbol of the meeting of the cultures of the East and the West on the western shores of the North American continent, it merits every consideration for preservation and interpretation."

In 1953 Bishop John of San Francisco renewed the historic site proposal with Mr. Collins of the Region Four Office, requesting that someone from the Washington Office explain the meaning and purposes of such status to the Metropolitan in New York. Bishop John had well in mind that national historic site status would not in itself bring funds but that the added recognition of the site might bring in non-federal revenue which could be used to preserve the cathedral. Shortly thereafter Metropolitan Leonty requested Mr. Ivan Michaelson Czap, Member of the Metropolitan Council, to investigate certain aspects of the historic sites proposal; and through Senator James H. Duff, Mr. Czap explored the matter with the Director of the National Park Service. On March 2, 1954, Mr. Czap indicated to the Director that the Metropolitan and other church officials wished to present a proposal for consideration by the Advisory Board as soon as additional facts were at hand "for definitive action".

V. Data for National Park Service Use.

A. Suggested Development. The only physical developments suggested are the repairs already mentioned in this report. It is also suggested, if the cathedral should be made a national historic site in non-federal ownership, that the National Park Service advise the Church on the establishment of an adequate and well-rounded interpretive program.

B. Recommended Boundaries. The boundaries of this property, designated as "Tract L, Survey No. 404," as taken from the Plat of Sitka Townsite, Alaska, U. S. Survey No. 1474, Tract A, completed June 24, 1924, are shown on Map II of this report. It is recommended that all of the area within the boundaries of this lot be considered for historic site purposes.

C. Estimated Cost of Management and Protection. For this preliminary report no estimate of management and protection costs has been obtained. However, since the cathedral evidently is being proposed for consideration only as a national historic site in non-federal ownership, costs to this Service do not appear to be involved except for the amounts required to provide interpretive literature, technical advice, national historic site marker, etc.

D. Evaluation of Historical Significance of the Site. In our opinion, St. Michael's Cathedral is of sufficient national historical and cultural significance to qualify as a national historic site.

First, as the cathedral and spiritual center for the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska for many years, both during the Russian and American periods of Alaskan history, it is the structure best suited to commemorate the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the development of Alaska.

Second, as the oldest known surviving religious structure in Alaska and as a splendid and typical example of Orthodox church architecture in Alaska, it is eminently qualified to illustrate for future generations one of the cultures which has contributed to the formation of our American civilization and our national scene.

Third, as one of the very few structures of any type still remaining from the period of Russian occupation, it symbolizes and commemorates the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures on the western edge of America.

Fourth, because of its association with Father Veniaminov it commemorates one of the great, though little known, men of the American missionary frontier.

This site is a natural point at which to present these broad aspects of American history. No other national historic site commemorates these particular phases of our country's history. Nearby Sitka National Monument presents another, though related, phase of Alaska's story — the culture of the natives and their resistance to white settlement.

This site has integrity. Standing on its original location, showing on every hand the non-machined workmanship of the original builders, the cathedral imparts a strong feeling of authenticity and association with the events which centered there.

This site is adaptable to effective treatment. All that is required is the repair of the structure and the formulation of a simple interpretive program. It is true that the immediate surroundings of the building are changing into a typical American city street, but the town setting - the harbor and the nearby mountains - remains largely as it was when the church was built. Because the cathedral stands alone, surrounded by a street, it will continue to have integrity despite the development which will take place on neighboring property.

Because the national historic site proposal comes from the Russian Orthodox Church itself, there evidently can be no question as to the availability of the property providing an operating agreement can be worked out which is agreeable both to the Church and to the Department of the Interior.

The site is accessible. The recent discontinuance of American passenger steamship service to Sitka undoubtedly will have some effect upon the pattern of tourist travel to this section of Alaska, but it is still too early to predict what influence this change will have upon visitation to St. Michael's Cathedral.

As has already been indicated, maintenance problems at this site will continue to be serious until visitation builds up to the point where fees will provide an adequate sum for the upkeep of the structure. Since the local priests and parishioners now provide the necessary personnel for guiding and interpretation at the cathedral, it is to be assumed that the Church or any special organization which might be formed to operate the structure as a national historic site could continue to render this service until such time as revenues will permit the employment of full-time attendants.

E. Recommendations

1. It is recommended that St. Michael's Cathedral be accorded the status of a national historic site in non-federal ownership.

2. It is recommended that a cooperative agreement be made between the United States and the Church to provide for the preservation and interpretation of the property.

3. In making such an agreement, it is suggested that there be explored tactfully the possibility of setting up a separate organization, such as a parish historical society or preservation committee, to actually handle the maintenance and the operation of the historic monument phases of the cathedral affairs. Funds collected by this organization should be kept separate from the regular church revenues and reserved for historic site purposes.

4. It is further recommended that, if more complete data is desired than it was possible to gather for the preliminary report, this office be authorized to make a full-scale Proposed Historical Area Study.

/s/ John A. Hussey

John A. Hussey
Regional Historian

Cleared for distribution

/s/ Lawrence C. Merriam 3/23/55
Lawrence C. Merriam (date)
Regional Director