

PRESERVATION OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE COOK INLET
REGION, ALASKA

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Russian exploration of Alaska began in 1741 and expanded rapidly upon discovery of the colony's potential for revenue. Furs and mineral resources quickly attracted the attention of private entrepreneurs, or *promyshlenniki*. The largest of these companies, the Russian American Company, is frequently cited as the driving force behind Alaskan settlement. The efforts of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company, which initiated settlement in the Cook Inlet region, are often overlooked due to the Company's lack of financial success. As a result, the history of the exploration of Southcentral Alaska is often overlooked. This work focuses on the settlement and Russian Orthodox proselytization efforts of the Cook Inlet region, including the Kenai Peninsula, in Southcentral Alaska. Three Russian Orthodox churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik serve as case studies to demonstrate the preservation of Russian Orthodox sacred sites in Alaska. The histories provided in the first few chapters aid in understanding the evolution of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska and, as a result, the role of the church in today's society.

In the native village of Eklutna, Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church was constructed with little Russian influence. By comparison, the construction of Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church in Kenai was the result of a combined Russian and Native Alaskan effort, and Holy Transfiguration Church in Ninilchik was built and maintained by Russian pensioners. Though initial research was completed in an effort to prove the lasting role of both Russian and Native Alaskan culture in each church, it becomes clear that multiple influences have both negative and positive impacts on the ways these remote structures utilize and preserve their heritage. Combined with recent demographic trends in the Russian Orthodox Church and, more specifically, the Diocese of Alaska, this work ultimately demonstrates the role of

congregations in the preservation of their churches and the importance of community engagement in promoting cultural heritage and histories of remote Russian Orthodox sites.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erin Frederickson was born outside of Orlando, Florida in 1990 and moved to Rhode Island before settling in New Jersey with her family in 1999. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in History from the College of New Jersey in 2012. She and her husband, Sean Cuerou, were married a month before the completion of her Master's degree in Historic Preservation Planning at Cornell University. Her interest in the intersection of American and Russian history led her to the research for this thesis.

To my father, Sean and Sandy

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I owe sincere thanks to my father and Sandy, whose emotional support has helped me to laugh through the difficult aspects of research and travel. My intermittent visits to my childhood home in New Jersey were essential to the completion of this thesis.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Michael Tomlan, who assured me he had Kleenex in his office anytime I admitted I was anxious, overwhelmed or confused. I'm sure I never tapped into his tissue supply because of his patience and encouragement. I will look back on our weekly thesis meetings fondly. I also extend gratitude to my co-chair, Jeff Chusid, whose time and energy are the only real reason I was permitted to enter "The Room Where it Happens."

My husband, Sean, has always encouraged me to pursue interests outside of my literal and figurative comfort zone. His support has helped me feel confident in an occasionally overwhelming frontier (I speak of both graduate school and Alaska).

Much of the information within this thesis was provided by indispensable, selfless and considerate sources. These include the priests at each parish: Fathers Christopher Stanton and Mikel Bock at Old St. Nicholas in Eklutna, Chancellor Thomas Andrew at Holy Assumption in Kenai, and Father Victor Nick at Holy Transfiguration in Ninilchik, as well as Bishop David. Each of them took the time to speak with me and answer questions at the very least. Those who opened their church doors to me provided not only helpful information but also unforgettable memories of Alaska and their communities. Grant Crosby, historical architect at the National Park Service headquarters in Anchorage, pointed me in the direction of multiple resources. Of these, Dorothy Gray and the non-profit organization Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska, Inc. (ROSSIA) welcomed me at a board meeting in April 2016 and supplied me with a wealth of information. I am honored to have been a part of their mission and can only hope that this research relieves a bit of the burden that their commitment to historic Russian Orthodox sites entails.

Casey Woster, M.A. H.P.P. '16, kindly allowed me to stay with her in Anchorage for several days to complete initial research in September 2015. She has been a source of advice, information and positivity, and her passion for the field and her home is contagious. This research would have been impossible without her selflessness, excitement and sense of adventure.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: Russian Orthodox Alaska and the Cook Inlet Region	6
CHAPTER TWO: Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik, AK and the Construction of the Russian Orthodox Churches	26
CHAPTER THREE: Architectural Descriptions of the Three Cook Inlet Churches	44
CHAPTER FOUR: The Role of the Russian Orthodox Church in America and an Analysis of the Cook Inlet Congregations	72
CHAPTER FIVE: Preservation Efforts and Challenges Related to Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in the Cook Inlet Region	88
CONCLUSION	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	104

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: 1797 Russian Map of Southcentral Alaska

Figure 1.2: Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska

Figure 2.1: 1900 map of Alaska

Figure 2.2: 1900 map of Alaska, subset of the Cook Inlet Region

Figure 3.1: Figure 3.1: The west and north facades of Old St. Nicholas

Figure 3.2: Spirit houses at Eklutna Historical Park

Figure 3.3: South and west facades of Old St. Nicholas, c. 1923

Figure 3.4: East and south facades of Old St. Nicholas

Figure 3.5: North and west facades of New St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox church

Figure 3.6: Plat of Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church in Kenai's landholdings

Figure 3.7: Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church c. 1900, prior to bell tower addition.

Figure 3.8: Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church, Kenai

Figure 3.9: East and north facades of Holy Assumption, Kenai

Figure 3.10: Holy Assumption bell tower and onion dome

Figure 3.11: St. Nicholas Chapel, across the street from Holy Assumption, 1953

Figure 3.12: St. Nicholas Chapel

Figure 3.13: Reconstruction of American Fort Kenay

Figure 3.14: The front (west) façade of the rectory

Figure 3.15: The front façade of Holy Transfiguration circa 1915

Figure 3.16: West and south facades of Holy Transfiguration

Figure 3.17: Russian Orthodox cemetery and north façade of Holy Transfiguration

Figure 3.18: View of Ninilchik and Holy Transfiguration from the main thoroughfare

Figure 3.19: View of Ninilchik from the top of the bluff where Holy Transfiguration is located

INTRODUCTION

Alaska's reputation as America's Last Frontier is fitting even in the 21st century. Large expanses of the state are untouched by human civilization. The more remote areas of the state remain accessible only by plane or boat. Many Alaskan towns retain the American Gold Rush era charm which originally led to the territory's fitting nickname. Some Alaskan skylines, on the other hand, are dotted with the unusual sight of onion-domed cupolas and three-barred crosses. These features were the result of exploration initiated by Russian entrepreneurs, followed closely by Russian Orthodox missionaries, as early as 1741. In many ways, the Russian Empire's evacuation of Russian America in 1867 makes Alaska Russia's last frontier as well. Outside of scattered architectural features and the occasional Russian-influenced town name, the Russian Orthodox churches are some of the only remnants of Alaska's Russian history. Approximately 30 historic churches are extant and, of those, 23 are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.¹

Research on the topic of Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska is frequently focused on the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak Island and Sitka. These areas are known as the initial Russian entrepreneurs and fur traders, known as *promyshlenniki*, in the 18th century. Later, both Sitka and Kodiak would become the capital of Russian America. Southcentral Alaska, namely the Kenai Peninsula, is frequently overlooked as a result. The initial goal of the research within this thesis is to uncover a brief history of Russian settlement on the Kenai Peninsula, followed by a timeline of Russian Orthodox missionary activity in the area. The churches addressed within this thesis are limited to the Cook Inlet region in Southcentral Alaska in an effort to consider a

¹ "Alaska's Russian Orthodox Churches." Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska. <<http://www.rossialaska.org/churches/>>. Accessed December 20, 2015.

frequently overlooked area. Three churches will serve as case studies to further investigate the potential threats. These churches are, from north to south on the Kenai Peninsula: Old St Nicholas Church in Eklutna, Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church in the city of Kenai and the Transfiguration of Our Lord Russian Orthodox Church in Ninilchik. Each of these churches were constructed in the late 19th century, anywhere from two to three decades after the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867.

With several of these Russian Orthodox churches threatened by physical impacts and lack of care. Efforts to preserve the churches by listing them on the National Register in the 1970s resulted in nomination forms with some errors and contradictions. Additionally, their listing does little to protect them and local preservation ordinances are rarely used in remote areas of Alaska. In the 1980s, for instance, an effort to stabilize the Old St. Nicholas Church in Eklutna, 25 miles north of Anchorage, led to the installation of large bolts through the logs that were highly visible on the exterior.² Attempts such as these may signify a previous lack of understanding in how to care for and preserve these structures. This work also seeks to uncover the scholastic and political atmosphere which existed at the time National Register nomination efforts began. This is tied to the preservation climate in Alaska, which drafted its first preservation plan in 1970. Today, however, it is clear that the preservation challenges facing these sacred sites are also interpretive in nature.

Many of Alaska's Russian Orthodox churches were constructed and utilized by native Dena'ina Athabaskans after the sale of Alaska to the United States. Many Russians left their Alaskan settlements as American settlers arrived. Initial research presented in this thesis seeks to uncover the reasons for construction of these sites. Identifying the methods, features and

² Hoagland, Alison K. *Buildings of Alaska* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 119.

influences of these sites on an individual basis will aid in determining how the structures have changed over time. Are they preserved in a manner which highlights their Russian or Native Alaskan or even, more specifically, Athabascan characteristics? The major purpose of this initial research is to identify the reasons the Russian Orthodox churches were preserved to better understand the way they are interpreted in the present. This information will ultimately be used to determine how the churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik are interpreted, preserved and supported by their congregations.

The history of the Russian Empire's brief foray into American colonialism has been researched extensively by Dr. Lydia T. Black and other historians specializing either in Russian imperialism, American history or Russian Alaska. Much of the work of architectural historian Dr. Anatole Senkevitch has addressed town plans and architecture in Russian Alaska, mainly in southeast Alaska (ie. Sitka). The role and importance of the Orthodox Church in Russian Alaska has been identified by several historians and theologians, including Sergei Kan, S. A. Mousalimas and Andreia Znamenski. Unfortunately, it is common for research to end at the sale of Alaska or the Russian Revolution. Information on the state of the churches and the interactions between natives, remaining Russian colonists and creoles (those with Russian and native ancestry) in the 20th century will be pieced together using primary source documents. Historian Barbara Sweetland Smith has compiled the archives of Orthodox churches across Alaska and published them in several volumes. Her focus on Orthodox icons has aided in their preservation in churches across the Pribilof and Aleutian Islands.

In addition, the preservation of the churches themselves has been documented in National Register nomination forms, as well as the archives and works of the non-profit preservation advocacy group Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska and the National Park Service. The

former, a non-profit group based in Anchorage, provided information on the funding and preservation challenges currently facing their current projects in Kenai, Karluk and elsewhere. Grant Crosby, a historical architect with the National Park Service office in Anchorage and a key player in the preservation efforts of the Russian Orthodox sites completed in recent years, also aided this research by providing contact information with various resources.

Information on the state of the Russian Orthodox Church in America is available via the Diocese's website, the Pew Research Center, and other sources. In more specific instances, the data compiled on the churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik have been offered by members of the clergy. These include Father Christopher Stanton of St. Nicholas in Eklutna, Chancellor Thomas Andrew of Holy Assumption in Kenai and Father Victor Nick of Holy Transfiguration in Ninilchik. Discussions with priests occurred in September 2015 and March 2016 during visits by the author to the parishes.

Primary source information comes from the journals of Orthodox missionaries and bishops as well as the diaries of company members and *promyshlenniki*. Unfortunately, primary source documents of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company, which settled almost exclusively on the Kenai, remain undiscovered.³ It is gaps in research such as this that make the topic much more difficult to understand completely. A wealth of photographic evidence is available on the Alaska Digital Archives, which is the result of a partnership of several Alaskan universities, the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, the Alaska State Library Historical Collections and the Sitka Tribal Library.⁴ Early census efforts, though unreliable, are also available online. Reproductions and translations of the Alaskan Russian Church Archives from the Alaska

³ Black, Lydia. *Russians in Alaska, 1732-1867*. (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2004), 56.

⁴ Alaska Digital Archives. "About." <<http://vilda.alaska.edu/cdm/faqs#answer1>>. Accessed September 3, 2015.

Division of State Libraries and Museums are available in the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress.⁵ When accessible, some translations were utilized within this research.

Chapter One provides a brief introduction to the relevant history of Russian Alaska, including the drive of private fur trappers and hunters, and the role of Russian Orthodox missionaries in the relationship between Russians and the native Dena'ina Athabaskan people. This history spans the beginning of Russian colonization in southern Alaska and extends through the 19th century, including the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867 and the American Gold Rush beginning at the turn of the 19th century. Chapter Two elucidates the histories of each town and seeks to identify the reasons the churches were constructed there. In Chapter Three, general Russian Orthodox architectural and planning practices are delineated and each of the three Kenai churches are documented, with photographs provided from archives and taken by the author. Chapter Four analyzes the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the present day. Primarily, it seeks to determine the status of the clergy and the congregations, their recent histories, and general data. Finally, Chapter Five addresses the future of preservation of each church in relation to the contributions and efforts of its congregation. Potential ideas to solve common challenges relating to Russian Orthodox church preservation, including diminishing congregations and lacking community engagement, are provided to ensure that these structures continue to be used in the future.

⁵ *Inventory: The Alaskan Russian Church Archives* (Washington, D.C.: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 1984).

CHAPTER ONE

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX ALASKA AND THE COOK INLET REGION

In order to understand the settlements on the Cook Inlet, it is necessary to identify the key themes behind Russian eastern expansion. The background research in this chapter is designed to provide general information on the motives behind Russian settlement in Alaska, the key players, their interactions with the natives and the role of Russian Orthodoxy. The exploration of Alaska extended as far west as the Aleutian Islands, through inland Alaska, and as far east as Novo-Arkhangelsk (modern Sitka) in the southeastern panhandle. Because the scope of exploration and settlement in Russian America is so large and research pertaining to the Kenai Peninsula is comparatively sparse, the Cook Inlet region is the focus of this chapter.

Eastern Expansion of the Russian Empire in the 18th Century and the Exploration of Alaska

The Russian settlement of Alaska was a combination of external and internal forces. Through much of Imperial Russia's history, the empire remained relatively isolated. Even as western European countries, such as England and Spain, expanded upon their colonial holdings, Russia's colonization remained relatively stagnant. It is logical, then, that the exploration of Alaska was initiated by private interests. Fur trappers, hunters and merchants, known as *promyshlenniki*, settled in the remote northern regions of Siberia after migrating from western Russia in the previous century. The labor and social practices of the original Siberian settlers traveled with them as they began to move further east near the Sea of Okhotsk and the Chukchi and Kamchatka Peninsulas. Behind the fur trappers were experienced entrepreneurs who utilized

their employees' previously established settlements as trading posts in a continuously expanding network.¹ As the potential for income increased, so did government interest.

A bevy of government-funded explorations occurred post-1700, almost exclusively for the purpose of identifying and mapping northeastern Siberia and the sea between Kamchatka and Alaska. Peter the Great sent cartographers to map Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands in the early 18th century, and sent Vitus Bering to navigate the sea between Okhotsk and the Kamchatka Peninsula in 1725.² A separate voyage based out of northern Siberia and led by Afanasii Shestakov included a crew which would ultimately become the first Russians to step on Alaskan soil.³ In 1732, under the rule of Peter the Great's niece, Empress Anna, Bering was ordered to thoroughly document and explore the northwestern coast of America. These ventures were primarily explorative in nature; there were no efforts to acquire new lands, but rather to understand nearby geography. Again, expeditions led by private companies expedited public interests.

The major private companies which participated in Alaskan exploration were the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company, Shelikhov-Golikov Company, and the Russian American Company. Slowly, as these private Alaskan ventures began to yield economic and social benefits, the government began to intervene. As has been noted by Siberian historian S. V. Bakhrushin, "The state's intention to subject the new lands followed much later ... [it] acted very cautiously, preferring to exploit the results of private activity."⁴ It was soon after these private ventures discovered the rich fur trapping, fishing and timber industries in North America that

¹ Black, Lydia. *Russians in Alaska, 1732-1867*. (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2004), 7-8.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

Russian claim to the new frontier, known as Russian America, was laid in 1741.⁵ However, fiscal and legislative government support was not obtained until 1799. In the decades between 1741 and 1799, private entrepreneurial companies fought for dominance in the colony.

The Lebedev-Lastochkin, Shelikhov-Golikov and Russian American Companies

The private companies that initiated the exploration of Alaska were typically competitive rather than collaborative. For instance, attempts of the Russian American Company to lay claim to the entirety of Alaska were refused by Catherine the Great and by other Russian leaders later on, much to the satisfaction of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company.⁶ Even within companies, sailors regularly disobeyed the orders of company owners, who typically remained in Russia. Two of the leading company owners, Pavel Lebedev-Lastochkin and Grigorii Shelikhov, began as employees of merchants who had begun to tap into the northeastern Siberia region.

Pavel Sergeevich Lebedev-Lastochkin was a merchant based out of Kamchatka, where he moved in 1773 at the age of 35.⁷ There he secretly worked under government orders to establish ongoing communication with the Japanese. The effort was masked under the guise of establishing trade with Atkis (modern Hokkaido) in northern Japan. Grigorii Shelikhov, originally from Ryl'sk in western Russia and supposedly working under merchant Ivan Golikov, had settled in Kamchatka between 1773 and 1775. Both Lebedev-Lastochkin and Shelikhov worked as agents under the directive of lead merchants. The two men met when the use rights of the ship, *Sv. Nikolai*, were offered to them in 1775. Lebedev-Lastochkin wished to use the ship

⁵ "History." *Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska, Inc.* <www.rossialaska.org/history/>. Accessed January 2016.

⁶ Solovjova, Katerina, and Aleksandra Vovnyanko. 1999. "The Rise and Decline of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company: Russian Colonization of South Central Alaska, 1787-1798". *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 90 (4). University of Washington: 193.

⁷ *Russians in Alaska*, 102.

to complete his voyages to Atkis. When he offered Shelikhov the opportunity to participate, Shelikhov accepted only to sell his share after one voyage to Japan. The men had an uneasy relationship from that point forward, despite sharing ownership of multiple ships.⁸ They acknowledged their growing interest in the Alaskan fur trade.⁹ However, the two eventually grew to detest one another and each created their own separate companies, both vying for wealth in America.

A majority of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company's records remain undiscovered, though primary sources in English, Russian and Spanish have surfaced which aid in pinpointing the activities, goals and timeline of the company's time in Russian Alaska.¹⁰ The locations of at least nine of their fortifications and artels (trading posts or settlements) have been documented: North Foreland near modern Tyonek, East Foreland near modern Nikiski, St. Hermogenes, Marmot Island, Fort Konstantinovskaia on modern Hinchinbrook Island, Kayak Island, Lake Iliamna, Fort St. Nicholas near modern Kenai, and Fort St. George near modern Kasilof.¹¹ These extend across the island of Kodiak, through the Cook Inlet region and east near Prince William Sound. Many of these settlements are visible in the 1797 Russian map shown in Figure 1.1.

The Lebedev-Lastochkin Company's first artel was located on what is now known as the Pribilof Islands. Their namesake, Captain Gavril Prybilov, was ordered by Lebedev-Lastochkin in 1781 to retrieve a grounded ship, the *Sv. Natalia*, in the Kuril Islands. After obtaining the *Sv. Natalia*, Prybilov was instructed to travel to the Aleutian Islands to complete a fur-trapping expedition. Prybilov traveled directly to the Aleutians instead, citing stormy weather. In 1782 Lebedev-Lastochkin ordered Stepan Zaikov to complete the same task on the *Sv. Pavel*, but

⁸ *Russians in Alaska*, 103-104.

⁹ Solovjova and Vovnyanko, 192.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

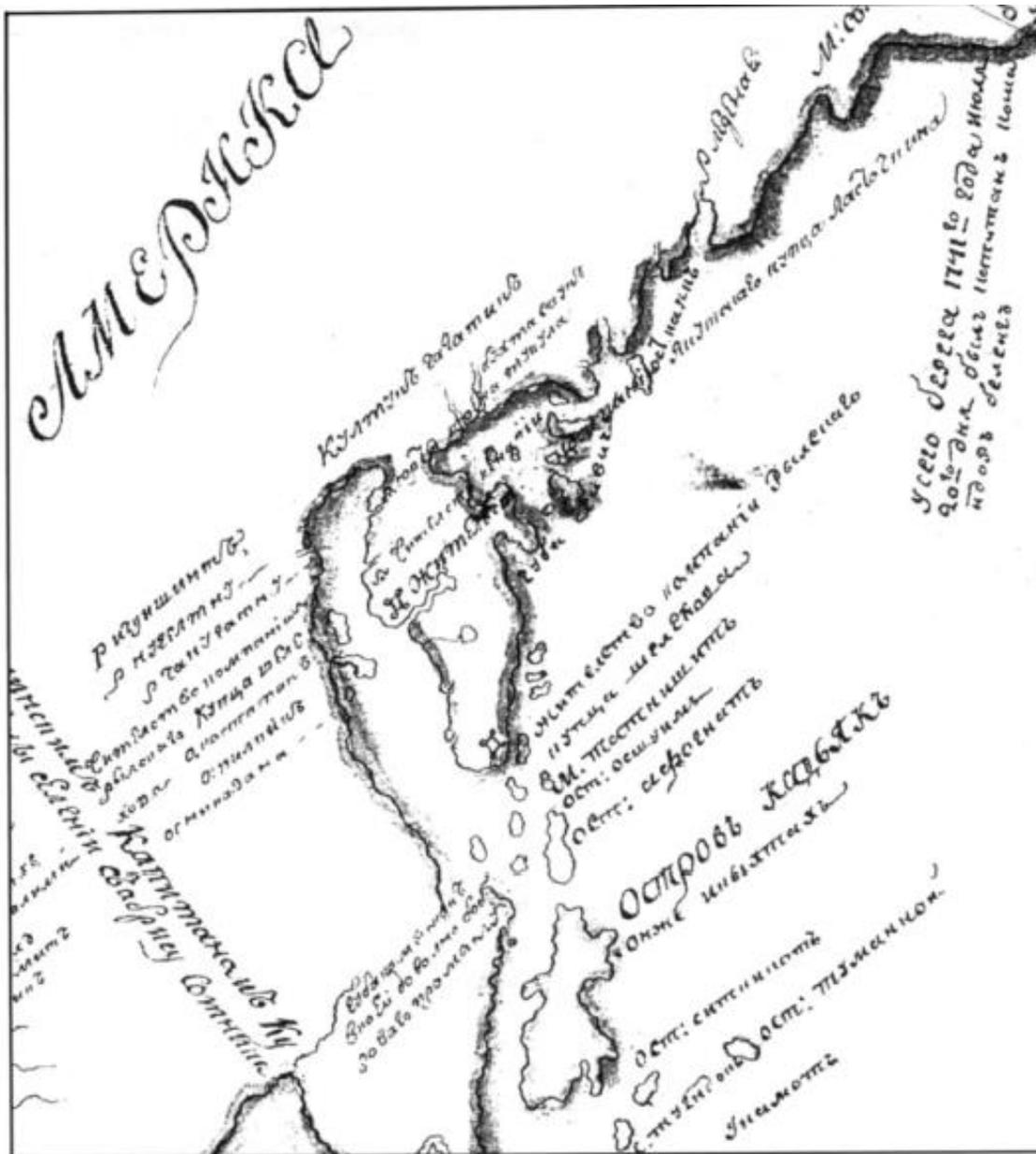


Figure 1.1: 1797 Russian Map of Southcentral Alaska highlighting Shelikhov and Lastochkin’s holdings on the Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak Island. The fortress in the middle of the Kenai Peninsula indicates Fort St. Nicholas (modern Kenai) at the mouth of the Kenai River.

Source: Solovjova, Katerina, and Aleksandra Vovnyanko. 1999. “The Rise and Decline of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company: Russian Colonization of South Central Alaska, 1787-1798”. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 90 (4). University of Washington: 193.

Zaikov's venture followed the same fate. Prybilov returned to Okhotsk in northeastern Siberia in 1789 with a ship full of seal and otter pelts from St. Paul and St. George (what is now known as the Pribilof Islands).¹² By 1794, Lebedev-Lastochkin had developed a solid presence in the Upper Cook Inlet region, including Tyonek on the west and smaller settlements near present-day Anchorage.¹³ An account from George Vancouver noted that Russians living in Kenai were "content to live after the manner of native Indians of the country."¹⁴ Soon after Vancouver's visit, however, Lebedev-Lastochkin's competition with Shelikhov quickly accelerated.

Shelikhov's venture began as a partnership with his wealthy employer, Golikov, who provided a majority of the funding to purchase holdings in fourteen ships and construct three new ships by 1797.¹⁵ The Shelikhov-Golikov Company was focused entirely on creating a settlement in Alaska, and chose the island of Kodiak as their central location. He argued to the imperial government that an Alaskan settlement was imperative to the success of the Russian Empire. He also insisted that utilizing Alaskan resources (namely, fur pelts, which were in high demand in Russia and China) remotely without establishing a colony would lead to ruin.¹⁶ To that end, Shelikhov's company relentlessly sought to destroy its competition and used underhanded tactics to do so. Historian Lydia T. Black explains one example, which ultimately led to the end of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company altogether:

In an instruction to Bocharov, one of his skippers, dated 19 March 1786, Shelikhov told him to entice Lebedev-Lastochkin's men, Russian and Kamchadal and Yakut, to entire Shelikhov's service. He claimed he had a letter from Lebedev-Lastochkin transferring to him absolutely the management of the Lebedev Company and further claimed to have given a copy of this letter to Bocharov.¹⁷

¹² Solovjova and Vovnyanko, 191-192.

¹³ *Russians in Alaska*, 114.

¹⁴ Mousalimas, S.A *The Transition from Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska* (Providence: Berghan Books, 1995). 65.

¹⁵ *Russians in Alaska*, 104.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

Shelikhov's false account was ultimately realized. 1790 marked the last year that Lebedev-Lastochkin's crew shipped furs or other resources back to Russia. In return, Lebedev-Lastochkin ceased sending aid to his Alaskan settlements. By 1792, he was poor, under investigation by the imperial government for debts he'd accrued, and unable to leave mainland Russia as a result. Simultaneously, Russian leaders had begun to support Shelikhov's ventures both financially and figuratively. Unrest among the native tribes in 1798 had finally encouraged the remaining 60 Lebedev-Lastochkin crew members on the Kenai Peninsula to return to Russia.¹⁸ The settlements set up by the Company were acquired by the Shelikhov-Golikov Company, which had just hired the successful Siberian merchant Aleksandr Andreevich Baranov.¹⁹ Ultimately, the fall of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company was caused by weakening trade, powerless and unsuccessful leadership at home and in the colony, and increasing competition with other companies.

The Russian American Company, a conglomeration of the Shelikhov-Golikov Company, another smaller private company, and Baranov's expertise, was formed in 1799 out of the ashes of the Lebedev-Lastochkin venture. Baranov and the Russian American Company are frequently cited as the driving force behind the settlement of Russian Alaska, likely due to the company's long period of occupancy and its success in the region. Their first charter was granted in 1799, with additional charters in 1821 and 1841. In these charters the imperial government granted the Russian American Company exclusive rights to obtain furs, minerals and timber.²⁰ Their monopoly persisted until the sale of Alaska in 1867. Lebedev-Lastochkin, who died in 1800 in Irkutsk leaving behind his young wife, has been dubbed the "chief loser" of the Russian

¹⁸ Solovjova and Vovnyanko, 201-202.

¹⁹ *Russians in Alaska*, 114-121.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 255-256.

American fur trade.²¹ As a result, his company's successful discovery and settlements on the Kenai Peninsula and larger Cook Inlet region are often understated.

The Dena'ina Athabaskans and Russo-Native Relations

A study by Ivan Petrof in 1880 determined that the Russians in Alaska identified four main Alaskan native groups: the Aleut, Eskimo, Tlingit and Athabascan.²² Today, Alaskan natives are divided into seven language families, with at least 23 languages between them. A depiction of their geographic distribution is visible in Figure 1.2. A majority of the Kenai Peninsula and larger Cook Inlet area is home to the Dena'ina Athabaskan people, with the Alutiiq in the southeastern Kenai near the Chugach Mountains and Prince William Sound. Rarely, if ever, are the Dena'ina referred to as such by the Russians in charters or other government or Russian American Company documents. Frequently, they are defined by their location: for instance, the Chugach and Kenai tribes on the Kenai Peninsula are named for the Chugach Mountains and the Kenai River, respectively. Though some native groups never came into contact with Russians during the era of Alaskan exploration, those who did received various forms of treatment. Furthermore, the treatment and management of natives by different companies also varied.

The Dena'ina in the Cook Inlet region excelled in hunting large land mammals and had just begun to dabble in maritime exploration when the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company arrived in 1787. Instructions for native treatment and establishment of settlements in the colony were made clear by company leaders. One Russian admiral instructed that the first priority of arriving

²¹ *Russians in Alaska*, 102.

²² Gsovski, Vladimir. *Russian Administration of Alaska and the Status of the Alaskan Natives* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950). 18.

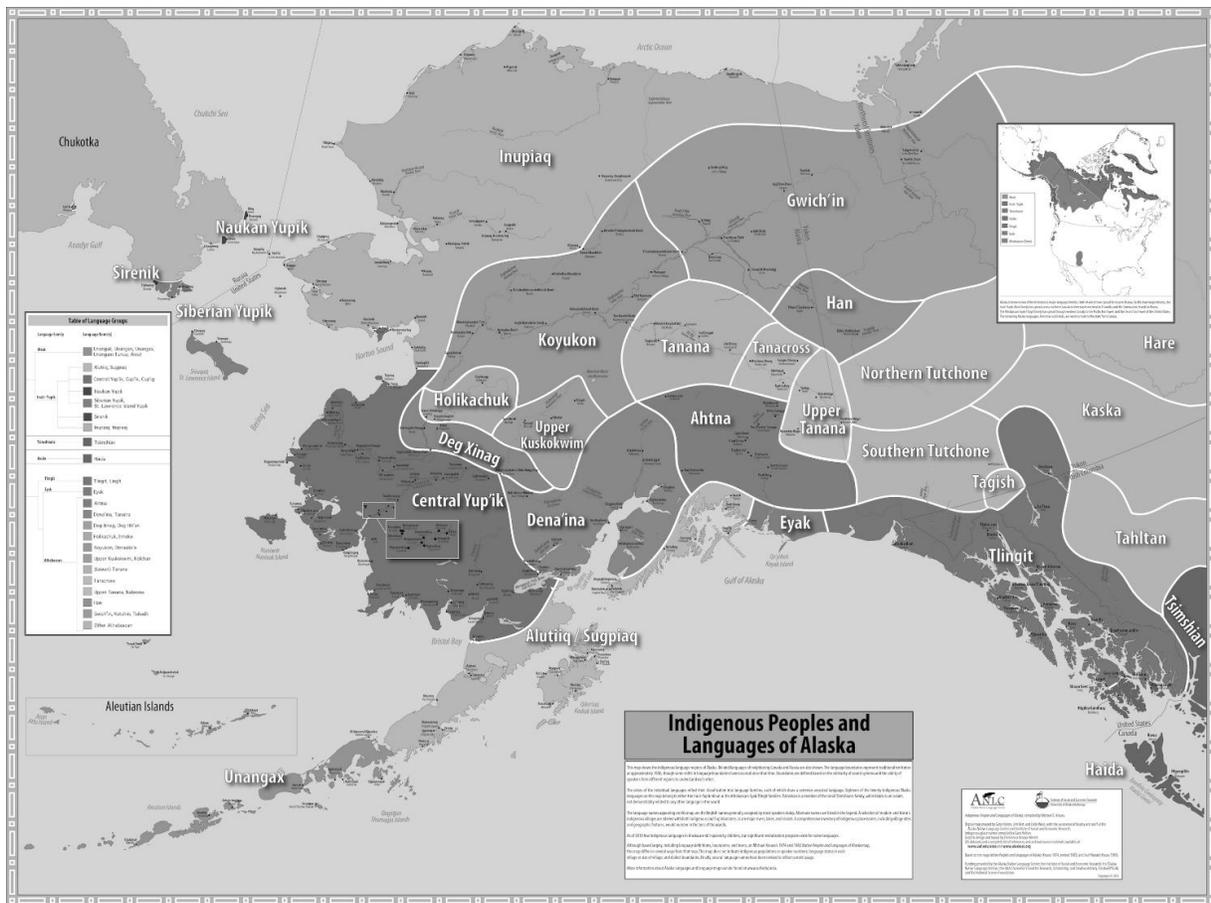


Figure 1.2: Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska, depicting the general location of the Dena'ina along the western shores of the Kenai Peninsula and Southcentral Alaska.

Source: University of Chicago Press. 2012. *Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska*. Accessed May 3, 2016.

promyshlenniki was to “make acquaintance of the people living there and offer them your friendship.”²³ In Sitka, for example, the strategy began with the crewmen’s arrival and determination of the site’s suitability for Russian settlement. If the location was found to be satisfactory, communication and the exchange of gifts with the native population (in this case, the Tlingit tribe) commenced. Company men were instructed to ask permission before beginning construction of any kind to ensure the natives’ blessing.²⁴ However, Russian conduct in Alaska did not always follow these instructions.

Company treatment of natives ranged from compassionate to cruel. The crew took hostages from the Kenai tribe “in order to guarantee their own safety.”²⁵ Shelikhov’s men, in an attempt to sabotage Lebedev-Lastochkin’s *artel* at Fort Nikolaevskaia, harassed the Kenaitzy and destroyed their *baidarkas*.²⁶ The Russian captain responsible for these acts was later arrested and forced to return to Siberia.²⁷ Those accounts of cruelty against the natives that were forwarded to governors in eastern Siberia were often overlooked. Upon the arrival of Orthodox monks, accounts of abuse abounded. A letter from Hieromonk Makarii to the tsar in October 1787 lists several offenses:

The Shelikhov and Golikov company men threaten other people in a most barbarous way. They lack any human kindness. They take their wives and daughters as mistresses by force, they kill the people. They send out the men to hunt sea otters from the earliest spring, healthy or ailing, it does not matter. Some of those who are ill, die en route. They keep the men hunting until fall and there is no time to put up food for themselves and their families, nor get materials for clothing...²⁸

²³ Winkler, Martina. 2011. "From Ruling People to Owing Land: Russian Concepts of Imperial Possession in the North Pacific, 18th and Early 19th Centuries*." *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 59 (3): 329.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 329-330.

²⁵ Solovjova and Vovnyanko, 193-194.

²⁶ A *baidarka* is a boat constructed using animal skin, typically whale intestine.

²⁷ Solovjova and Vovnyanko, 194-195.

²⁸ *Russians in Alaska*, 234.

Makarii's letter demonstrates the nature in which the Shelikhov-Golikov Company men, as well as crews from other companies, controlled and exhausted resources at the expense of the natives.

It is important to note that the Imperial Russian government did not support the inhumane treatment of native Alaskans. In August 1787, at the request of Catherine the Great, an imperial decree was issued which prohibited "traders from plundering or committing any atrocities towards the natives of the islands of the Eastern Sea."²⁹ This crime remained one of the few punishable by death under Catherine's reign.³⁰ Russian tradesmen who ignored this decree were investigated and barred from further trade in Alaska. Under section 43 of the Russian American Company's Second Charter, all tribes were viewed as Russian subjects who "shall conform to the general views of the Empire and shall enjoy the protection thereof."³¹ Native populations were further categorized by their willingness to cooperate with Russian rule, which determined their degree of dependence and civility. The Kenai Indians in the Cook Inlet region were deemed as "good natured" and "true Christians" who lived "in complete accord and in constant contact with the Russians."³² Other native groups, such as the Kuskokwim and Yukon, were considered somewhat dangerous, after some uncommon "attempts to kill the Russians."³³

However, relations between Alaska's native population and the *promyshlenniki* were not always positive despite orders from the tsarina. Shelikhov was known to follow only some imperial orders and occasionally used brute force to sway native populations.³⁴ Despite the practice of taking hostages being outlawed in 1762, Shelikhov's men continued to use native

²⁹ Gsovski, 35.

³⁰ *Russians in Alaska*, 106.

³¹ Gsovski, 44.

³² *Ibid.*, 58.

³³ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁴ *Russians in Alaska*, 107-109.

hunters' wives as collateral to do their bidding.³⁵ In 1788, a naval expedition was ordered to Kodiak to investigate claims of indecency and abuse by Shelikhov against the natives.³⁶ In 1802, Russian tensions with the Tlingits in Novo-Arkhangelsk escalated to a head in what is now known as the Battle of Sitka. The town was destroyed only two years after construction of the settlement had begun. Historians now understand that the Tlingits had refused Baranov's original request to construct a permanent settlement there, but Baranov moved forward regardless.³⁷

This is not to say that all interactions between the natives and Russians were inhumane. In 1790, Baranov left Russia for Kodiak Island, but was shipwrecked on the island of Unalaska. There, an Aleut tribe aided Baranov and his crew by providing shelter and offering a baidarka in which he would sail to Kodiak the following spring.³⁸ In short, the congenial nature between natives and Russians was the result of a balance of power. Natives aided Russians in fur trapping, hunting and gathering food, while Russians bartered goods and offered protection if natives were in conflict with nearby tribes.

As colonization in Russian America progressed, Russian settlers began to marry and have children. Children of Russian and native parents were referred to as creoles by the Russian government. By 1821, 80 years after Russia laid claim to Alaska, approximately 188 Creole men and 120 Creole women lived in the colony.³⁹ In Section 41 of the Second charter of the Russian American Company, drafted 1821, it was reported that Creoles "constitute from now on a special estate enjoying" rights akin to commoners. Creoles who studied at Russian universities with

³⁵ "1743-1867 Era of Russian Violence." *Alaska Humanities Forum: Alaska History and Cultural Studies*. <www.akhf.org>. Accessed January 2016.

³⁶ *Russians in Alaska*, 126.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 155-158.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁹ Gsovski, 43.

financial assistance from the Russian American Company were required to return to the colonies for ten years, with compensation from the Russian government, in an effort to encourage them to serve their homeland. After the ten year period had ended, they were free to leave Russian America and “practice their profession elsewhere.”⁴⁰ The treatment and reference of creoles in imperial documents demonstrates the Russian imperial governments’ changing attitudes toward Russian America.

Missionary Activity and Native Alaskan Conversion to Russian Orthodoxy

A major reason for the increasingly positive relationship between natives and Russians is the introduction of missionaries. The need for an Orthodox mission in Russian America was first proposed by Gregory Shelikhov in a letter to Empress Catherine in 1788. In 1789, Shelikhov began to campaign the imperial government and the Holy Synod of St. Petersburg for funding and support to construct a church on Kodiak Island. A church was imperative to colonial success for several reasons. First, a Russian town was incomplete without a Russian church. Shelikhov also insisted that the Russian population in the colony were unable to lead full, pious lives without the presence of the church. Perhaps most importantly, though, was the need to educate the natives. The presence of a dedicated and ordained priest, or Hieromonk, would aid in increasing native literacy of Russian. The Russian American Company would later recount that “many islanders wished to adopt the Christian religion.”⁴¹ After a decade of demands, Shelikhov received a positive response from St. Petersburg.

Empress Catherine ordered the Holy Synod to select their best monks from the northeast Siberian monasteries and send them to Kodiak. Ten able-bodied monks arrived on Kodiak

⁴⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁴¹ *Russians in Alaska*, 230.

Island six years after Shelikhov's request. Their 293-day and 7,327 mile journey, from St. Petersburg to Moscow to Okhotsk, then to Unalaska and finally Kodiak, was the longest journey in Orthodox Church history. They were equipped only with holy books, *reznitsy*⁴², new heavy coats and 900 rubles.⁴³ Two months after their arrival, on November 21, 1794, the Church of the Holy Resurrection was constructed.⁴⁴ One monk, Archimandrite Ioasaf, was called soon after to return to Russia to be consecrated as the bishop-vicar for Russian America. Another monk, Herman, would eventually become North America's first Orthodox saint. The remaining clergymen were distributed across Russian America as regional monks and priests.⁴⁵

The Dena'ina Athabascans, as well as other native Alaskans, practiced shamanism prior to the introduction of Russian Orthodoxy. The first converted Alaskans were Aleuts on the Aleutian Islands in the 1760s. These baptisms were completed by Russian *promyshlenniki*, as no missionaries or Russian holy men were present on the initial voyages to Alaska. Existing Christian communities in Kodiak and Unalaska were found by the Orthodox holy men when they arrived in Russian America in 1795.⁴⁶ This would establish the Kodiak Diocese, which would persist until 1811 when it was enveloped by the Irkutsk Diocese in eastern Siberia.⁴⁷ Even if the Russian American Company's exuberance in recounting native interest to convert to Orthodoxy was overemphasized, sources indicate that the Kenai and other Alaskan natives converted quickly and openly both before and after the establishment of an Orthodox mission in the colony.

⁴² Plural of *reznitsa*, a "group of utensils and vestments for church services" (Black, 232).

⁴³ *Russians in Alaska*, 230-232.

⁴⁴ Smith, Barbara Sweetland, David J Goa, and Dennis G Bell. *Heaven On Earth: Orthodox Treasures of Siberia and North America*. Anchorage, Alaska: Anchorage Museum of History and Art, 1994. 85.

⁴⁵ *Russians in Alaska*, 233-235.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁷ Orthodox Church in America. "St. Herman of Alaska: Wonderworker of All America." <www.oca.org/FS.NA-Documents.asp?SID=4&ID=55> Accessed September 3, 2015.

Historians and theologians have long hypothesized the reasons for native willingness to convert to Orthodoxy. The most prolific determination is that similarities between the two religions allowed for easy adoption of traditions. For instance, both religions utilized protective talismans and worshipped ancient idols. The tolerance of both the Orthodox and shamans allowed for an acknowledgment of the others' idols, and seemed to accommodate a slow transition to worship the Orthodox god over the shaman gods.⁴⁸ An additional cultural hypothesis is the importance of names in shaman ideology. Evidence suggests that the Aleuts and natives in northeast Siberia believed that each additional name a person was given increased their status. Converting to Orthodoxy meant the adoption of an additional name, typically of an Orthodox saint, "in addition [to] the patronymic derived from the baptismal name of his or her sponsor and the use of the sponsor's family name. Thus, a young boy from Attu taken to Kamchatka in 1747 ... became Pavel Mikhailovich Nevodchikov, in honor of his baptismal sponsor, Navigator Mikhail Nevodchikov."⁴⁹ These cultural and anthropological hypotheses are helpful, and are aided by the role of the clergy as protectorates.

The kindness and compassion of Russian clergy also almost certainly played a part. In many ways, missionaries served as a level of defense and protection against the *promyshlenniki*. At the height of native mistreatment by Shelikhov's men, clergymen were compelled to report their behavior to their superiors at the Holy Synod and the imperial government. Tensions between the *promyshlenniki* and the missionaries were often high as a result. Historian Barbara Sweetland Smith explains the innate nature of their conflict further:

Their financial obligation to the Russian State notwithstanding, the monks understood their role in the colonies as general overseer of the morality of the

⁴⁸ Znamenski, Andrei A. *Through Orthodox Eyes: Russian Missionary Narratives of Travels to the Dena'ina and Ahtna, 1850s-1930s*. (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2003), 122.

⁴⁹ *Russians in Alaska*, 224.

Russians as well as enlighteners of ‘the heathen.’ The Company officials obviously wanted the missionaries to confine themselves to the second task. Their very different assignments led to frequent clashes between the Company and the missionaries. The missionaries strongly objected to the attitudes, style of life, and methods employed by the Company officials, particularly by Alexander Baranov, who became General Manager in 1802. A major source of tension was the Company treatment of the native population.⁵⁰

In addition to protection, missionaries acted as educators. Holy men learned the native languages in an attempt to communicate with the different native groups, and gave sermons in their languages to further their knowledge of Orthodoxy.⁵¹ Shortly after his arrival in Unalaska in 1824, Father Ianov Veniaminov began translating biblical passages and liturgy into Aleut. A dictionary was printed as a result of his efforts, and schools were constructed to aid in the teaching of Russian to natives.⁵² In this way, education served as an additional tool in converting native populations. Education, however, would have never been possible without the introduction of Orthodox missionaries.

The process of selecting a location and establishing a settlement was legitimized by the construction of an Orthodox church. For the Russians, it was an integral cultural aspect of society. Company men also looked to church as a method of obtaining obedience from the native populations. For the natives, the church served as a symbol of protection from abusive employers, and as a cultural exchange of ideas. In this way, the settlement of Alaska was aided by the establishment of the Russian Orthodox missions. Even after the sale of Alaska in 1867, the prominence of the church continued and, in many ways, increased.

⁵⁰ Smith, Barbara Sweetland. “Orthodoxy and Native Americans: The Alaskan Mission.” *Orthodox Church in America Department of History and Archives, Historical Society Occasional Papers. No. 1.* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980). 9-11.

⁵¹ *Russians in Alaska*, 230.

⁵² “*Heaven on Earth: Orthodox Treasures of Siberia and North America*,” 85.

The Sale of Alaska and its Impacts on the Russian Orthodox Church

Prince Maksutov, the last Russian governor of Alaska, was present with his wife on October 18, 1867, when the Russian flag was lowered in Sitka. General Lovell Rousseau wrote to Secretary of State William H. Seward that the day was “bright and sunny.”⁵³ The official account of the affair as presented by General Rousseau to Secretary of State William Seward continues:

... The troops being promptly formed, were, at precisely half past three o'clock, brought to a 'present arms', the signal given to the Ossipee... which was to fire the salute, and the ceremony was begun by lowering the Russian flag... The United States flag... was properly attached and began its ascent, hoisted by my private secretary, George Lovell Rousseau, and again salutes were fired as before, the Russian water battery leading off. The flag was so hoisted that in the instant it reached its place the report of the big gun of the Ossipee reverberated from the mountains around... Captain Pestchouroff stepped up to me and said, 'General Rousseau, by authority from his Majesty the Emperor of Russia, I transfer to the United States the Territory of Alaska' and in a few words I acknowledged the acceptance of the transfer, and the ceremony was at an end.⁵⁴

The sale of Alaska came in the wake of decades of rumors within the Russian military. After the Battle of Sitka and the reconstruction of the city soon after, the Russian American Company experienced small successes between years of strife. A smallpox epidemic raged across the colony from 1836 until 1840, and another struck in 1862.⁵⁵ Difficult relations with some native tribes, particularly the Tlingit, continued through the 1850s. The depletion of sources, particularly furs, was a constant concern, as well as the threat of the Spanish and Americans who began to explore the region. The end of the Crimean War put the profitability of Russian America into further speculation. It was decided that the Russian American Company

⁵³ Jones, Wendy. “Princess Maksutova: Last Russian First Lady.” *Great Lander Shopping News*, October 20, 1971.

⁵⁴ “Alaska Day Festival: Charting the Transfer at Sitka.” <<http://alaskadayfestival.org/transfer.html>>. Last modified September 23, 2015.

⁵⁵ *Russians in Alaska*, 196 & 279.

would not be granted another charter.⁵⁶ Finally, after months of discussion with diplomats and dignitaries, the sale of Alaska to the United States was made final on March 30, 1872.

With the signing of the treaty, the Russian imperial governments' primary concern became the status of the Russians who had settled there. Maksutov was tasked with administration of Russian withdrawal.⁵⁷ The Treaty of Alaska stated that Russian colonists would have the option to return to Russia or become United States citizens. However, only the land owned by the Russian Orthodox Church was protected in the transfer. The few Russian speaking peoples who remained in Alaska from that point forward were aided and administered by the church. It was suggested that those Russians who chose to stay in Alaska establish towns in which to retire. The town of Ninilchik on the Kenai Peninsula is an example of this kind of establishment. When Henry W. Elliott traveled to the Pribilof Islands in 1872 on behalf of the U.S. Treasury Department, he noted that the entire population, including Aleuts, Creoles and Russians, were reluctant to abandon the Russian language in favor of English. Elliott also noted the churches in the area were in poor condition.⁵⁸ Whether this is due to the churches' remote location, or if it can apply to all Orthodox churches in the former colony, is uncertain.

The church's status as sole authorized remnant of the Russian colony aided in its power after 1867. In 1858, a total of nine priests served 44 Orthodox parishes. By 1972, about the same number of priests served 84 parishes. Without an Orthodox seminary in Alaska between 1858 and 1972, the increase in the number of parishes can be attributed to the activity of native Alaskans.⁵⁹ Theologians have identified the introduction of Presbyterian, Moravian and other

⁵⁶ *Russians in Alaska*, 278.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 282-285.

⁵⁸ Postnikov, Alexey and Marvin Falk, *Exploring and Mapping Alaska: The Russian America Era, 1741-1867* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2015). 451.

⁵⁹ Mousalimas, 23.

missionaries in the years following the sale of Alaska, noting that none were as successful as the Orthodox missions of the 18th or 19th centuries. It has been suggested that Russian Orthodoxy was utilized as a tool by native Alaskans to refuse American customs and religious pressure in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁶⁰ Today, Russian Orthodoxy remains a prominent religion among descendants of both natives and Russians, and Alaska retains the highest concentration of Orthodox churches of any state in the United States.⁶¹

Conclusion

The experiences of Russian *promyshlenniki* in Russian America varied according to several factors. The geographical location of the settlement and the relations with nearby natives particularly impacted relations. Though some native groups were deemed more violent than others, the behavior of the Russian company men was often the reason for the tumultuous history in west, Southcentral and southeast Alaska. The introduction of Russian Orthodox missionaries in the late 18th century helped to incorporate cultural and religious exchanges between the two groups. Efforts of holy men such as John Veniaminov established standards of conduct in the treatment of natives by the *promyshlenniki*.⁶² In 1867, the sale of Alaska and evacuation of Russian government in the colony helped to cement the power of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska.

The Lebedev-Lastochkin Company's occupation of the Cook Inlet region is largely viewed as a failure, as it is frequently compared to the successful expansion and trade networks

⁶⁰ Vinkovetsky, Ilya. *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 156.

⁶¹ Krindatch, A. *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Churches*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011), 70.

⁶² "Heaven on Earth: Orthodox Treasures of Siberia and North America," 85.

established by the Shelikhov-Golikov Company and, later, the Russian American Company. As a result, it seems many of the towns in this region which were settled by Russians as early as the 18th century are overlooked. The persistence of three Russian Orthodox churches on the Kenai Peninsula, including Old St. Nicholas Church in Eklutna, Holy Assumption Church in Kenai, and Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord in Ninilchik, demonstrates the success of both the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company and the Russian Orthodox Church. The histories of these towns and the roles of the churches within them are explored in Chapter Two in order to further reveal their unique backgrounds and challenges.

CHAPTER TWO

EKLUTNA, KENAI AND NINILCHIK, ALASKA, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

While Chapter One provided the motives and patterns of exploration and settlement of Russian America, Chapter Two will further elucidate the histories, extending through the modern era, specific to the towns of Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik. It is important to note that each locality shares both similarities and striking differences. Eklutna, the only historically native village of the three, has been consistently inhabited for over 400 years. Kenai was founded near a native settlement, allowing Russian settlers to tap into pre-existing resources. The intermarrying of two cultures within Kenai created a large Creole community. Ninilchik, the last of the three towns to be established, was settled as a Russian pension community. The municipalities will be addressed from north to south, beginning with Eklutna, 30 miles northeast of Anchorage, Kenai on the western shore of the Kenai Peninsula, and Ninilchik, 45 miles south of Kenai also on the west shore of the peninsula.

This chapter also seeks to identify the context of the construction of each town's Russian Orthodox Church: St. Nicholas Church in Eklutna, Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Church in Kenai, and Transfiguration of Our Lord Church in Ninilchik. Each was constructed after the United States' purchase of Alaska and the establishment of the Alaska Commercial Company, often considered the American counterpart of the Russian America Company. The Alaska Commercial Company established five trading posts in the Cook Inlet



Figures 2.1 and 2.2: 1900 Map of Alaska and subset of the Cook Inlet Region, showing the distribution of minerals (including gold, copper and coal) and the American Fort Kenai. Eklutna, though not named in the map, is at the mouth of the Knik River north of Sunrise City. Ninilchik is just south of Kasilof, below Fort Kenai.

Source: Mitchell, Edward H. *Alaska and British Columbia showing the Yukon, Cariboo, Cassiar, with a portion of the Kootenay gold fields*. 1900. Rare Maps Collection, Alaska & Polar Regions Collections, Alaska Digital Archives.

region and continued the fur trade in the state through the late 20th century. Coupled with the discovery of gold in 1895, thousands of Americans settled on the Kenai Peninsula.¹ The natives, Creoles and remaining Russians in the area were faced with a new American culture, a new government and a new religion. The location and history of each town played a large part in the reaction to American homesteading and, as a result, the role of Russian Orthodoxy moving forward.

Eklutna

The region surrounding the native village of Eklutna, located at the mouth of the Knik River at the northern point of Cook Inlet, has been consistently inhabited by Dena'ina Athabascans since at least the 1600s. On the Kenai Peninsula Sources indicate that the current population originally settled in the area after migrating from Knik, northwest of Eklutna across the Knik Arm. The name Eklutna comes from the Dena'ina *Idlughet* meaning “by the objects,” with the lower Cook Inlet Dena'ina pronunciation being *Ezdlughet*. As a result, the Russians referred to the town as *Izliueskoe*, with *-skoe* serving as a Russian suffix meaning ‘village.’² Throughout history, Eklutna has historically been referred to Knik, Old Knik and New Knik.³ The reasoning for Eklutna's multiple names seems to be a lasting remnant of the village's re-establishment.

Beginning in the 1870s, Russian Orthodox missionaries aided the Dena'ina in the upper Cook Inlet region with the construction of Orthodox chapels. Much of this was in response to

¹ Znamenski, Andreia. *Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820-1917*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999). 100-101.

² Kari, James M, James A Fall, Shem Pete, and Mike Alex. *Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina*. 2nd ed. (Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 2003). 320.

³ *Ibid.*, 320.

American settlement in the area, which was perceived as a threat to the church's success. Simultaneously, the Orthodox Church had worked for some time to proselytize the Ahtna, a nomadic and relatively isolated native Alaskan group which settled largely in the area just north of Eklutna. The Ahtna traded relatively regularly with the Dena'ina, and some Ahtna had already converted to Orthodoxy as a result of their communication. However, missionaries hoped that setting up a parish in the area could entice the Ahtna to the church during their trade stops.⁴ Missionary Nikolai Mitropolsky settled in Knik village just northwest of Cook Inlet in 1888. A church was constructed in Knik by 1889 with his help.

Soon after its construction, however, the native Dena'ina suggested to move the church from Knik to Eklutna (or "Old Knik" to "New Knik," as it is frequently seen in missionary accounts), likely in an attempt to better fund and care for the structure by increasing accessibility. Even in 1893, Knik had only three permanent homes and one trading post.⁵ Eklutna, by comparison, was situated at the juncture of several trade routes and gold rush trails.⁶ The idea of moving the community went against the wishes of American tradesmen, who had set up trading posts in Knik and recognized the potential failure of their enterprises if the native population fled. Despite attempts to negotiate, ten native families moved from Knik to Eklutna in 1897.⁷

The status of the church they had constructed has been consistently debated for decades. Some sources indicate that the original St. Nicholas Chapel was dismantled, moved and reconstructed with the community. However, more recent sources have translated and utilized

⁴ Znamenski, Andrei A. "Native Culture through Orthodox Eyes: Russian Missionary Ioann Bortnovsky on the Dena'ina and Ahtna, 1896-1907." *Alaska History* 13 (1998). 3-5.

⁵ *Through Orthodox Eyes*, 100.

⁶ Kari, 321.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

the accounts of Orthodox priest Ioann Bortnovsky, whose personal journals documented the move from Knik to “New Knik” (Eklutna). In his account, the Knik families originally planned to dismantle and reconstruct the church. Father Bortnovsky instead encouraged them to construct a new church in Eklutna. There is no indication of whether the Eklutna church utilized the building materials of the original church. If Bortnovsky’s explanation of the construction of Eklutna’s St. Nicholas Church is correct, the church’s date of construction is 1897.⁸ The church remained in use until the mid-20th century when it was found to be structurally unstable. A new church, dubbed the New St. Nicholas Church, was constructed adjacent to the old church in 1962 by Athabaskan Chief Mike Maxim Alex.⁹ Both churches are extant, but the congregation meets exclusively in New St. Nicholas to aid in the old church’s preservation.

Completely unique to St. Nicholas is the use of spirit houses, a practice which seems to have followed the ten Knik families who resettled in Eklutna. These structures symbolize a combination of Russian Orthodox and Dena’ina burial practices. Prior to the introduction of Orthodoxy, natives cremated the deceased and placed their ashes in a remote, quiet, outdoor location. Orthodoxy, however, forbids cremation. Spirit houses ensured the spirit would be isolated from the living, as was Dena’ina tradition, for the 40-day period required to reach salvation in the Orthodox Church.¹⁰ Archpriest Nicholas Harris recently explained the tradition further:

They are an Indian institution; the Orthodox church does not know of this in the way the Indians do. In the case of the Eklutna Indians, the spirit houses bring together both traditions in their burial rites. They still have the aboriginal spirit house, but over the house is the Orthodox Cross, which shows that the person buried there is a member of the Orthodox church.¹¹

⁸ Ibid., 321.

⁹ Eklutna Historical Park. <<http://www.eklutnahistoricalpark.org/>>. Accessed September 1, 2015.

¹⁰ Flintoff, Corey. “In Alaskan Cemetery, Native and Orthodox Rites Mix.” *National Public Radio*. June 25, 2012.

¹¹ *Through Orthodox Eyes*, 123.

Remnants of spirit houses in Knik are also visible, likely from the years before the relocation to Eklutna. Spirit houses remain the normal burial practice in Eklutna to this day, though their decoration has changed slightly. Those found in Eklutna include the typical three-barred Orthodox cross and simple front-gabled, hipped-roof miniature house. However, they are painted bright colors and include more ornate features, with some newer spirit houses boasting three- to four-stories, cupolas and porches. They are largely empty but one, in which a smaller spirit house was constructed to represent the deceased mother's unborn child. Barring exterior ornamentation and the few exceptions, they are relatively simple in nature.

After the sale of Alaska, Russian-born U.S. soldier Ivan Petroff was assigned by the Department of the Interior to study, map and complete a census of Alaska in 1880. The resulting work's eighth volume, "Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources in Alaska," is frequently cited as a key document in understanding early American settlement in the new frontier. In this work, Petroff cites a trading outpost on the "river Kinik" in addition to Kenai and Tyonek.¹² In 1880, the largest village on the Knik River was recorded as having 46 people. This number increased to 160 and 31 households by 1900.¹³ Whether this village eventually became Eklutna is not clear, but it is probable. The natives in the area were known to trade *baidarkas* and other resources with those in Kenai and Nikiski. Their proximity to the Knik River and the nearby mountains provided access to sustenance and other resources.

Twentieth century Eklutna history is largely tied to the expansion of Anchorage and the continuation of American expansion and exploration within Alaska. The Alaska Railroad was expanded through Eklutna in 1918.¹⁴ In 1929, the Anchorage Light and Power Company

¹² Petroff, Ivan. "Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska." U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890. 26.

¹³ Kari, 320-321.

¹⁴ Alaska Historic Resources Card. "Eklutna Village." 1972.

completed construction of a power plant on the bank of the Eklutna River. American migration to Alaska increased during the 1940s as a result of World War II and the construction of Fort Richardson. The resulting increased demand in housing led developers and government officials to determine that the state's power infrastructure was inadequate. The Eklutna Project, established by the United States Bureau of Reclamation, allowed for the construction of an additional power plant and alterations to the existing dam. The project was completed in July 1955.¹⁵

Eklutna's size has diminished greatly in the last century. The village had originally included parts of Anchorage, Eagle River and the Matanuska Valley.¹⁶ In the 1960s, with all but .5% of its original land holdings remaining as a result of American homesteading, the village of Eklutna began efforts to preserve its remaining possessions. Under the 1977 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), Eklutna Inc. was formed in 1972. As their website explains:

By conveying Native land titles to 12 regional and 200 local village corporations chartered under Alaska state law, ANCSA changed the relationship between Natives and the land from one of co-ownership of shared lands to one of corporate shareholding; i.e., land ownership was based on a corporate model, and governmental entities, including traditional or IRA "tribal" governments.

Eklutna Inc. represents at least 170 shareholders and holds significant portions of undeveloped land. Today, the native village of Eklutna is considered a part of municipal Anchorage, despite its distance and comparative remoteness. Its insularity, however, aids in the preservation of native Dena'ina values and traditions. It has been reported that nearly all of Eklutna's residents are at least partly of native descent.¹⁷

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. "The Eklutna Project." <<http://www.usbr.gov/history/eklutna.html>>. Accessed February 12, 2016.

¹⁶ Kari, 321.

¹⁷ Eklutna, Inc. "About Us." <<http://www.eklutnainc.com/2013/about-us/>>. Accessed February 12, 2016.

Kenai

Russian merchant Stepan Zaikov and his crew, on orders from the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company, were the first Russians to explore the northern Kenai Bay and Southcentral Alaska. They landed on Kodiak Island in 1786, approximately 60 miles south of the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula.¹⁸ After remaining there through the winter, the crew sailed north and settled at the mouth of the Kaknu (now Kenai) River on June 1, 1787.¹⁹ Fort Pavlovskaja, as the fort was named, would become the center of all trade and presence on inland Alaska.²⁰

The fort established on the banks of the mouth of the Kenai River has been referred to interchangeably as Fort Pavlovskaja or Fort Nikolaevskaja (Fort St. Nicholas) throughout history. Some historians assert that the fort was named for the *Sv. Pavel*. Russian American Company historian P. A. Tikhmenev asserted that the fort was named for “the bay that later was named Nikolaevskaja Harbor.”²¹ To add to the confusion, forts throughout Russian America are occasionally called redoubts (ie. Redoubt St. Nicholas), are referred to with or without their associated saint, or are transposed from Russian directly (St. Nicholas as opposed to Nikolaevskaja). For the sake of simplicity, the Russian settlement will be referred to as Fort St. Nicholas within this work.

The settlement at the mouth of the Kenai River is representative of many traits of early Russian American establishments. Fort St. Nicholas was constructed proximally to the native village of Skittok.²² The name Skittok comes from the Dena’ina Athabascan *shk’ituk’t*, meaning

¹⁸ Solovjova and Vovnyanko, 193.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

²² Orth, Donald J. *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names*. “Skittock.” (United States Government Printing Office: Washington 1967), 884.

“where we slide down,” which aids in confirming the location of this native village at the northern bank of the mouth of the Kenai River.²³ Most notably, however, is the town’s location on a bluff overlooking both the river and Cook Inlet. Like other contemporary coastal settlements, including Kasilof and Homer further south on the Peninsula, the Russian settlers sought to establish a settlement on a promontory. Fort St. Nicholas would eventually be considered the primary Russian settlement on the Kenai Peninsula.

The first Russian Orthodox missionaries arrived in Kenai in the 1840s. Their arrival ultimately aided in the precarious relations between *promyshlenniki* and natives, which had come to a head in the late 18th century during a native uprising sometimes referred to as the Battle of Kenai. Nearly 50 years later in 1846, Igumen Nicolai, a Russian monk, requested the construction of a church.²⁴ Father Nicolai was revered by the natives and Russian settlers for the administration of the smallpox vaccine, which saved the lives of countless Dena’ina only years before.²⁵ Upon Nicolai’s death, he was buried in the churchyard with his assistant, Makary Ivanov, and an unnamed monk. The date the original church was destroyed or demolished is unknown. Its replacement, the Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Church was constructed from 1894-1895, likely under the direction of Father Alexander Yaroshevich. It has been suggested that the structure’s similarities to the Holy Ascension Cathedral in Unalaska, built around the same time, may indicate a particular design was offered to multiple communities.²⁶

²³ Bright, William. *Native American Placenames of the United States*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 451.

²⁴ Allen, L.H. *Alaska’s Kenai Peninsula: The Road We’ve Travelled* (Hope, AK: Kenai Peninsula Historical Association, 2002), 110.

²⁵ Eklutna Historical Park. <<http://www.eklutnahistoricalpark.org/>>. Accessed September 1, 2015.

²⁶ *Buildings of Alaska*, 119.

Surrounding the church are multiple contemporary structures. A rectory was built adjacent to the church in 1881. The two-story structure is constructed of axe-hewn logs and 11-inch Russian ship nails, and is considered to be the oldest structure on the Kenai Peninsula.²⁷ The smaller St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Chapel was constructed in 1906 to honor Father Igumen Nicolai and his assistant, Makary Ivanov. The chapel was built above their graves, which aids in determining the location of the original 1846 church. A large Orthodox cemetery is located just north of the chapel and has been used continuously since the 19th century. Each grave is marked with simple, white Russian Orthodox three-barred cross. Today, many of the names of Kenai's first Russian settlers persist within the community. A small log cabin a hundred yards from Holy Assumption is the original home of the Oksolkof and Dolchok families. Built in 1918 using traditional Russian building methods, the home is said to be located on the original location of the Russian fort.²⁸

With the sale of Alaska in 1867, Russian Orthodox missionaries sought to entrench the role of the church in native culture in an attempt to defend against incoming Americans, who were joined by Protestant and Moravian missionaries. Bolstering the church also served as a method of ensuring native autonomy and allowed the church to serve as a protective entity. Alec Rayan, an American storekeeper who settled in Fort. St Nicholas, became infamous for cruelty and corruption against native Dena'ina peoples. The Russian Orthodox Church intervened directly by filing a court petition on behalf of the natives and creoles within the city.²⁹ In this way, the Russian Orthodox Church cemented its role as an authority and protectorate within Fort St. Nicholas.

²⁷ Allen, 110.

²⁸ The City of Kenai. "Old Town." < <http://www.ci.kenai.ak.us/visiting/oldtown>>. Accessed September 5, 2015.

²⁹ *Through Orthodox Eyes*, 110.

Orthodoxy also served an educational purpose in the town of Kenai. Holy Assumption was used as a school, where native Dena'ina could learn to read and write. Russian clergy also taught simple building construction methods, which explains the widespread use of dovetailed log construction in Kenai and other nearby towns on the peninsula. Several log cabins are scattered across the older section of the town, commonly referred to as Old Town Kenai. In addition to education, the church acted as an agent in promoting the welfare of locals. Father Nicolai distributed vaccines to natives during the smallpox epidemic of the 1830s and 1840s. Though the epidemic killed nearly half the Dena'ina population across Cook Inlet, Father Nicolai's efforts undoubtedly aided in the ultimate preservation of the Kenai community.³⁰

Under American control, Fort St. Nicholas was renamed Fort Kenay and was used as an army fort until 1870.³¹ The United States Department of Agriculture also chose Kenai as the site of an agricultural experiment station in 1899. The department sought to determine the viability of land cultivation and crop growth in the town of Kenai. Old cannery buildings were dismantled and the lumber was used to construct sheds, a barn and a small cottage. The experiment failed by 1908, but many of the buildings remain.³²

As the American government considered economic expansion and development in the region, Kenai residents continued to rely on the fishing and canning industries for employment.³³ The Wards Cove Packing Company Cannery was constructed in 1914 on the southern bank of the Kenai River. Incoming ships were able to transport fish via forklift or conveyor belt to the cannery with relative ease. The cannery included machinery and structures for the purposes of

³⁰ "Russian America." Anchorage Museum. < <https://www.anchagemuseum.org/media/4545/tt3-russian-america.pdf>>. Accessed September 3, 2015.

³¹ *Buildings of Alaska*, 117.

³² *Ibid.*, 123.

³³ Allen, 109.

processing and freezing fish and roe, as well as manufacturing cans. These industries, including the Wards Cove cannery itself, remain the primary economic drivers of the community today.³⁴

Kenai was the third largest town on the Kenai Peninsula by the mid-20th century. In 1946, approximately half of Kenai's population (approximately 500) was of native, Russian or Creole descent.³⁵ Several large events in the 1950s led to an exponential increase in the number of Americans within the community. The town was made eligible for homesteading and the Wildwood Army Base was constructed in the early 1950s. Kenai's schools quickly became overcrowded, leading to the expansion of educational and civic buildings. Between 1957 and 1959, the fishing industry expanded and a new industry was created when oil was discovered near Swanson River. Small subdivisions were constructed to accommodate the influx of workers and their families, and they have persisted through the 1980s and 1990s.³⁶ Many of the industries which began in the 20th century have continued to flourish through the present day.

Ninilchik

By 1820, managers of the Russian American Company faced the problem of an aging workforce. Simultaneously, company employees had grown increasingly tired and poor as a result of heavy taxes levied on their properties in their native Russia. These taxes were automatically withheld from company wages, meaning newer employees received little subsistence while older employees worried that retiring in Alaska would mean continued Russian taxation. Additionally, many company employees had married native women and hoped to remain in the colony with their families.³⁷ The main policies issued by the Russian American

³⁴ *Buildings of Alaska*, 122.

³⁵ Allen, 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113-115.

³⁷ *Buildings of Alaska*, 122.

Company outlined that retiring employees were exempt from Russian taxation, that the company would provide them food and supplies for one year, and that retirees would be required to continue positive relations with the natives. The search began for an appropriate coastal pensioner settlement soon after and, in 1841, the town of Ninilchik was established for this purpose.³⁸ It has been suggested that Ninilchik was founded as an experimental agricultural station, similar to that in Fort Ross, California. However, primary sources documents including the pension settlements' guidelines as far as the supply of resource written by Frederick Wrangell, indicate otherwise.³⁹

The first Russian families to reside in Ninilchik were the Chernyshevs and Munins. Both families, likely due to illness, left Ninilchik only a year later. Several old maps identify the settlement as Munina as a result.⁴⁰ Five years later, in 1847, the Kvasnikov and Knage families arrived in the area. It seems to be agreed that the origin of the name Ninilchik comes from the Dena'ina *niqnilchint*, meaning "lodge by the river." Prior to the establishment of the pension settlement, the Dena'ina had used the area as a fishing camp. Evidence of their *barabaras*, or partially subterranean homes, are still visible, making the town an archaeological and anthropological resource.⁴¹

The success of the Kvasnikov and Knage families in Ninilchik can be credited to the subsistence offered by the Russian American Company, but also to the availability of local resources. It was quickly discovered that the land in Ninilchik was fertile enough for agriculture. The abundance of trees allowed for the construction of sturdy log homes. Because the town was

³⁸ Allen, 109.

³⁹ Arndt, Katherine L. "Released to Reside Forever in the Colonies: Founding of a Russian-American Company Retirement Settlement at Ninilchik, Alaska." *Adventures through Time: Readings in the Anthropology of Cook Inlet, Alaska*. (Anchorage: Cook Inlet Historical Society, 1996), 237.

⁴⁰ Allen, 151.

⁴¹ Allen, 153.

constructed on the banks of the Ninilchik River and on a bluff overlooking the Cook Inlet, razor clams and fish were a readily available source of food. These resources, similar to those found in nearby Kenai, created a largely independent and efficient community.

The patriarch of the Kvasnikov family, Gregorii, was a Russian Orthodox missionary born in Kaluga, Russia, not far from Moscow. He married a Russian-Alutiiq woman, Mavra Rastorguev, before arriving in Ninilchik. Orthodox mass was held in a small church constructed in 1847 which also served as the school. Whether this church was destroyed or constructed for a temporary purpose is unknown, and no archaeological evidence of the structure remains. The Transfiguration of Our Lord Russian Orthodox Church (originally named the Russian Church of the Exiles) was constructed on the bluff overlooking the town between 1884 and 1893, though the church was not consecrated until 1901.⁴² Sources indicate the church was designed by its first priest, Father Aleksei Andreev Oskolkoff.⁴³ As seen in other examples of Russian buildings across the Kenai Peninsula, the ends of the logs are dovetailed and interlocked at the corners of the structure. A graveyard is located directly next to the church and has been utilized consistently since the church's construction. Each grave is marked with a wooden Orthodox three-barred cross. Many are also surrounded by short, white fences.

Father Ioann Bortnovsky, the priest who had previously documented the Eklutna church and traveled throughout the Kenai Peninsula, visited Ninilchik in 1896. He wrote in his notes, “[the new church] is the best in the Kenai parish. It resembles our Russian villages. One may say it even has a Russian smell. The natural environment is invigorating. The people are mostly of Russian origin: vigorous, tall, healthy, strong, white.” At this time, the population in Kenai

⁴² Hoagland, Alison K. “Photographs, Written and Descriptive Data: Transfiguration of Our Lord Russian Orthodox Church, Ninilchik, Kenai Peninsula Borough.” *Historic American Buildings Survey*. Summer 1990. 3.

⁴³ Allen, 154.

was approximately 100.⁴⁴ A Russian school was constructed near the church in 1896. A small English school was constructed nearby in 1911, which created a shift in the community. Families began to forbid the use of Russian at home and English slowly became standard.⁴⁵ This two-classroom school was replaced with a larger building in 1951.

Ninilchik's population grew slightly as American homesteaders arriving in the Cook Inlet region recognized the fertility of the town's land. An account of one homesteader, Leroy Erickson, is offered in a source from 1946, "One homesteader, Leroy Erickson, disabled veteran of World War I, conducts a fox farm. In addition, he has goats, chickens, ducks, turkeys, and off and on, a pig or two. Native grass grows thriftily at Ninilchik and there are many cows. When a road is built, dairying will be a big industry at Ninilchik."⁴⁶ However, it wasn't until the discovery of nearby coal deposits that a road was constructed. Prior to this discovery, oil and coal was delivered to Ninilchik and other settlements further south on the peninsula by dog team or boat. To avoid expensive delivery costs, those residents who did not gather their own coal typically took advantage of the expansive surrounding forests for fuel to heat their homes. Mail was delivered to Ninilchik by dog sled until the construction of the post office in 1925.⁴⁷ The Sterling Highway, which stretches north to south down the Kenai Peninsula, was not finished in Ninilchik until 1950. Residents of the town could communicate with friends and relatives in Anchorage using a radio station. Dubbed the "Mukluk Telegraph," it was used frequently through the 1950s until the introduction of telephones to the community in the following decade.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ "Photographs, Written and Descriptive Data: Transfiguration of Our Lord Russian Orthodox Church, Ninilchik, Kenai Peninsula Borough," 3.

⁴⁵ Allen, 155-156.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁷ The first postmaster, Mike Oskolkoff, was a direct descendant of Father Oskolkoff. The postmaster in 1982 was Lynda Kvasnikov.

⁴⁸ Allen, 156-157.

Similar to Kenai, the fishing and clamming industry in Ninilchik continues to flourish but has evolved to accommodate a tourist economy. Fishing tour guides settle in these western areas of the Kenai Peninsula and assist visitors in finding fishing locations and advising on the fish in season. Tourism in Ninilchik has increased to attract visitors from across the state for an annual rodeo and the State Fair each summer. Outside of these events, however, the town remains isolated and extremely insular. It is largely known as a checkpoint between the summer destinations of Homer and the larger town of Kenai, each approximately 40 miles from Ninilchik and connected by the Sterling Highway.

Ninilchik has a large number of extant 19th century structures that recall its Russian heritage. Dovetailed log-hewn cabins are scattered across the bottom of the bluff on the banks of the winding Ninilchik River. In addition to its tangible preserved assets, the family names and histories of Ninilchik are also well intact. All but one of the nine original family names, each descendants of the original Kvasnikovs, is still present within the community. As of 2002, the population of Ninilchik was 3,000, with almost all of them directly related to the Russian pensioners who settled in the area in 1847.⁴⁹ Less than 20 elders in the town speak a unique and rare dialect known as Ninilchik Russian, which incorporates Russian, Athabaskan and Slavic roots. The push toward English-based education in the early 20th century certainly led to a decline in the dialects' usage, and linguists across the world have made efforts to document the language before its extinction.⁵⁰ Outside of the Russian architectural features, dialect and family names, the role of the towns' Russian heritage seems less obvious than its northern counterpart, Kenai. Whether this is a lasting effect of the change in educational standards in the early 20th

⁴⁹ Allen, 154.

⁵⁰ Bergelson, Mira B. and Andrej A. Kibrik. "Russian Language in Alaska: Ninilchik Russian." (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Linguistics, 2010), 3.

century or can be attributed to another reason is undetermined. However, the Transfiguration of Our Lord Church remains active and serves as a visual and historic landmark both within the town and across the Kenai Peninsula.

Conclusion

Each town offers a different perspective of the persistence of Russian Orthodoxy within the community. In Eklutna, the natives have continued to care for St. Nicholas Chapel but simultaneously embrace ancient burial techniques based on the compromise of shaman and Orthodox principles. Kenai's Holy Assumption Church, by comparison, was constructed in a community of Russian, creole and native Dena'ina peoples. The church is a lasting example of their shared history within that community. Further still, the Transfiguration of Our Lord Church in Ninilchik seems to be one of the few tangible references to the town's Russian heritage. In these ways, the differences between the churches and the surrounding landscapes are demonstrative of the cultures and community that inhabit the area. Likewise, these factors have each affected the development of the churches differently.

The fact that the churches were each constructed at the end of the 19th century is representative of several larger themes. First, it indicates the positive relationship which existed between Orthodox clergy and the Dena'ina, made possible by similarities between cultures and a mutual dependency (which was discussed further in Chapter One). The need for collaboration increased at the end of the 19th century when American tradesmen, miners and speculators, coupled with Protestant and Moravian missionaries, arrived. Orthodox missionaries and clergy sought to retain the stronghold which they had established in Alaska. Conversely, the native

embrace and adoption of Orthodox values at the end of the 19th century was a defense mechanism in avoiding American power and influence.

The churches' proximal dates of construction also indicate that the Russian Orthodox faith flourished even after the sale of Alaska. By 1900, nine Russian Orthodox chapels were established and governed by natives or Creoles within major Dena'ina villages. These men and women were known for their dedication to the church, and were encouraged by Orthodox clergy to maintain the structures. In this way, the construction and success of a church established the town as a haven for natives in nearby communities that had been struck by disease, famine or conflict.⁵¹ Russian Orthodox churches within these villages bolstered the community and the Orthodox Church itself. The relationships between the clergy, the natives, the church and the villages were symbiotic in nature.

Perhaps most importantly, though, is the care and pride with which the churches were constructed and the efforts made to maintain and decorate them. Russian Orthodox clergy encouraged the natives to build and improve their own chapels. The rapid construction of the churches combined with Dena'ina eagerness to ensure their success ensured Orthodoxy's expansion and sustenance through the 20th century. Whether or not this trend has continued into the 21st century and aids in the explanation of the methods and motives of preservation of the churches Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik is to be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four.

⁵¹ *Through Orthodox Eyes*, 111.

CHAPTER THREE

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE THREE COOK INLET CHURCHES

While Chapters One and Two provided imperative background information on the historical context of Orthodox missionary activity and church construction throughout the Cook Inlet region, Chapter Three provides a closer look at the architecture of the churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik. There is no single document that cumulatively identifies and analyzes the architecture of the three Russian Orthodox churches considered within this work. Documenting and providing an architectural description of each church, which has not been done since their nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in the 1970s, is useful in identifying any changes made in the last five decades while demonstrating the changing values and traditions of the congregations and influences of their surrounding communities. Each church's architectural description will include any known alterations in addition to its current appearance.

It is important to note the similarities in Russian church construction in comparison to those in Russian colonial Alaska, particularly in northeastern Siberia. This is largely due to the commonality in available building materials and environments, and a desire to mimic native Russian cultural traditions. Architectural historian Anatole Senkevitch noted:

The permanent settlements in Russian America were indeed built... almost entirely of wood. They thus perpetuated both a building tradition and a cultural metaphor that had long flourished in the mother country. Until the nineteenth century, not only most Russian churches, but also countless tiny villages scattered across the Russian countryside, as well as entire towns and cities had been constructed predominantly of wood. The picturesque image of wooden churches rising majestically over a cluster of log houses enclosed by a network of wooden walls and towers, which had been conveyed over centuries by native iconographers and foreign travelers alike, is emblematic of a

“wooden Russia” whose abundant forests supplied material for farm and city, for house and church, and for street paving and eating utensils.¹

Though Alaska certainly acted as an extension of “wooden Russia,” the construction of the churches was limited by labor, availability of other building materials, and the size of the communities for which they were built. The three Cook Inlet churches are constructed of axe-hewn logs and are relatively small in both size and massing. They are simple in exterior appearance, including fenestration. In many cases, additional details or adornment such as the use of color in paint or roofing materials has come later. Despite these changes, the churches still exhibit many characteristic Russian Orthodox architectural features.

A Russian Orthodox church is almost always oriented so that the altar faces east, with the entrance located on the west elevation.² The only instances in which this rule is broken is if the church originally served a separate purpose or if a service is being conducted in a home.³ The general form of the church can vary. The two most common styles are the Pskov style, also known as the ship or vessel plan, and the cruciform plan. The ship style, rectangular in form, echoes the thought that the church should serve as a vessel to heaven. An exception to the more common ship or cruciform plan includes the octagonal St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Juneau, Alaska, constructed in 1893. A circular plan has also been utilized, but due to the challenges it creates in interior arrangements, neither the octagonal or circular plan is common.

The layouts of the churches also vary, though a typical Russian Orthodox church includes a narthex, nave and sanctuary. Many churches also have small porches extending from the entrance of the church. The narthex is a smaller room serving as the entrance from the exterior

¹ Senkevitch, Anatole. “Early Architecture and Settlements of Russian America.” In *Russia’s American Colony*, edited by S. Frederick Starr. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987. 153-154.

² A Monk of St. Tikhon’s Monastery. *These Truths We Hold – The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings*. (Waymart, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1986).

³ Ibid.

to the nave. The interior walls of the nave are frequently decorated with elaborate frescoes, paintings and icons. Separating the nave from the sanctuary is the iconostasis, which consists of the holy doors in the center and a deacon door on each side. The sanctuary houses the altar and is limited to use by the clergy. Parish members remain standing in the nave, as pews are not used in Orthodox churches. Chairs or benches may be present on the perimeter of the floor. Generally, however, Orthodox tradition states that it is disrespectful to stand during mass.⁴

The iconostasis, also known as an icon screen, is commonly considered one of the most decorative and important aspects of Russian Orthodox architecture. The iconostasis includes icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Saints. Larger churches include images of important or relevant saints on the peripheral panels. As a monk at St. Tikhon's Seminary explained, "...The Iconostasis both divides the Divine world from the human world, but also unites these same two worlds into one whole, a place where all separation is overcome and where reconciliation between God and man is achieved."⁵

The most distinguishing feature of a Russian Orthodox church is the three-barred cross. Each church has at least one located at the highest point of the structure. The three-barred cross is a lasting tradition of Byzantine Orthodoxy. According to a 1986 report from St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, each bar represents a different aspect of the crucifixion: "The upper arm represents the inscription over Christ's head, and the lower slanting arm represents His footrest. Many of these crosses are also found with the lower arm straight, rather than slanted."⁶ The use of the slanted bar has two potential explanations. One suggests that its slanted position signifies the two thieves on either side of Jesus Christ during the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

crucifixion. The upward slant represents the path of the thief who repented, while the downward slant represents that of the thief who condemned Jesus Christ. In the cases of Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik, all Orthodox crosses are three-barred with slanted bottom bars.

An additional, but not required, element of Russian Orthodox architecture is the onion dome. The utility or reasoning for the onion dome has been debated over time. Some historians have considered them useful for shedding heavy snow off of rooftops, an explanation which applies to both the native Russian and Alaskan examples. Comparatively, Russian philosopher Evgeny Trubetskoi argued that the cupolas upon which the onion domes sit serve as candles, with the domes symbolizing flames pointing to the heavens.⁷ While some churches have multiple onion domes, some have none. For instance, Old St. Nicholas Church in Eklutna does not have any onion domes, whereas its replacement located just feet away has two. The number of cupolas. One cupola represents Christ, three represent the Holy Trinity, and five cupolas represent Jesus Christ and the four evangelists.⁸ In Russia, it is common for churches to include many more than five cupolas, but in the Cook Inlet region, few have more than three.

Each of the Cook Inlet churches carries elements of Russian Orthodox architecture. Their similarities exist in spite of the environmental challenges prevalent at the time of their construction. The prevalence of Russian missionaries and settlers in the area also influenced the degree of Russian influence in church construction. The architectural descriptions provided in this chapter further aid in identifying what features illustrate Russian or native influences.

⁷ Trubetskoi, Evgeny. *A World View in Painting*. (New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973). 25.

⁸ *These Truths We Hold – The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings*.

Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Eklutna

The native village of Eklutna is approximately 30 miles north of Anchorage and a mile south of the banks of Knik Arm. The village is split in half by the Glenn Highway connecting Anchorage to Fairbanks by way of the Richardson Highway. Until the 1960s, the road dissecting Eklutna was rarely used. As Anchorage grew in size, however, the Glenn Highway expanded. Due to the small size of the community, each member lives close to the village center, making Eklutna Historical Park a central location.

The three-acre Eklutna Historical Park includes two Russian Orthodox churches and a large cemetery. Old St. Nicholas Church was constructed circa 1897. Its replacement, New St. Nicholas, was constructed between 1954 and 1962 by Eklutna Chief Mike Alex and his sons. The altars of both churches face east, following Russian Orthodox architectural form. New St. Nicholas is a frame structure and seems to replicate the Old St. Nicholas, but with more typical Russian Orthodox architectural features. The narthex is closed and the steeple is topped with both an onion dome and a Russian Orthodox three-barred cross. The sanctuary, facing the street, is five-sided. The hipped roof above the nave and sanctuary includes a centrally-located cupola with a larger onion dome and an additional cross. Old St. Nicholas, by comparison, is a far simpler structure.

Old St. Nicholas Church sits approximately 40 feet from the road. From the exterior, the church appears to be one large room, as its hipped, low-pitched, shingle roof extends approximately 26 feet from the rear of the sanctuary east to the entrance. All exterior walls are constructed of horizontally placed, square-hewn logs, each approximately ten inches wide. The logs are notched at the two west corners so that they interlock, and each log extends approximately six inches past the corner joints. The east corners are vertical, square-hewn

beams which run flush with the logs on the east elevation. The logs on the north and south elevations are each approximately 13 feet in length, and each log is notched in an 'l'-shape to interlock with the adjacent member.

The only entrance, a plank door, is on the west elevation. On the door is painted a yellow, three-barred Russian Orthodox cross. There are two six-over-six, double-hung sash windows on the south elevation and one six-paned, fixed window on the north elevation. Judging from early 20th century photographs, the door and windows are original to the structure. The east elevation does not have any openings, but a solid, six-inch log extends from the second log from the ground to the apex of the roof. This single beam seems to serve as structural support.

The porch extends from the entrance and is constructed on a platform approximately seven inches tall. The roof of the porch sits approximately eight feet from the top of the platform where it attaches to the west façade. The roof of the porch is elevated where it attaches to the west façade. The porch walls are constructed of horizontal running halved-logs creating an illusion of a flat surface on the interior of the porch, but a rounded surface on the exterior. The porch has been altered several times. Above the porch is a makeshift, 12-foot steeple constructed of four logs, topped with a pyramidal roof and a three-barred cross. Earlier images indicate that a bell was once present within the steeple, but it has since been removed.

The interior of the church is relatively minimal in decoration excluding the iconostasis. Several of the icons were supposedly brought to the church from the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The church follows the same interior arrangement of a typical Russian Orthodox church, excluding the narthex. The hewn logs are exposed throughout the interior. Today, with the New

St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church being used for mass, few artifacts remain within the old church.

Photographs of the church prior to rehabilitation in the 1970s indicate that the structure has undergone numerous alterations. In one 1923 image, the roof is layered with successive planked beams of various lengths. The porch does not exist. In this photo, the church is clearly dilapidated. The exterior walls are anchored by wooden posts. The gable of the west façade is faced with vertical planks, also of different lengths. A thin, white picket fence is wrapped around the church and the landscape surrounding the building is overgrown. An additional image, dated 1940, shows that the roof was replaced with asphalt sheeting. The fence and overgrown landscape have been removed, and the porch exists similar to the way it looks today. The three-barred cross in the center of the roof is non-existent in the 1923 image, shown in Figure 3.1, but is shown on the apex of the roof at the east elevation in 1955. Other than these relatively minor changes, the church's construction seems in keeping with a description given by Father Ioann Bortnovsky soon after it was built in 1897:

The new chapel represents a solid large building with walls made of logs. Wooden boards for the ceiling, floor, and roof were made by the Kenaitze themselves. There was no need to buy anything except nails and a couple of windows. The size of the chapel is 30 feet in length, 20 feet in breadth and 8.5 feet in height. The Natives postponed the final decorating of the chapel until the summer, when the building material will have dried a little. Besides, next winter they plan to build a front porch with a modest bell tower and to cover the outside of all walls with boards. If entirely completed, the present Knik chapel might function as a genuine church.⁹

There is no documentation, written or photographic, that the exterior clapboard siding was applied. If Bortnovsky's reference to Old St. Nicholas potentially functioning as a genuine

⁹ Bortnovsky, Ioann. "Report of Priest Ioann Bortnovsky: An Orthodox Missionary Spends a Winter in a Kenaitze village." Translated by Andrei Znamenski. *Alaska History* 13 (1998).



Figure 3.1: The west and north facades of Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox church in Eklutna. A storage shed and the new St. Nicholas Church are visible in the background.

Source: Author, September 3, 2015.



Figure 3.2: Spirit houses at Eklutna Historical Park.

Source: Author, September 3, 2015.



Figure 3.3: South and west facades of Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, c. 1923.

Source: Alaska Railroad. *Old Russian Church, Eklutna*. 1923. The Alaska Railroad Tour Lantern Slide Collection, 1923, Alaska Digital Archives.



Figure 3.4: East and south facades of Old St. Nicholas Church.

Source: Author, September 3, 2015.

church is a reference to its simplicity in comparison to contemporary Orthodox structures on the Kenai Peninsula, the differences in church architecture are still visible.

Several other structures are located within Eklutna Historical Park. The New St. Nicholas Church is located only 50 feet south of the church it was meant to replace. Between the two churches is a small shed, likely added in the 1950s or 1960s during construction of the new church. Facing the street behind the churches are dozens of spirit houses haphazardly lined in seven rows, which mark the graves of parish members. At the time of this research, the most recent spirit house was just a few years old. There are two small outbuildings which seem to service as monuments to holy figures. The first, located just north of the old church and facing the spirit houses, is a small, three-walled, hipped-roof structure. The interior houses an image of Saint Varnava the New Confessor.¹⁰ The second of these outbuildings, located near the new church, is similarly proportioned but holds an image of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. These structures are relatively recent, seemingly built within the last 15 years.

Of the three Cook Inlet churches discussed within this thesis, Old St. Nicholas is the simplest structure. As a result, it is difficult to determine what aspects of the church were constructed due to limited resources or a lack of understanding of Orthodox building practices. The lack of exterior ornamentation, such as onion domes and multiple building materials, is more representative of native Dena'ina (rather than Russian) building traditions. It is also indicative of Eklutna's remoteness at the time of construction. Barring the construction of the Alaska Railroad not far behind the church's property, the park and surrounding village is densely wooded. As indicated by a 1900 map of Alaska (Figure 2.1 and 2.2), the largest towns near

¹⁰ Saint Varnava, a Serbian hierodeacon and later Bishop of Hvosno, was canonized in 2005. He is celebrated for his commitment to the Orthodox Church during World War II despite being accused of and imprisoned for espionage by the communist secret service. He is said to have been poisoned.



Figure 3.5: North and west facades of New St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox church.

Source: Author, September 3, 2015.

Eklutna were Sunrise City and Hope City, 100 miles south, and Fort Kenai, 185 miles south. It is therefore likely that the church was constructed with little, if any, participation from the Russians remaining in the area, with only American influence significantly altering the surrounding environment in the 20th century.

Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Kenai

Holy Assumption Orthodox Church is located in a part of the City of Kenai known as Old Town, which encompasses the southern shore of the northern bank of the Kenai River. Within this area are several historic structures dating to the Russian era, but also relating to American military occupation and the expansion of the fishing industry. The structures related to the church include the rectory immediately adjacent to the church on the opposite side of Mission Avenue, St. Nicholas Chapel opposite the church on Petersen Way, and the Russian Orthodox cemetery on an unnamed road extending northeast off of Mission Avenue. These historic resources are all located within the Russian Mission Reserve. The church itself is located 1,000 feet from the shores of the Kenai Beach. The bluff, however, starts only 300 feet southwest and runs parallel to Alaska Avenue. Visible on the opposite side of Cook Inlet is the Alaska Mountain Range. This picturesque scene is helpful in determining why the church and the Russian fortification was constructed here. Beyond serving as a defensive strategy, the church's prominent role in the skyline and commanding view of the surrounding landscape demonstrate an almost tangible sense of authority.

The odd shape and large size of the Russian Mission Reserve seems to be a result of U.S. Surveying and homesteading in the early 20th century. The reserve is 13.47 acres and is shaped so that each structure is connected to the others with thin passages of land. The plat of the

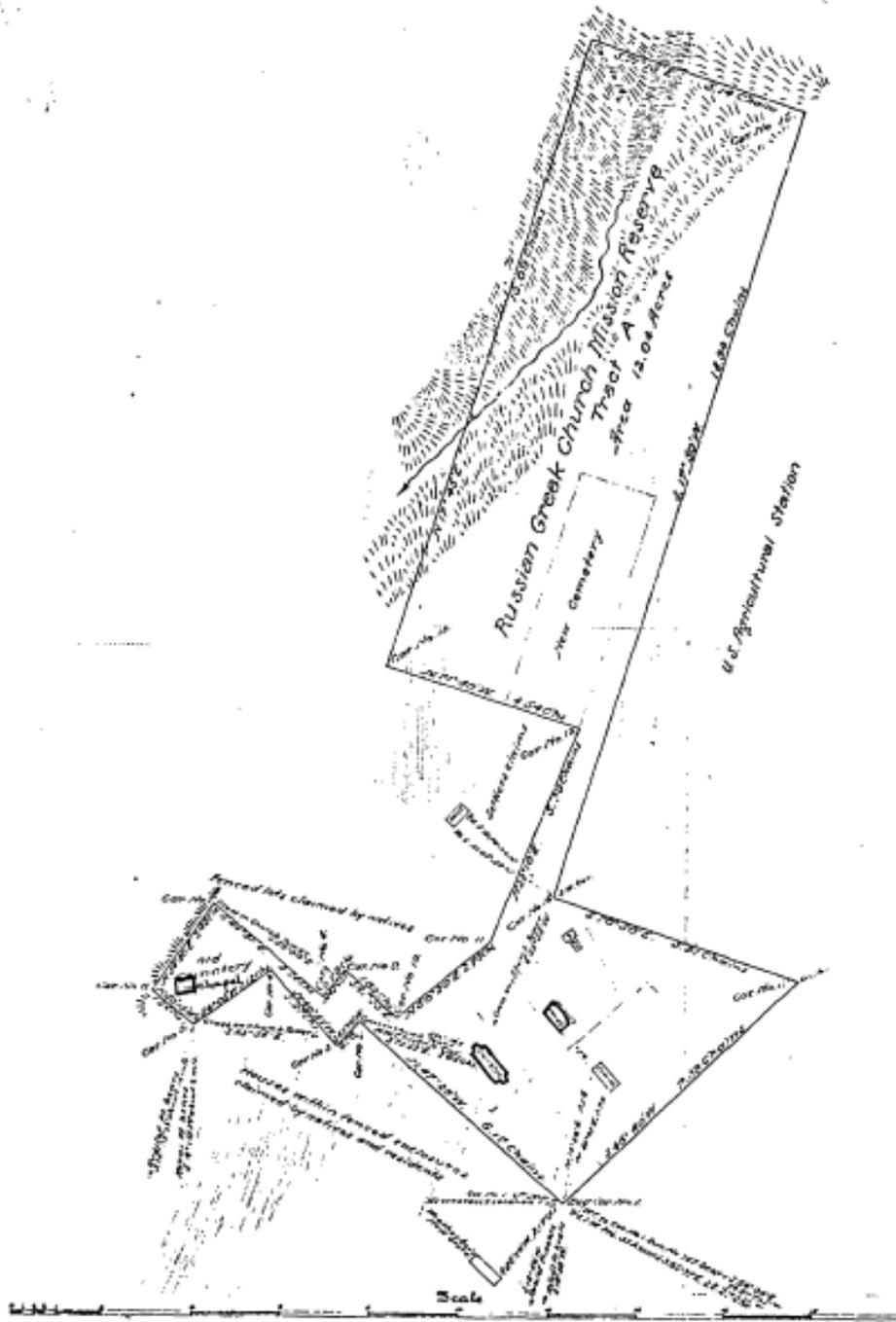


Figure 3.6: Plat of Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church in Kenai's landholdings in 1900, showing the church in the bottom center, extending north to the cemetery and west to the chapel.

Source: Lascy, Albert. "Plat of U.S. Survey of No. 192 of the Russian Greek Church Mission Reserves under Act of June 6, 1900 situated at Kenai, District of Alaska." U.S. Surveyor General's Office. November 26, 1906.

Russian Mission Reserve completed by the United States Deputy Surveyor in 1906 includes notes delineating settlers' claims on the outskirts of the property line.¹¹ The structures that stand outside of the Russian Mission Reserve were largely constructed after 1900, after American occupation.¹²

Holy Assumption was constructed of logs in the Pskov or vessel style between 1895 and 1896. It is the third church built in its vicinity, as the original constructed in 1841 was replaced only eight years later. As seen in typical Russian Orthodox church construction, the entrance is located on the west elevation with the altar facing east. In addition to its orientation, Holy Assumption features three octagonal cupolas each topped with a large onion dome and prominent three-barred Orthodox cross. Its layout follows the typical narthex, nave and sanctuary style. The wood-shingle roof has been painted light blue, and the exterior logs have been covered with wood clapboard. The onion domes are painted white, yellow and blue, and are decorated with stars and geometric motifs. Trim on the eaves, windows and corners is painted brown.

The church is entered by a set of double doors under an open, hipped-roof porch. These doors enter into the two-story narthex, which is topped with a pyramidal roof and an octagonal cupola. Within each side of the cupola is a louvre. The octagonal nature of the cupola continues and terminates with a thin onion dome. The north and south elevations of the narthex each include two double-hung sash windows, with one located on each floor.

Holy Assumption's largest room is the nave. Its pyramidal roof also terminates in an octagonal cupola and a shorter, wider onion dome. Holy Assumption's sanctuary is split

¹¹ Lasey, Albert. "Plat of U.S. Survey of No. 192 of the Russian Greek Church Mission Reserves under Act of June 6, 1900 situated at Kenai, District of Alaska." U.S. Surveyor General's Office. November 26, 1906.

¹² The City of Kenai. "Old Town." <<http://www.ci.kenai.ak.us/visiting/oldtown>>. Accessed September 5, 2015.



Figure 3.7: Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church c. 1900, prior to bell tower addition.

Source: Michael Z. Vinokoureff. *Exterior of Kenai Russian Orthodox Church*. Michael Z. Vinokoureff Photograph Collection ca. 1880-1970, Alaska Digital Archives.



Figure 3.8: Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church, Kenai

Source: Author, September 4, 2015.

between a hipped roof and a semi-hexagonal apse, similar to that seen at Old St. Nicholas. There are four windows on the north and south elevations of the nave. Two paired double-hung sash windows are centrally located, and flanked by two additional double-hung sash on either side. All windows appear to be original to the building.

When the current structure is compared to Old St. Nicholas Church in Eklutna, Holy Assumption is larger, more ornate, and serves as a better example of typical Russian Orthodox architecture. However, older images of the church dating to the late 19th century show that Holy Assumption was originally a much smaller and simpler structure. A description of the church prior to its present additions was translated from the *Russian Orthodox American Messenger* in the National Register of Historic Places nomination form drafted in 1972:

The new Kenai temple is constructed in the shape of a ship, of logs... with a capacity of 80 persons, with an ikonostas. On the ikonostas and on the Royal Doors are new ikons, acquired in part through donations of \$100 from the local Brotherhood. The walls of the temple are wall-papered and the ceiling is painted with oil[-based] paint. The porch [narthex] is divided into two small rooms: one designated as a vestry, the other as an archives and for church supplies. The [exterior] walls are not yet sided; the roof is shingled and painted with oil[-based] paint. There is no bell tower, but the bells (3) hang from a beam under a portico [naves] built over the entrance door to the narthex.¹³

Despite the simple original arrangement being much simpler, a 1910 image of the church is strikingly similar to the current exterior. The 1910 photograph also shows that the narthex and bell tower were added around the turn of the 20th century.

Separate from the church itself is St. Nicholas Chapel across the street, constructed in 1906 in memory of Holy Assumption's first priest, Igumen Nicolai, and his assistant, Makary Ivanov.¹⁴ The chapel is a simple, cross-gabled, axe-hewn log structure with dovetailed ends

¹³ "Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Church." National Register of Historic Places nomination form. June 16, 1972. 3.

¹⁴ Eklutna Historical Park. <<http://www.eklutnahistoricalpark.org/>>. Accessed September 1, 2015.



Figure 3.9: East and north facades of Holy Assumption, Kenai.

Source: Author, September 4, 2015.



Figure 3.10: Holy Assumption bell tower and onion dome.

Source: Author, September 4, 2015.



Figure 3.11: St. Nicholas Chapel, across the street from Holy Assumption, 1953.

Source: Maynard C. Dahlstrom. *Kenai – Labor Day, September 5-7, 1953*. Maynard C. Dahlstrom Photographs 1945-1994, Alaska Digital Archives.



Figure 3.12: St. Nicholas Chapel.

Source: Author, September 4, 2015.

where the logs intersect. The wooden shingle roof seems to have been replaced recently. The gables, window trim and cupola have been painted to match the color scheme of Holy Assumption across the street. The log construction is entirely visible within the chapel extending from floor to ceiling.

An additional structure, the rectory, is located just north of Holy Assumption. It was likely the tallest building in the area at the time of its construction in 1888, signifying its importance within the community. There are few exterior alterations, including an exterior staircase providing access to the second story. The rectory continues to serve as the priest's residence. Holy Assumption's cemetery is located just northeast of the rectory on an unnamed dirt road off of Mission Avenue. At 12 acres, it is the largest parcel within the Russian Mission Reserve.¹⁵ Several dozen Russian Orthodox crosses mark the graves of over a century of Holy Assumption parish members.

With the large size of the Russian Mission Reserve, landscape features and changes in nearby but unrelated buildings become equally important. Tall trees surrounding the church, likely planted shortly after its construction, were recently removed as evidenced by the stumps remaining in their place. A short, white picket fence is seen surrounding the perimeter of Holy Assumption Church in pictures dating to the early 20th century. Today, a similar replacement fence stands in only some areas, but a short fence surrounds the perimeter of the reserve, separating the structures related to the mission's history from similar but unrelated properties. This fence is necessary in distinguishing the Orthodox-related structures from the newer ones, which have significantly altered the historic integrity of the Russian Mission Reserve. The

¹⁵ Lascy.



Figure 3.13: Reconstruction of American Fort Kenay

Source: Author, September 4, 2015.



Figure 3.14: The front (west) façade of the rectory.

Source: Author, September 4, 2015.

bizarre property lines make this distinction somewhat confusing. It is clear that the views of Cook Inlet from the church and its related structures were uninterrupted as recently as 1959. Today, however, newer buildings surround Holy Assumption Church, the rectory, St. Nicholas Chapel and the cemetery, completely marring the historic atmosphere.

Transfiguration of Our Lord, Ninilchik

Transfiguration of Our Lord Church is located on the northern bluff looking above the village of Ninilchik. An inconspicuous gravel road leads from the Sterling Highway to the base of the church cemetery. There is a steep decline from the top of the bluff descending to Ninilchik River. The church looks out over the Cook Inlet and faces Mount Redoubt, which translates from the Russian *Sopka Redutskaya* and the Dena'ina Athabascan, *Bentuggezh K'enulgheli*, each meaning “a fortified place” (though whether the native or Russian transliteration was first has not been determined). Mount Redoubt is an active volcano on the western coast of Cook Inlet. It is the highest peak in the Aleutian Range, which extends along the Alaska Peninsula.

Transfiguration of Our Lord Church is particularly notable for its cruciform plan, which separates it not only from the other Cook Inlet churches but also from others across Alaska. Contemporary Russian Orthodox churches in the state are almost exclusively in the Pskov plan.¹⁶ Despite the plan, the arrangement of rooms is identical to that seen in Kenai and others, as it includes a porch, narthex, nave and sanctuary in the typical order. In Ninilchik, however, the cruciform layout is created by extending the nave on the north and south elevations.

¹⁶ *Buildings of Alaska*, 123.

The church's location within Ninilchik also makes it a unique structure. While the town itself is located on the banks of the Ninilchik River, the church is on the northern bluff overlooking the river and Cook Inlet. This is in contrast to Eklutna and Kenai, where the churches are centrally located within the town center. Journal entries dating to 1899 written by Orthodox missionary Ioann Bortnovsky indicate that the original church, constructed in 1846, was constructed on the banks of the river:

Incidentally, a chapel in Ninilchik also has a sufficient amount of ecclesiastical items, and by its interior design even surpasses the Alexandrovsk chapel, but the building itself is significantly deteriorated, and it is cold there in winter. Besides, the Ninilchik chapel is situated at an inconvenient site: in spring a nearby river often floods the banks, and its roaring currents threaten the chapel. Fortunately, the inhabitants of this village plan to build a new chapel designed in a convenient place. They have already prepared all building materials for this project and have also collected about \$70 in cash. The work is expected to begin this fall.¹⁷

The new church, constructed on higher land away from the banks of the Ninilchik River, was completed in 1901. Whether the interior features of the first church remain in the current structure, including the iconostasis, is unknown.

The dimensions of Transfiguration of Our Lord are approximately 50 feet from the porch to the rear of the sanctuary, and 20 feet from each side of the nave. The narthex is accessed by a small, hipped-roof porch and a small staircase. The clapboard siding on the north elevation of the narthex is oriented in a diagonal manner around the door. There are two windows, a double-hung sash vinyl window on the first story and a four-light fixed window on the second story, located on the south façade of the narthex. Similar to Holy Assumption in Kenai, the narthex is two stories and topped with a cupola. This cupola is four-sided with two eight-light windows on each façade and a pyramidal roof. Each of them are fixed but one on the south façade. Above the cupola is a short, gold-painted onion dome topped with a three-barred Orthodox cross. An

¹⁷ Bortnovsky, 1-22.

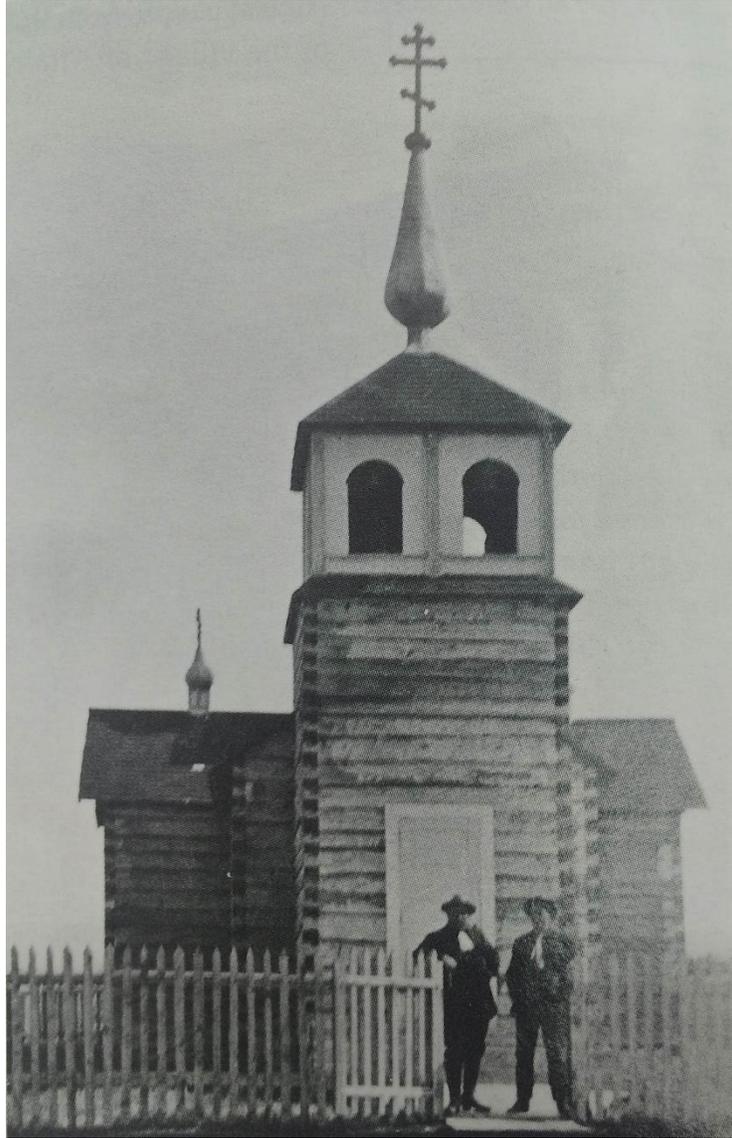


Figure 3.15: The front façade of Holy Transfiguration circa 1915.

Source: L. H. Allen. *Alaska's Kenai Peninsula: The Road We've Travelled* (Hope, AK: Kenai Peninsula Historical Association, 2002), 154.



Figure 3.16: West and south facades of Holy Transfiguration.

Source: Author, September 5, 2015.



Figure 3.17: Russian Orthodox cemetery and north façade of Holy Transfiguration from gravel road entrance.

Source: Author, September 5, 2015.



Figure 3.18: View of Ninilchik and Holy Transfiguration from the main thoroughfare.

Source: Author, September 5, 2015.



Figure 3.19: View of Ninilchik from the top of the bluff where Holy Transfiguration is located.

Source: Author, September 5, 2015.

additional octagonal cupola is located in the center of the nave with four fixed, four-light windows, and also terminates in a gold-painted onion dome and three-barred cross.

Excluding the narthex, the fenestration on the first floor of the church is identical on both the north and south elevations. Double-hung windows are located in the nave, the transept, and the sanctuary. The south façade of the sanctuary is free of any windows, similar to the churches in Eklutna and Kenai. The southern gable of the hipped-roof above the sanctuary is marked with an additional onion dome and Orthodox cross. Additional onion domes are located on either side of the transept. In total, the roofline of the church is marked by five onion domes and five Orthodox crosses. The tallest, most prominent of these is that located above the narthex.

Photo documentation indicates that few changes have been made to the church's exterior. An image taken soon after construction shows that Transfiguration of Our Lord was constructed using axe-hewn logs dovetailed at the ends, similar to the construction methods seen in Kenai and in the town of Ninilchik at the mouth of the river below.¹⁸ Clapboard siding was recently applied to the exterior in an effort to protect the original log construction underneath. The porch extending from the narthex was added later as well. Other visible changes include the installation of vinyl windows in the belfry, the application of a metal corrugated roof and replacement onion domes. All the first floor windows and those within the central octagonal cupola were replaced with vinyl windows in 2015.¹⁹

As opposed to Holy Assumption in Kenai, the surrounding landscape seems to have changed very little. The cemetery is located immediately adjacent to the east elevation and is surrounded by a short white picket fence. Within the fence are dozens of graves marked with

¹⁸ Allen, 154.

¹⁹ Reverend Victor Nick, Chancellor of the Diocese of Alaska. "Kenai/Prince William Sound." October 6, 2015. <<http://www.doaoca.org/files/pdf/KenaiPrinceDR2015.pdf>>.

three-barred Orthodox crosses and small fences, also called cribs. Few structures are visible from the church, excluding small outbuildings such as sheds and other, more modern structures in the distance. The old school, approximately 400 feet north of the church, has been significantly altered with the addition of dormers and incongruent windows as well as replacement siding and roofing. The town of Ninilchik, which is easily visible just a few feet from the church's porch, has changed little over the years. Several log structures dot the landscape, though many are empty or significantly altered. Photographs compared by the Kenai Historical Society between the 1950s and the present substantiate the claim that there has been little change in the town's configuration.

Conclusion

Russian *promyshlenniki* and Orthodox missionaries clearly looked to Russia as a source of inspiration while constructing settlements throughout Alaska. These Russian architectural characteristics are also visible in their ecclesiastical structures. Ultimately and inevitably, the structures would be influenced by native elements as well, creating unique and occasionally one-of-a-kind adaptations. In the Cook Inlet region, Dena'ina influences are particularly clear in Eklutna both in the simplified construction methods and appearance of the church and the spirit houses dotting the landscape. The role of Dena'ina culture is less obvious in Kenai and Ninilchik, however, where Russian missionaries played larger roles within a community comprised mostly of Russian settlers.

The differences in architecture further demonstrate the balance of Russian and Dena'ina Athabascan culture at the turn of the 19th century. In the native village of Eklutna, the typical Russian Orthodox features such as onion domes and typical building plan are missing. This is

indicative of either a lack in building materials and abilities, or an inherently Dena'ina approach to construction. It is also undoubtedly a result of the lack of Russian missionary activity and influence in the area. By comparison, the churches in the towns with greater Russian influence, Kenai and Ninilchik, exhibit many typical Russian Orthodox features. With decades of Dena'ina habitation in Kenai and Ninilchik, however, some native influence persists and is demonstrated in the changes which have taken place after the churches' construction through the present day.

To aid in understanding the role of native influence at the present time, research concerning the recent history and current status of each congregation is imperative. As was discussed in Chapter Two, Russian missionaries encouraged the construction of Orthodox chapels by the natives, but also fervently pushed the Dena'ina to cultivate a sense of responsibility and ownership for the churches in years to follow. Recent census data, however, indicates that the populations within Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik are as diverse as ever. Chapter Four will utilize congregation-specific information, compared with general information and history on Orthodoxy in recent decades, to determine whether the care of these churches has continued from internal or external sources.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROLE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE COOK INLET CONGREGATIONS

A history of the Orthodox diocese, beginning with the sale of Alaska in 1867 and extending to the present day, is provided here in order to identify trends in growth and decline. The church's efforts to educate the public are closely tied with its establishment and expansion in the early 20th century. These educational efforts were a direct response to American settlement, including the introduction of Presbyterian and Moravian missionaries. Tensions within the church at the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917 forced the creation of an independent American diocese to answer to and aid their congregations. The Orthodox Church in America has changed significantly in the years since it was granted autocephaly in 1970. The first part of this chapter is an effort to identify major themes and changes both before and after autocephaly.

The second part of this chapter presents general information relating to each congregation and the communities. This is done in an attempt to distinguish additional, more specific themes and practices. Providing information on the role of the congregation and its leadership in relation to the deanery, the diocese and the community serves to create an all-encompassing analysis of the church's role at the local level. Ultimately, this information will aid in addressing the role of each parish in the preservation of the three churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik.

History of the Orthodox Diocese in Alaska, 1867 to the present

The sale of Alaska to the United States caused considerable change in the lives of Russian settlers and Orthodox missionaries. The 1867 census lists 576 Russian men and 206 Russian women living between 43 separate communities in Alaska, with nine Orthodox churches

and 35 chapels.¹ Undoubtedly, however, the native Alaskan population experienced the most significant changes. Their century-long experiences with Russian settlers had created a sense of understanding between the two cultures. This made the introduction of the European-Americans with missionaries from new religions that much more difficult.

Before 1867, there was only one non-Orthodox church in Alaska, which was the Finnish Lutheran Church constructed in Sitka in 1843. Most of the parish hailed from Finland and were employed by the Russian American Company. The Lutheran Church had been protected by the Russian government since the eighteenth century.² With only one parish in the entire colony, protected and comprised of largely foreign nationals, the Lutheran parish hardly served as a competitor to the Russian Orthodox Church. It was not until the Gold Rush, sparked by Americans in the late 19th century, that Orthodoxy in Alaska faced a decline in numbers.³ Ivan Petroff's 1890 census identifies a total of 481 Presbyterian "communicants" compared with 10,335 identifying as Russian Orthodox. To further demonstrate the threat of outside sources, 1,260 (or 94%) of the Presbyterians identified in the census were Native Alaskan or Creole. By comparison, all but 30 (or 99%) of those identifying as Russian Orthodox in 1890 were Native Alaskan or Creole. Considering the first Protestant houses of worship were erected not long after 1867, the number of Presbyterians is surprisingly high and certainly competes with Russian Orthodox statistics.⁴

Protestant and Catholic settlers coming from America threatened the Russian Orthodox Church in multiple ways. With the thought of competition in sight, the *Russian Orthodox*

¹ Hardwick, Susan Wiley. *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. 71.

² Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Sitka Lutheran Church." <<http://www.sitka.org/listings/>>. Accessed April 2016.

³ Krivonosov, Alexander. "Where East Meets West: A Landscape of Familiar Strangers – Missionary Alaska, 1794-1898" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2008), 82-83.

⁴ Petroff, Ivan. "Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska." 185-186.

American Messenger proclaimed: “[The Alaska natives] have not become wealthier under American rule – that is a fact. Quite the contrary: the population is frightfully impoverished ... now living poor destitute wretches, hopelessly in debt to those commercial Companies to whose tender money-making mercies the American Government has delivered up to Alaska.”⁵ In this way, Russian Orthodoxy stepped forward in an effort to serve as the natives’ protectorate. This is seen within the language used by clergy to their native parishioners. In a 1901 letter from a Russian priest to Tlingit congregation members, the clergyman referred to himself as their father, reminding them “I will... give you a fatherly punishment in order to save you from the punishment on the Judgment Day.”⁶

In many ways, the Orthodox Church’s defensive strategy was warranted. The American government and Protestant missionaries made no efforts to learn or respect Russian Orthodox traditions, and provided services in English rather than Russian. The actions of the competing non-Orthodox missionaries also added to the tensions in newly American Alaska. An account in the *Russian Orthodox American Messenger* tells the story of a Protestant missionary in the Pribilof Islands who stole from the local parish’s donations to the Alaskan Diocese to compensate for debts that natives had accrued to the American commercial company. The U.S. Treasury repaid the debts to the Alaskan Diocese after a three year debate with the Russian government.⁷ Churches of multiple Catholic denominations were constructed at this time despite Orthodox opposition. Here, again, is where the role of Russian Orthodox missionaries becomes important.

⁵ Krivonosov, 84.

⁶ Geraci, Robert P, and Michael Khodarkovsky. *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 195-196.

⁷ Krivonosov. 84-85.

Ioann Bortnovsky, whose journal entries have been cited in previous chapters, is arguably the most important missionary in the history of Orthodox missionary work in the Cook Inlet region. Bortnovsky was born in modern Belarus in 1869. After failing out of the Holm Theological Seminary in modern Belarus, he requested to be placed in the Alaska mission in 1888. He worked for several years in both Kodiak and Sitka. In 1896, Bortnovsky was transferred to the Kenai parish, where he continued to serve until his return to Russia in 1907. Many of his journals and church service logs (items which were required by the Orthodox Church to be updated on a daily basis) were translated in the 20th century. His accounts include visits to the churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik (among other settlements) and proselytization efforts of the Dena'ina and Ahtna.⁸ It was during Bortnovsky's time, largely between 1890 and 1917, that the number of Russian Orthodox churches in the United States increased from ten to 350.⁹

Bortnovsky's placement in Alaska aligns with the continued expansion of the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States into the early 20th century. A seminary was constructed in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1905. The Minneapolis seminary was the first constructed in the United States since that in Sitka, constructed by the Russians in 1840. In order to be closer to the diocesan administration in New York City, the Minneapolis seminary moved to Tenafly, New Jersey in 1912. These efforts to expand education continued after the end of Russian control of Alaska. In 1870, there were 17 Russian parish schools and four orphanages within Alaska. The

⁸ Znamenski, "Native Culture Through Orthodox Eyes: Russian Missionary Ioann Bortnovsky on the Dena'ina and Ahtna, 1869-1907," 3.

⁹ Stokoe, Mark and Leonid Kishkovsky. 21.

same year, the mission moved from Sitka, Alaska to San Francisco, California. Less than two decades later, the number of parish schools expanded to 43.¹⁰

Increase in Russian Orthodox educational institutions correlates directly with an increase in Orthodox publications. The first of these, the *Slavonian* produced in San Francisco, was published in 1871. Its successor, the *Oriental Church Magazine*, was published from 1878 to 1883 and printed in New York City. The last of these publications, the *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, began in 1895 and was printed semi-weekly in Russian and English until the 1970s. The *Messenger* was by far the most prolific of the three.¹¹ In many ways, it was this publication that allowed for the continued communication of Russian clergymen and parish members during the Bolshevik Revolution and the early years of the Soviet Union.

Much of the overall expansion of the Orthodox diocese in America in the late 19th and early 20th century can be credited to financial contributions from the Imperial Russian government. In 1916, the government allotted \$500,000 to the diocese. This expansion slowed after the Russian Revolution of 1917, and government support of the church's efforts in Alaska (and ultimately elsewhere) stopped entirely. Many Russian Orthodox priests remaining in Russia were executed for their allegiance to religion in the newly created and atheistic Soviet society. During this time, Orthodoxy in Alaska and across the United States stalled. Between 1906 and 1936, over 1,500 Russian Orthodox churches ceased operations in Alaska.¹² In 1924, as a result of the lack of communication between Russian officials and American clergymen brought on by the Russian Revolution, the Orthodox Church became a self-governing entity in the United States. It wasn't until 1970, however, that Orthodox clergymen in America initiated a

¹⁰ Orthodox Church in America. "Chapter 3: Institutions of the Immigrant Church." <<https://oca.org/history-archives/orthodox-christians-na/chapter-3>>. Accessed March 15, 2016.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stokoe, Mark and Leonid Kishkovsky. 27-30.

discussion Russian church leaders. The diocese was granted autocephaly and became the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) that year.¹³

Several organizations aid in the myriad philanthropic, educational and social missions of the OCA and other Orthodox groups. These include the Orthodox Christian Charities (OCC), Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) and the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC). Of these, the work of the OCC and OCMC are perhaps most visible in Alaska. The mission sends several teams of volunteers to Alaska annually.¹⁴ These efforts aid in and promote the relevance of the Russian Orthodox Church while supporting the structures individually. Additional organizations within the church address substance abuse, family planning and other community issues.

The Orthodox Population in Modern Alaska: Statistics and Trends

Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska are divided into ten regional deaneries. Old St. Nicholas in Eklutna is one of fourteen churches within the Anchorage Deanery. Both Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary and Transfiguration of Our Lord in Kenai and Ninilchik, respectively, are listed under the Kenai/Prince William Sound Deanery. Kenai and Ninilchik's churches are two of just ten within this deanery. As of 2016, there are a total of 88 Russian Orthodox parishes within the state of Alaska.¹⁵ Two churches have been added since 2010.¹⁶

The number of active Orthodox adherents in Alaska has waned considerably in recent years. Of

¹³ Smith, Barbara Sweetland. *Preliminary Survey of Documents in the Archives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska*. (Anchorage: University of Alaska, Anchorage, 1974). 133.

¹⁴ "Striking a Balance: The Importance of Mission Teams to Alaska." Orthodox Christian Mission Center. January 15, 2016. <www.ocmc.org>.

¹⁵ *Diocese of Alaska Parish Directory*.

¹⁶ Stokoe, Mark and Leonid Kishkovsky. *Orthodox Christians in North America 1794-1994* (Cleveland, OH: Orthodox Christians Publications Center, 1995), 144.

the 12,652 Alaskans who identified as Russian Orthodox in 2010, only 2,498 or 19.7% are active within their congregations.¹⁷

It is interesting to compare the number of Russian Orthodox adherents with Alaskan demographics and population trends. Few if any sources address the number of Native Alaskan Russian Orthodox followers. The 2010 census reports that over 16,665 natives in Alaska identify as Dena'ina Athabascan, while recent research by the Pew Research Center indicates that four percent of Alaska's population is Eastern Orthodox.¹⁸ It is also noteworthy that a majority of the priests serving Alaskan parishes are of Native Alaskan descent.¹⁹

In the last few decades, Orthodoxy in Alaska has expanded to accommodate multiple sects. In the late 1960s, a conservative Russian Orthodox sect known as the Old Believers settled in Nikolaevsk, not far from Homer, Alaska on the southwestern tip of the Kenai Peninsula. Their small, independent community relies on fishing to participate in the local economy. Their small church is topped with typical onion domes and three-barred crosses. Some members have left Nikolaevsk to create more isolated communities in remote areas of the Kenai Peninsula.²⁰ In addition to the Old Believers, a recent expansion of Russian Orthodoxy is visible in Anchorage as recently as 2004. St. Innocent Russian Orthodox Cathedral, located in Anchorage, was founded in 1967 and serves the Anchorage community as well as Orthodox visitors from remote areas of the state.²¹ Bishop Nikolai, who served as head of the OCA from 2000 to 2010, said in 2004, "At the sale of Alaska, everyone thought that Orthodoxy would

¹⁷ Stokoe, 144.

¹⁸ As of 2014, the United States Census Bureau estimates that Alaska's population is 736,732.

¹⁹ "Priest shares history of Alaska Natives during Russian Period." NBC. November 2, 2015.

²⁰ Jonassen, Wendi and Ryan Loughlin. "A 17th-Century Russian Community Living in 21st-Century Alaska." *The Atlantic*. May 1, 2013.

²¹ "St. Innocent Russian Orthodox Cathedral." <<http://www.sicanc.org/home/>>.

disappear because all the Russians left. Actually quite the contrary has happened – we are now the largest church in Alaska.”²²

Old St. Nicholas, Eklutna

The native village of Eklutna is small despite the increase in traffic and connectivity to Anchorage brought on by the construction of the highway and expansion of the Alaska Railroad. In 1974, Eklutna’s population was 126.²³ As of 2010, the population was 54, with approximately 44 identifying as Native Alaskan.²⁴ Projections of future population growth indicate little to no change. Within such a small community, both in terms of population and physical size, it is clear that Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church and the larger Eklutna Historical Park serves as an important physical and historical landmark. Eklutna Historical Park is situated largely on church property and includes a cemetery, two churches and several small outbuildings.

Today, Old St. Nicholas Church operates as a museum. Within its walls are artifacts and icons pertaining to the history of St. Nicholas and Orthodoxy. As mentioned previously, the construction of the new church was ordered by the Orthodox bishop in the 1960s. The congregation had outgrown the old church. Mass at Eklutna Historical Park is held in the New St. Nicholas Church approximately once a month and is led by Father Christopher Stanton. The grounds and museum are managed by Father Mikel Bock.

²² Dixon, Martha. “Religious legacy lives on in Alaska.” *BBC News*. September 12, 2004. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3531458.stm>>.

²³ Fall, James. “Traditional Resource Uses in the Knik Arm Area: Historical and Contemporary Patterns.” *Alaska Historic Resources Survey*, 1981. 7.

²⁴ Alaska Department of Labor and Workplace Development. “Alaska Population Overview: 2010 Census and Estimates.” October 2012. <<http://labor.alaska.gov/research/pop/estimates/pub/1011popover.pdf>>.

When analyzed against its history, it seems the dwindling size of the present congregation is no new problem. During a visit he made from his Kenai parish to the Eklutna chapel in

August 1935, Very Reverend Pavel Shadura noted the poor state of Old St. Nicholas:

From dinner until 5 o'clock in the evening we were busy cleaning the chapel, where church services have not been performed since 1912. The chapel has fallen into decay, and some items have rotted, while others are already gone because there was nobody to watch them. Yet now Kenaitze have started coming back to Eklutna and building permanent houses at the old site. Moreover, in 1933 they made some repairs on the chapel such as putting on a new roof and raising the ceiling, which earlier was very low. Still, the work on the chapel has not been finished. Therefore, we had to work hard to put this building in proper order and make it appropriate for performing church services.²⁵

The next day, he continued writing in his journal:

This locality is the most difficult in terms of missionary work. What can the missionary accomplish with when he comes here for only three or four days once a year? Thank God the natives still remember the Lord and baptize their children. Today only women and children came for the service, while the men returned to their [railroad] jobs. I cannot guarantee that I will come here again to perform ministrations, although one may find a sufficient number of people who belong to our church, but only if you collect them together at one spot.²⁶

It seems Shadura agreed with Yaroshevich, a missionary in the late 19th century who felt the location of the Old Knik church was inconvenient for both missionaries and the congregation.

The area had seen a continued decrease in population as Anchorage continued to expand. In addition to its remote location and waning congregation, the site was overrun by mosquitoes and sat in a dense forest. Shadura's efforts to move the church back to Knik failed despite native support. In several journal entries he notes the difficult nature of the congregation itself, which suffered from substance abuse among other issues. Despite this, he admits that the people devoted to the chapel did everything within their means to promote and maintain the site.²⁷

²⁵ Znamenski. "Through Orthodox Eyes." 275.

²⁶ Znamenski. "Through Orthodox Eyes." 276.

²⁷ Znamenski. "Through Orthodox Eyes." 55.

Even today, St. Nicholas' congregation numbers approximately a dozen, with next to none being residents of the native village of Eklutna. Its members travel from Wasilla, Palmer and Anchorage. Of these members, only about half are active participants. None of the native village residents are active members. This change in the congregation's demographics are echoed in the park's landscape. As fewer villagers identify as Russian Orthodox, the burial tradition of spirit house construction has waned. Graves of Eklutna natives who identify as Russian Orthodox are now marked with simple three-barred crosses and framed by logs wrapped in a thick blanket.

Discussions concerning land ownership have occurred between the native Dena'ina village, represented by private native corporations CIRI and Eklutna, Inc., and the Orthodox Church. A parcel in the rear of the property has recently been split in half to accommodate native burial plots, separating them from their Russian Orthodox counterparts. Whereas the spirit houses in the old section of the cemetery are arranged according to family, but with little to none advanced planning, the plots in the newer, rear cemetery are to be arranged orthogonally. These differences illustrate a larger schism between Eklutna's native population and the role of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Despite its small and scattered congregation, Eklutna Historical Park is well-maintained. It is clear that Fathers Christopher Stanton and Mikel Bock, who have distributed the duties related to the maintenance of the property and the congregation, are devoted to its success. Father Stanton travels extensively across southern Alaska and has insisted upon the importance of St. Nicholas in the region. Similarly, Father Bock's consistent maintenance, care and expansion of the museum located within Old St. Nicholas Church demonstrates an effort to promote Russian Orthodox history. In the future, it will be important to note the role of native

Dena'ina culture within both the museum and the park as a whole. Eklutna Historical Park will continue to serve as a case study of native and community relations with that of the congregation, the church and the diocese as a whole.

Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Kenai

The city of Kenai is a relatively metropolitan area on the Kenai Peninsula. Approximately 7,100 people lived in this three square mile area in 2010. By comparison, the Kenaitze Indian Tribe includes the locations of Cooper Landing, Funny River, Kalifornsky, Kenai, Nikiski, Point Possession, Ridgeway, Soldotna, Salamatof and Sterling, encompassing an area of over 800 square miles. The total population of this area was 33,350 in 2010. Of this population, 3,606 (or 10.5%) identify as Alaska Native. Census records indicate that the number of Tribe members has increased steadily since 1990.²⁸

Historically, the Russian Orthodox parish at Kenai has been led by a succession of longstanding priests and deacons. The first of these priests was Abbott Nicholas, the first permanent missionary serving the Dena'ina. Abbott Nicholas assembled the congregation in Kenai between 1844 and 1849 and remained there until he died in 1867. The parish remained in limbo without a leader for several years after the sale of Alaska that year. Nicholas was not replaced until 1881 by another missionary, Nikita Marchenkov. He was replaced by Nikolai Mitropolsky from 1888 to 1893, who was succeeded by Alexander Yaroshevich from 1893 until 1896. Ioann Bortnovsky replaced Yaroshevich as permanent missionary of the Kenai parish until 1907.²⁹ The Very Reverend Pavel Shadura replaced Bortnovsky in 1907 and served the

²⁸ Alaska Area Native Health Service. "2010 Census Counts: American Indians/Alaska Natives Alone or in Combination With One or More Other Races, Alaska." (Anchorage: Indian Health Service, 2011).

²⁹ Znamenski, 2.

longest of any missionary stationed in the Kenai parish. His dedication to Orthodoxy and missionary activity is documented in his journals and exemplified by his willingness to travel, without reimbursement, to various parishes to give sermons. Parish visits included stops in Tyonek, Eklutna, Anchorage, Seldovia and Ninilchik. He, his wife and children remained in Kenai until 1952.³⁰ Since his retirement, the church has been maintained by a number of priests.

The church's congregation numbers approximately 60 people, with a vast majority being active members. As seen in many Alaskan Orthodox parishes, the congregation travels from a wide radius around the city. Most members, however, are Kenai residents. A recent influx of Native Alaskans from the Alaskan interior increased the congregation's size by almost a dozen.³¹ Parish members participate in mass and also contribute to the church's maintenance by overseeing the operation of the gift shop next door, offering church tours, and other volunteer-based efforts. Mass is held every Sunday and led by Archpriest Thomas Andrew, who also serves as the Chancellor of the Diocese. According to a deanery report drafted in October 2015, Father Andrew participated in three baptisms, two funerals, one chrismation, and no marriages. In addition to his work at Holy Assumption, Father Andrew visits other parishes on a semi-monthly basis.³²

In 1895, roughly the time of Holy Assumption's construction under Yaroshevich's authority, the population of Kenai was 1,017.³³ The population of the city continued to increase in the following decade as a result of the fishing industry and the temporary American fortification constructed there. Evidence shows that this trend has continued and the City of

³⁰ Znamenski. "Through Orthodox Eyes." 275.

³¹ Conversation with Dorothy Gray. March 30, 2016.

³² Andrew, Archpriest Thomas. Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church, Kenai, *AK Deanery Report*. October 6, 2015.

³³ Hardwick, Susan Wiley. *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 72.

Kenai's population has steadily increased. These recent population trends seem to echo within Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary's congregation. It is clear that the large size and commitment of the congregation is directly tied to its location.

Holy Assumption is located within a section of the city referred to as Old Town Kenai, a small area where the municipality has placed several historic structures, partly in an effort to create and support a walking history tour. These structures include homesteader cabins, a reconstruction of American Fort Kenay, and several related to Russian settlement. This part of the city is promoted by the Chamber of Commerce and plays a vibrant role in the city itself as a driver of heritage tourism. The city's logo includes an image of Mount Redoubt and St. Nicholas Chapel demonstrates city's acknowledgment of the church's importance within the community. Holy Assumption of Our Lord is located at the heart of Old Town Kenai, making it the centerpiece of a larger historical narrative that includes native, Russian and American culture and history.

Transfiguration of Our Lord, Ninilchik

Ninilchik is a small, unincorporated town located approximately halfway between Kenai and Homer. Though the town encompasses just over 207 square miles of land, 883 residents lived in the area in 2010, creating a density of four residents per square mile. It is likely that many of these residents leave Ninilchik for warmer climates during the winter months. As a result, it is difficult to tell what percentage of residents are year-round versus those that consider the beaches of the Kenai Peninsula a vacation spot. During the summer months, however, locals know that the Seward and Sterling highways will be crowded with recreational vehicles and tourists making their way down the coast from Anchorage. Regardless, records indicate that

Ninilchik's population is steadily increasing. Between 2000 and 2010, the area saw 110 new residents.³⁴

Using the census-designated definition, approximately 136 or 15.4% of the population of Ninilchik is American Indian or Alaska Native. The Ninilchik Traditional Council, however, encompasses multiple areas within the Kenai Peninsula. These include the nearby locations of Anchor Point, Clam Gulch, Cohoe, Happy Valley, Kasilof, Nikolaevsk in addition to Ninilchik. The population of those locations included in the Ninilchik Traditional Council is 5,907, with 586 (or 9%) identifying as Alaska Native. Between 1990 and 2010, the population of the Ninilchik Traditional Council has increased by 357 people, or 60%.³⁵

This transient community sees many of the challenges visible in nearby Kenai, but on a larger scale. Whereas the city of Kenai serves as a larger metropolitan area (including nearby Soldotna with a population of 4,381 people as of 2013) and retains more year-round residents, Ninilchik's population is more transient.³⁶ The old section of Ninilchik located below the bluff is one of the more dense areas of the community. The concerns regarding Ninilchik's population are magnified within the congregation of Transfiguration of Our Lord Church.

The church's active parish is no more than half a dozen people, and they commute from nearby areas including Kasilof and Kenai. Mass is led by Archpriest Victor Nick, and the mass schedule is prepared and distributed on a monthly basis.³⁷ Parish members of Holy Assumption in Kenai will occasionally visit the church in Ninilchik for mass. Similarly, Ninilchik parish members will visit the church in Kenai. The two congregations work together frequently as a

³⁴ Alaska Area Native Health Service. "2010 Census Counts: American Indians/Alaska Natives Alone or in Combination with One or More Other Races, Alaska."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Nick, Archpriest Victor. "Kenai/Prince William Sound Deanery Report." 2015.

result of their proximal location and, likely, a dependence on Ninilchik's smaller congregation on Kenai's larger community.

Conclusion

The churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik share several similarities. Their devoted clergy continue to promote and care for their structures and the larger historical contexts surrounding them. The major differences between the three sites is the role of the surrounding community. In Eklutna and Ninilchik, the congregations are small as a result of their remoteness. St. Nicholas Church in Eklutna, however, also suffers from a lack of interest in the local native community. The lack of engagement and communication between the church and the native corporations is exemplified in the manner with which the landscape surrounding the church has been parceled to accommodate changing cultural influences. In stark contrast, Holy Assumption Church in Kenai is located within a makeshift historic district. The role of multiple cultural and historical influences, including natives, Russian settlers and American homesteaders, is visible immediately upon entering the old section of town. These differences in community and the promotion of cultural heritage are major forces behind the success, size and continued maintenance of each church and congregation.

Many of the trends in Russian Orthodoxy within Alaska are echoed in the congregations along the Cook Inlet region. Since 1970, between 100 and 150 new parishes have been constructed, bringing the Orthodox Church in America to 700 churches across the United States, 88 of those churches are located within Alaska.³⁸ They accommodate approximately 12,652

³⁸ "Russian Orthodox Church in America." Orthodox Church in America. <<http://www.oca.org>>.

active members of the church, many of which travel extensively to attend mass.³⁹ Today, many Orthodox parishes across Alaska face diminishing congregations. With fewer parish members to support these structures, their preservation is unlikely if not impossible. More importantly, Russian Orthodox churches which are no longer used are decommissioned by the diocese and burned. Only a large Russian Orthodox cross is planted in its place.⁴⁰ Though this is not a real threat to the historic Russian Orthodox sites still standing in Alaska, most if not all face some varying degree of destruction. Chapter Five will address the issues related to the preservation of each church, the role of the communities, congregations and other organizations in these efforts, and the future of their preservation within the framework of Alaska's preservation climate.

³⁹ Krindatch, Alexei. 2011. *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Churches*. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press. 144.)

⁴⁰ Discussion with Father Christopher Stanton. March 28, 2016.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESERVATION EFFORTS AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO RUSSIAN ORTHODOX SACRED SITES IN THE COOK INLET REGION

Alaska's unique history has created an equally distinctive context for the preservation of its historic resources. Early preservation efforts faced the challenge of protecting and maintaining historic resources while respecting native cultural institutions, foreign architectural and ecclesiastical influences as well as uniquely Alaskan industrial and commercial sites. These concerns are magnified on the Kenai Peninsula and surrounding area, where native Dena'ina, Russian *promyshlenniki* and their ancestors and American homesteaders interacted for decades. The portrait of Cook Inlet's modern preservation climate includes the architectural descriptions provided in Chapter Three and the information on the congregations and the current state of Russian Orthodoxy at a national, state and parish level provided in Chapter Four. Within this chapter, specific preservation efforts made at the churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik are discussed and compared with overarching preservation themes, spanning the 20th century to the present day. This context provides possibilities for the future of the structures, which are facing diminishing congregations, and the increased threat of lack of maintenance and care.

Alaska's Preservation Climate: 1966 to the Present

The first state constitutional convention met at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks in November 1955 in hopes that a draft would inspire statewide support and legitimacy in Washington, D.C. A small fraction of Alaskans, however, opposed statehood, fearing the threat of burdensome government, additional taxation, and a lack of authority to control and maintain public lands and resources. Ironically, the government created by the Constitution was strong.

Both the governor and legislature were given extensive rights in direct response to the weak authority that governed the territory for decades prior.¹

The first State Constitution, drafted in 1957, allowed for the state to acquire and protect “sites, objects and areas of natural beauty or of historic, cultural, recreational, or scientific value.”² Less than a decade later, a law was passed which provided the governor the right to designate historic sites and distribute funds for their maintenance. These public-sector efforts were followed by academic and public conferences in the late 1960s: the Conference on Alaskan History in 1967, the Alaska Historical Society Preservation Conference in 1968, the Alaska State Arts Council’s conferences in 1967 and 1968 concerning “Southeast Alaska artifacts and monuments” serve as early examples.

The adoption of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, however, was the final push in the establishment of the State Historic Preservation Advisory Board in 1970. Alaska Governor Walter J. Hickel endorsed the development of the historic preservation office in Alaska and urged the Division of Lands to develop “procedures which will accomplish successful implementation.” Alaska’s first preservation plan was reviewed and approved by the State Historic Preservation Advisory Board on August 28, 1970.³ The definitions and philosophies of preservation provided by Alaska’s first preservation plan are important to note. “Preservation, per se, is preferable to restoration,” the document asserts, and continues:

...Historically significant phenomena seldom occur in isolation; therefore, the whole should be protected under the district concept, in preference to isolated designations. This permits planning and development on a comprehensive basis. Research and interpretation are facilitated. A thematic mode of development is readily accommodated and better protection is afforded during exploitation.

¹ Harrison, Gordon. “*Alaska’s Constitution: A Citizen’s Guide*.” (Anchorage: Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency), 3-4.

² Historic Preservation Advisory Board. “Alaska’s Historic Preservation Plan.” (Anchorage, AK: Alaska Department of Natural Resources), August 28, 1970.

³ Ibid.

This thematic approach to the preservation of structures across Alaska serves multiple purposes. First, as the Advisory Board suggests, it allows for the acknowledgment of historic themes within Alaska's history. Second, and perhaps most important in Alaska's case, thematic districts allow for all-encompassing historic themes. Gold rush era Alaskan landmarks across the state were nominated thematically in 1987.⁴ The proposed use of thematic districts was not unique in the years following the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. In Alaska, however, early attempts to utilize them seem to have served as a potential solution to the challenge of surveying, documenting and nominating structures in such a vast landscape.

Russian Orthodox churches statewide were nominated in a proposed thematic district in 1979, with many of the churches having been documented in the mid-to-late 1970s. At the time of the drafting of this thematic nomination, eight Russian Orthodox sites had previously been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. These included Old St. Nicholas in Eklutna, Holy Assumption in Kenai and Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord in Ninilchik. The thematic district proposal, which was completed by Russian Orthodox clergy living in Alaska, includes a total of 149 Russian Orthodox sites. Extant and demolished structures are both addressed, and those churches that are no longer used for services are also identified. The nomination's extensive history notes the role of natives in the church's success. It states, "The Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska is a major element of Native heritage, in unity with Native life in many places, over the past two centuries."⁵

The focus on Native Alaskan history within this nomination form echoes a larger theme in the state's preservation goals at the time. Alaska's first preservation plan declared that

⁴ *Thematic Representation: National Historic Landmarks*. National Park Service. <www.nps.gov/parkhistory>. Accessed April 9, 2015.

⁵ "Russian Orthodox Church Buildings and Sites in Alaska." National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. June 6, 1980.

“priority is to be given to protecting ... cultural patrimony of aboriginal populations,” followed by “European sites in danger of destruction.”⁶ In this way, the state demonstrates the importance placed upon native interpretations of the land. An early example showcasing this prioritization is the Alaska State Museum’s Totem Pole Preservation Survey spanning 1969 and 1970.

Simultaneous with this early focus on native history was the conflict concerning native land claims, culminating in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971. Under ANCSA, 44 million acres of federally-owned land were transferred to native corporations.⁷ The consideration of Alaskan native cultural and historical resources certainly correlates with the political discourse at the time.

Alaska’s first comprehensive preservation plan explicitly credits missionaries as the first preservationists for their efforts to document “aboriginal culture.”⁸ What part of the aboriginal culture, and by which denomination’s missionaries, is unclear. Certainly, the documentation of said culture by Russian Orthodox missionaries is obvious in primary sources. The document’s prioritization of native land holdings is relatively unusual when compared to contemporary state preservation plans. Though several states stress the role of native preservation in statewide efforts, though Alaska’s emphasis on missionary impacts exhibits an acknowledgment of Russian impact and colonial relationships with Native Alaskans. The State of Alaska’s focus on native rights remains a central part of the Historic Preservation Office’s mission even today.⁹

Alaska’s most recent preservation plan is envisioned to guide the state through 2017. It identifies six objectives that elucidate the importance of partnerships, preservation education,

⁶ Alaska State Historic Preservation Office. “*Alaska’s Historic Preservation Plan.*” (Anchorage, 1970.) 7-8.

⁷ Turner, Wallace. “Areas as vast as whole states now change hands in Alaska.” *The New York Times*. October 8, 1982.

⁸ “Alaska’s Historic Preservation Plan.”

⁹ Cooley, R.A. "Evolution of Alaska land policy." in Morehouse, T. A. (editor). *Alaskan Resources Development: Issues of the 1980s* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 13-49.

and the role of communities in surveying, documenting and evaluating historic resources. To aid in the latter, the state has a Certified Local Government program that was created in 1986.

Alaska has only thirteen Certified Local Governments, including the City of Kenai and the Municipality of Anchorage. The program has received approximately \$1.763 million in federal grants since its inception.¹⁰ For the Fiscal Year 2017 proposed budget, the state has requested \$800,000 from the National Historic Preservation Fund, matching the grant amounts provided in recent years and projected amounts through Fiscal Year 2020.¹¹

Many of the challenges facing the preservation of Russian Orthodox churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik impact historic resources across Alaska. Natural disasters such as volcano eruptions and earthquakes have occurred in recent decades and threatened to damage Russian Orthodox sacred sites. Mount Katmai erupted in 1912 and Mount Redoubt erupted in 1990 and 2009. Records indicate that each of these eruptions scattered ash across Kenai and Ninilchik.¹² The 9.2 magnitude Good Friday Earthquake of 1964, the second largest recorded earthquake in history, affected over 500,000 square miles across Alaska, parts of Canada, and the Pacific Northwest. The epicenter of this earthquake was only 120 miles from the city of Kenai.¹³ A 7.1 magnitude earthquake in the spring of 2016 destroyed gas pipelines and roadways across the Cook Inlet region.¹⁴ Hence, the potential danger brought on by earthquakes is not limited to the tremor itself, but the resulting damage which can lead to fire and flooding. Similarly, the spring

¹⁰ *Saving Our Past: Alaska's Historic Preservation Plan 2011-2017*. Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Office of History and Archaeology. <<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/oha/planning/savingourpast.htm>>. Accessed April 8, 2016.

¹¹ Office of Management and Budget. "National Historic Preservation Fund Fiscal Year 2017." Alaska Department of Natural Resources. December 9, 2015.

¹² U.S. Department of Commerce. *Mount Redoubt Volcanic Eruptions March – April 2009*. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. January 2010.

¹³ U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 542, *The Alaska Earthquake, Effects on Communities*, US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1967.

¹⁴ Berlinger, Joshua. "7.1-magnitude earthquake hits Alaska." *CNN*. January 24, 2016. <<http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/24/us/alaska-earthquake/>>.

2016 earthquake damaged a historic icon at Holy Assumption Church in Kenai, though the church itself was not affected.

In addition to the challenges posed by nature, others are the result of human interaction and interpretation. The size and form of the century-old churches frequently differ from the needs of the congregation. As a result, clergy are often torn between accommodating the parish and preserving the structure. These concerns are aggravated by clergy, diocesan or congregation-based interest in preservation funding, which mandates the preservation of character-defining features. The clergy's conflict of interest, combined with dwindling native populations and the expanding threat of the loss of native languages, the ability to translate and understand these sites becomes a more urgent necessity. In Ninilchik, for instance, few Dena'ina speak the rare Russian Athabaskan dialect of their ancestors. The same is true for the native village of Eklutna, where the population has consistently decreased for decades. As has been noted in previous chapters, these shifts in population echo shifts in the number of parish members. For this reason, the day-to-day maintenance and success of the Russian Orthodox churches discussed within this thesis is heavily dependent upon their congregations.

The small size of many Russian Orthodox congregations throughout Alaska is a leading concern. This is particularly true in the cases of St. Nicholas in Eklutna and Transfiguration of Our Lord in Ninilchik, where active congregations number in the single digits. With little missionary activity across Alaska, a sudden increase in church attendance is unlikely. The Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), for example, is a worldwide organization that focuses its attention across the globe in an effort to "make disciples of all nations."¹⁵ Missionary efforts in Alaska have addressed the preservation of Russian Orthodox structures in the past in

¹⁵ *Mission, Vision, & Values*. Orthodox Christian Mission Center. <www.ocmc.org>. Accessed May 11, 2016.

addition to community education and outreach.¹⁶ Though these measures help to maintain the spotlight on these structures, the Russian Orthodox Church can look to other options to ensure the structures' continued existence. These include partnerships with other religious or community organizations and faith-based community development.

Looking Outside of Simple Ownership

If it is possible for the structure to remain in Orthodox hands, partnerships are an alternative to increase revenue and community engagement. Holy Assumption Church's restoration efforts in 2008 were aided by a partnership with the Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center. An exhibit curated by the Cultural Center featuring Russian Orthodox icons, journals and artifacts was the most visited exhibit in the Center's history. This exhibit, in combination with an increase in media attention of Holy Assumption's restoration, led to an increase in regional and nationwide attention, spurring increased revenue as a result. The church's reopening in 2010 drew an unprecedented number of visitors and donations.¹⁷ Today, the Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center retains various pieces of information pertaining to Holy Assumption Church. A walking tour guide of Old Town Kenai specifically features the church and its role in Russian settlement in the area. This symbiotic relationship between civic and religious activity in the city, combined with Kenai's status as a Certified Local Government, increase tourism and revenue for both parties.

Other partnerships that may be considered include offering the church space or other structures for local purposes. These options include artist groups, day care and other educational

¹⁶ "Missionary Updates." *Orthodox Christian Mission Center*. Fall 2015, Volume 31 No. 2. 15.

¹⁷ "Telling the SAT Story: Holy Assumption Orthodox Church." American Architectural Foundation. <www.archfoundation.org/2015>. Accessed April 19, 2016.

functions, or meetings for local organizations. Partners for Sacred Places, a non-profit organization based in Philadelphia, refers to this method as establishing a “center for urban life.”¹⁸ The non-profit’s guide to community outreach continues:

While creating a separate non-profit organization with its own directors takes away some of the congregation’s flexibility in the use of its own building, the “center for urban life” model can significantly enhance programming for community activities and fundraising opportunities for the building. With a center for urban life, potential funders can be asked to support not a religious mission, but an independent community resource within an architecturally significant building.¹⁹

This method can also be referred to as faith-based community development.²⁰ For example, Fort Kenay in Kenai is a reconstruction of the original Russian school and has served as a community hall and senior citizen center in the past. It is possible that the church could gain revenue through rents and donations by offering their space as an extension of Fort Kenay’s purposes. Of course, it is important to note that all three of the Cook Inlet churches are extremely small in size, which limits the number of feasible groups that could take advantage of their spaces.

An additional option is to offer the church as a space for the services of other denominations. Case studies have demonstrated the Russian Orthodox Church’s willingness to purchase and adopt the space of another denomination.²¹ Whether this is also indicative of the church’s alacrity to share their structure with other religious groups, whether Catholic or not, is unclear. The potential for reuse of the churches should they be abandoned is difficult to gauge considering the Russian Orthodox Church’s policy on deconsecration. Historically, an unused

¹⁸ Partners for Sacred Places. “Community Outreach Guide.” < <http://www.sacredplaces.org/tools-research/outreach>>. Accessed May 1, 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tomlan, Michael A., and David Listokin. *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015. 337-338.

²¹ Pickles, Kate. “Orthodox Community of St. Andrew eyes deconsecrated chapel for new home.” *Edinburgh Evening News*. November 24, 2012.

church was burned to the ground and marked with a three-barred cross. It seems this method has not been used in many years and is reserved for very specific and rare cases.²²

The method of sharing spaces presents challenges in the more remote locations of Eklutna and Ninilchik. At Eklutna Historical Park, the museum operating inside Old St. Nicholas Church is dependent on tourism while the replacement church relies on its shrinking congregation. Both the museum and the church face the possibility of abandonment while the diocese is charged with the task of maintaining multiple structures. The museum draws countless tourists annually, calls for donations from visitors and includes a small gift shop in the park's small welcome center. In some ways, the conversion of Old St. Nicholas to a museum serves as the village's own center for urban life, though the villagers do not seem to utilize it. It remains to be seen a more positive relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the native village of Eklutna, potentially mollified by recent compromises concerning land ownership, have an impact on Old St. Nicholas' role within the community.

Old St. Nicholas Church would do well to promote its cultural Dena'ina Athabaskan heritage, which plays a larger role than in the other two case studies. It is possible that a partnership with the nearby Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage could lead to increased exhibit space, loaned resources and artifacts, and an influx of visitors. Similarly, the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center has held several exhibits relating to Native Alaskan heritage, Russian settlement, and the confluence of the two cultures. Its inception echoes this emphasis, as the museum was intended to celebrate the centennial of the Alaska purchase in 1867. As the largest museum in Alaska, its archives are a significant regional and national resource in aboriginal Alaskan culture. The Anchorage Museum's 26,000 objects include paintings and

²² Discussion with Father Christopher Stanton. March 28, 2016.

artifacts dating to Russian colonialism. Perhaps an exhibit on the churches themselves and their role in the communities could aid in publicity and funding opportunities.

The main concern relating to partnerships is location. Holy Transfiguration in Ninilchik is slightly more remote and does not have the benefit of proximity to Anchorage. Neither Ninilchik or Eklutna have the benefit of a nearby downtown area. Within a few miles, however, are a school and several churches, which indicate the existence of an active community with the potential for new partnerships. An additional method to overcome the challenge of distance is to capitalize on the churches' shared histories. A partnership with the Cook Inlet Historical Society, which may involve creating and publishing brochures, could promote tourism to these sites based on the churches' role in Native Alaskan culture, Russian colonialism and American expansion.

Conclusion

It is clear that tourism plays a major role in the continued success of the Russian Orthodox sites in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik. These churches continue to face the threat of alteration or demolition if the congregations that use them cease to exist. This threat is especially real in Eklutna, where services are held only once a month. Holy Transfiguration in Ninilchik has a steady congregation and a close partnership with Holy Assumption in Kenai. Of the three churches, Holy Assumption has the largest congregation and also a clear role within the community, as evident by its central location in the city's historic center. In order to ensure preservation of the structures, the Russian Orthodox churches in the Cook Inlet region must consider the role their parishes play in the larger community.

CONCLUSION

Russian settlement of Alaska began in the early 18th century with the arrival of private entrepreneurs, known as *promyshlenniki*. The most notable companies to participate in this eastern expansion included the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company and the Shelikhov-Golikov Company, the latter becoming the Russian American Company. Government interest in Alaska did not begin until the settlements' potential revenue from the fur trade and other resources became evident. Initial settlement began on the Aleutian Islands and extended east across the island of Kodiak, the Cook Inlet region, and southeast Alaska. Relations between Russians and the native Alaskans within these regions ranged from tolerant to hostile. Undoubtedly, the introduction of Russian Orthodox missionaries soon after the introduction of the *promyshlenniki* aided in creating a more positive relationship between Russians and the natives. When tensions between the two cultures rose, Orthodox clergy served as mediators and protectorates of Native Alaskans. In this role, the Russian Orthodox Church was able to convert natives.

Settlement of the Kenai Peninsula was initiated by the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company. Their main fortification in this area was Fort Nikolaevskaia, the modern city of Kenai. By comparison, Eklutna had been a native Dena'ina Athabaskan settlement for more than a century while the town of Ninilchik was established by Russian American Company pensioners. Though the reasons behind their settlement differ, the churches in each town were constructed after the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867. It appears their construction was spurred by the influx of American settlers and the missionaries that migrated with them. Native Alaskan response to Presbyterians and Moravians frequently resulted in the embrace of Russian Orthodoxy as a defensive measure. Church construction flourished for a second time as a result.

The churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik are relatively simple in construction, frequently utilize Russian construction techniques, and follow typical Russian Orthodox construction practices. The surrounding landscapes include cemeteries and, in some cases, large tracts of land, monitored and cared for to varying degrees depending on the parish.

Russian Orthodoxy itself has shaped the role of the Cook Inlet region churches within their communities. Nine Orthodox parishes were scattered across Alaska in 1867.¹ Today, the Diocese of Alaska administers 88 churches, two of which were constructed after 2010.² Just over 12,000 Alaskans consider themselves active members of their Orthodox congregations.³ The religion, however, is often viewed by modern communities as a remnant of their parents' or grandparents' generations. Many Russian Orthodox congregations across Alaska continue to shrink as a result.

Russian Orthodox churches across Alaska are threatened by physical and interpretive preservation challenges, ranging from volcanoes and weather-related impacts to scarce or missing resources related to their histories. The continued preservation of the churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik is, therefore, largely dependent on their congregations. To combat diminishing congregation sizes and the risk of the structures' abandonment, it is necessary for each church to consider the role they play within their communities. Efforts to increase and promote this role by creating partnerships with and renting their spaces to local organizations could also increase revenue. Among the three Cook Inlet churches, Holy Assumption in Kenai has initiated this process by establishing a working relationship with the city's Visitor and

¹ Stokoe, Mark and Leonid Kishkovsky. *Orthodox Christians in North America 1794-1994* (Cleveland, OH: Orthodox Christians Publications Center, 1995), 144.

² *Diocese of Alaska Parish Directory*. Orthodox Church in America. <www.oca.org/parishes/diocese/AK>. Accessed May 1, 2016.

³ Krindatch, Alexei. 2011. *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Churches*. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press. 144.)

Cultural Center. Their partnership has aided in the creation of a walking history tour coupled with increased publicity, allowing the non-profit organization, Russian Orthodox Sacred Sites in Alaska (ROSSIA), Inc., to fund structural preservation efforts. Fundraising has also resulted in the construction of a gift shop and informational signage to increase tourism and revenue. St. Nicholas in Eklutna and Holy Transfiguration in Ninilchik are challenged by the lack of a centralized downtown area. These sites, however, could still benefit from expanded relationships with the public. Perhaps a larger partnership between the churches and ROSSIA, Inc. and similar groups (ie. the National Trust for Historic Preservation at the federal level) would increase publicity, thereby allowing community members and tourists alike to seek out sites for educational, cultural or religious purposes.

As cross-sections of their communities, each congregation has the opportunity to educate the community while shaping its own identity. In Native Alaskan communities such as Eklutna, a partnership within the village and larger Anchorage community should aid in the promotion and education of Dena'ina Athabascan heritage and traditions. If a congregation is given the opportunity to choose its partnerships with various community organizations, it can further define itself in a way that allows the community to understand its history. This also bolsters community engagement and a local if not regional focus on the role of these Russian Orthodox sites historically and culturally. The challenge, then, is aiding each parish in finding organizations to partner with that mirror their own values and cultural identity.

The research within this thesis had originally hoped to identify the common themes between Russian colonialism in Alaska and interactions with Dena'ina Athabaskans. The hypothesis assumed that any cultural or religious traditions from the 18th century would still be evident, in some form, in each church today, and that these features were the primary reason for

the preservation of Russian Orthodox sacred sites. Further research, however, indicated that there is no direct cultural, religious or historical bridge that connects these churches to their pasts or even to their communities. There are several reasons for this disconnect. First, the history of Russian settlement in Southcentral Alaska is often overshadowed by its Southeastern counterpart. In a purely religious context, Native Alaskans do not identify with Russian Orthodoxy as their grandparents once did. Despite this, the Orthodox Church has built several new churches in the region in recent years, indicating an increase in the Orthodox population in only certain areas and likely from different demographics. Furthermore, community interest in historic Russian Orthodox sacred sites is varied, and the relationships between the churches and communities is varied. These findings uncovered that the primary concerns facing the preservation of remote, underutilized and often threatened churches can only be mollified with community interest.

Addressing the role of history, culture and heritage in the preservation of sacred sites requires an ongoing dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church, the congregation and the community. This proposal is easier said than done in many cases. In using Old St. Nicholas Church in Eklutna as an example, the differences within each stakeholder are embodied in the existence and continued use of two churches for different purposes, and a growing disconnect between the congregation and the surrounding village. An effort to bring the groups together should seek to answer multiple questions. What role should the clergy and the congregation play in preservation efforts? How can the community help, and how do their interests differ from that of the congregation's? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, what is each party's vision for a functioning church, museum and cultural landscape that plays a larger role in not only the community, but also within Southcentral Alaska's Russian colonial and native Dena'ina

historical narrative? Posing preservation-related questions will undoubtedly yield different answers. It is the responsibility of each to agree on a compromise that allows the church to continue to serve its community in a religious, cultural and historical context.

The main and most obvious limitations within this research are geographic in nature. The three churches focused upon were chosen due primarily to their proximity to Anchorage. An additional Russian Orthodox Church, St. Nicholas in Seldovia, is located approximately 25 miles south of Homer and is only accessible by ferry. A truly comprehensive look at the preservation of Russian Orthodox Churches near the Cook Inlet should also include those closer to Prince William Sound. Such a study would address the church in Seldovia, as well as those located in Tatitlek, Valdez, Chenega Bay, Port Graham, and Tyonek, among others. Considering the state of most of Alaska's Russian Orthodox sites, a comprehensive approach would be most helpful in determining the immediate threats to each structure and the potential opportunities available to each individual congregation.

Additional challenges stem from inaccurate and contradictory sources. For example, multiple sources use the town names of Eklutna, Old Knik and New Knik interchangeably, though New Knik is an alternative name for the village of Eklutna. Similarly, research was stalled when 18th-century Russian fortifications were identified by multiple names in multiple languages. The best example of this is Fort Nikolaevskaia, which is referred to in sources as such, or as Fort Nikolai, Fort St. Nicholas, Fort Kenay (under American jurisdiction), or Kenai in the present day. Transliteration of Russian names created similar issues, as translations of works led to varied spellings. Certainly, research in the future would better utilize original Russian texts, located at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and various archives across Russia.

The author also acknowledges a lack of information concerning Dena'ina Athabaskan culture within this research. Certainly, the history of Russian settlement would produce strikingly different results if told from the perspective of Native Alaskans. It seems scholars cited within this thesis have noted the same challenge. Future studies should focus on the role of Native culture in the preservation of Russian Orthodox sites. Additionally, the cultural interpretation of preservation in aboriginal culture should be considered. For instance, do Native Alaskans agree with cultural and historic preservation efforts and regulations adopted by the state preservation office? Furthermore, are there differences in the views of preservation between Native Alaskan groups? Though many Russian Orthodox congregations in Alaska are comprised of Native Alaskans, their voice was not discussed with enough emphasis within this thesis.

The original goal of this research included using the churches in Eklutna, Kenai and Ninilchik as case studies, the lessons of which could be applied to other remote Russian Orthodox sacred sites statewide. A clear challenge with this approach is the varying landscape across Alaska. For example, the Church of the Holy Ascension, located in Unalaska, is far more remote and faces different challenges given its location on the Aleutian Islands. The three Cook Inlet churches serve as useful case studies for the Kenai Peninsula in that they are each proximally located to Anchorage and, therefore, can benefit from steady summer tourism and a consistent, watchful eye from preservation-minded individuals and organizations. Future research may consider what individual threats these structures face and how they compare depending on their regional differences. Compiling this information will help to prepare a toolkit for congregations struggling with similar preservation concerns.

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