

St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church
326 5th Street
Juneau
Alaska

HABS No. AK-59

HABS
AK
8-JUNE
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HABS
AK
8-JUNE,
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
ST. NICHOLAS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

HABS No. AK-59

Location: 326 5th St., Juneau, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, the Orthodox Church in Alaska.

Present Occupant: St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: The only remaining octagonal Russian Orthodox church in Alaska, this is also among the oldest. Its small size, fanciful belfry, and hillside location contribute to its picturesque appearance.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1893-94. The church was consecrated on June 12, 1894.
2. Builders, suppliers: Constructed by Ellingen and Rudolph, builders in Juneau.¹ The land, lumber, and labor were donated by Dimitrii (formerly Chief Ishkhanalykh).
5. Original plans and construction: Bishop Nicholas provided \$2,000 and local Russians and Eastern Europeans provided guidance in the design and construction, while the Tlingit congregation provided the labor. The octagonal church, unique among surviving Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska, was planned and built much as it appears today. The octagon plan, derived from the tent-shaped churches of Russia, was often used in Alaska for the first chapels on a site, such as those at Unalaska, Sitka, and possibly St. Michael's. Similar to those chapels in form, it is not known if St. Nicholas is also similar to them in size and proportions.
6. Alterations and additions: The belltower was added in 1905. The roof was originally tile, but was rebuilt in 1908. In 1916, a new concrete foundation was added.²

Extensive renovations undertaken in 1976-79 involved \$133,000 worth of work, including new electrical and heating systems, insulation, and sheetrock interior to

¹ Inventory of Historic Sites and Structures, City and Borough of Juneau, Alaska (City and Borough of Juneau Planning Department, 1986), 40.

² Andrew Kashevarof, "Clerical News: St. Nicholas Church in Juneau, Alaska, for 1916" (typescript, no date).

ST. NICHOLAS RUSSLAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH
HABS No. AK-59 (Page 2)

replace the celotex. Douglas Ackley was the architect for the renovation. The church was re-consecrated on July 1, 1979.

B. Historical Context:

This was the first Russian Orthodox church in Juneau. In 1890, Chief Ishkhanalykh contacted Fr. V. Dukhov at St. Michael's Cathedral in Sitka, saying that he wished to convert. On July 26, 1892, Bishop Nicholas visited Juneau, and three days later Chief Ishkhanalykh and his wife were baptized, receiving the Christian names Dimitrii and Elizaveta. Dimitrii donated the land, supplies, and labor to construct this church.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The form of the church is octagonal, with a rectangular vestibule extending from the west side. The sanctuary is contained within the volume of the octagonal mass.
2. Condition of fabric: good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 27' in diameter.
2. Foundations: The foundations are concrete, enclosed at the perimeter by vertical novelty siding.
3. Walls: The walls are clad in horizontal novelty siding; they are painted white with aqua trim.
4. Structural system, framing: Post and beam construction with machine-sawn lumber.
5. Chimneys: There is a stovepipe on the east side of the roof.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The double doors leading into the vestibule have five horizontal panels and are surmounted by a three-light transom window.
 - b. Windows: The windows have four-over-four-light double-hung sash, set in frames with a molded architrave.

ST. NICHOLAS RUSSIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH
HABS No. AK-59 (Page 3)

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: There is a polygonal roof over the nave and a gable roof over the vestibule; both are covered with wood shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a molded cornice.
- c. Dormers: There are four small dormers over the nave. Each is gable-roofed, with a blind bull's-eye window.
- d. Cupola: The nave is topped by an octagonal cupola, which has air vents and wood-shingled walls. It is crowned by a gold onion dome.
- e. Belfry: There is a small square belfry over the vestibule. It has open sides with a balustrade and jigsaw brackets. The wood-shingled roof is polygonal, with four pediments.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is octagonal in plan; the amvon rises two steps. The iconostas across the east end conceals three walls.
2. Flooring: Wall-to-wall carpeting.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are white plaster, with a wainscot of vertical beaded boards, painted blue. The ceiling is boards, with a molding around each of the eight panels.
4. Doorways and doors: The double doors between the vestibule and the nave have four panels, and are set in a plain surround.
5. Decorative features: The iconostas in the east end is divided into seven parts horizontally; the end panels angle back from the screen. The wooden iconostas is divided by engaged box columns, painted white with moldings picked out in gold. Many of the icons were donated by the Moscow Missionary Society when the church was built, so the church has a rich collection of nineteenth-century icons.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church is located in a hilly, urban setting at the corner of Fifth and Gold streets in downtown Juneau. The church faces west, with its sanctuary in the east end. It is set in a picket-fenced churchyard.
2. Outbuildings: The rectory, located about 10' north of the church, is a one-and-a-half-story wood-framed building. The gable roof, covered with corrugated metal,

ST. NICHOLAS RUSSIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH
HABS No. AK-59 (Page 4)

has a shed dormer. The walls are covered with wood shingles, and there is a variety of window openings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Inventory of Historic Sites and Structures, City and Borough of Juneau. City and Borough of Juneau Planning Department, 1986.

Kashevarof, Andrew. "Clerical News: St. Nicholas Church In Juneau, Alaska, for 1916." typescript, n.d.

St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church: Consecration of Church and Altar. Juneau, July 1, 1979.

Stamey, Roy. "The Restoration of the Saint Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Juneau, Alaska." Orthodox Alaska 8 (December 1979): 73-78.

Wallace, Amos. "National Register Nomination: St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church." National Park Service, 1973.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1989 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO
ST. NICHOLAS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
326 Fifth Street
Juneau
Juneau County
Alaska

HABS No. AK-59

HABS
AK
8-JUNE,
1-

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013

ADDENDUM TO:
ST. NICHOLAS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
326 Fifth Street
Juneau
Juneau Borough
Alaska

HABS AK-59
HABS AK,8-JUNE,1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001