

St. Alexander Nevsky
Russian Orthodox Church
Akutan
Alaska

HABS No. AK-73

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. ALEXANDER OF NEVSKY RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

HABS No. AK-73

- Location: Akutan, Akutan Island, Fox Island group of Aleutian Chain, Alaska.
- Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.
- Present Occupant: St. Alexander of Nevsky Russian Orthodox Church.
- Present Use: Church.
- Significance: The church at Akutan is a simple wood-framed building with a gable roof covering both sanctuary and nave.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1918.
2. Original plans and construction: The nave and sanctuary were incorporated into one gable-roofed block. The vestibule is slightly shorter than the nave and has the same slope to its gable roof.
3. Alterations and additions: In the mid-1980s, the foundation and floor were replaced. The roof was re-shingled. The vestibule was widened, in order to accommodate the oil furnace (previously a stove in the nave), and the doors were changed. The east wall was re-covered with plywood.

B. Previous Churches on the Site:

The previous church was constructed in 1878, when the village was established. That church had a hipped roof sheltering both nave and sanctuary, and a small gable-roofed vestibule. The building was sided with clapboards. In the early 1880s, Akutan's population was 63 Aleuts and two whites. (Petroff, 23)

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The simple wood-framed building has a gable roof, covering both nave and sanctuary, and a lower, gable-roofed vestibule.
2. Condition of fabric: good.

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B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block measures 18'-4" x 30'-6" and includes both nave and sanctuary. The vestibule measures 17'-7" x 8'-0".
2. Foundations: not visible.
3. Walls: The walls are clad with beveled siding, painted white. The vestibule and east end are covered with plywood.
4. Structural system: Wood frame.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are plain, single doors on the west front and on the north side of the vestibule. There is a hatch door at the attic level of the vestibule.
 - b. Windows: Most of the windows have six-light sash. The westernmost bay of the nave has windows with nine-light sash on the north and south sides.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The gable roof is covered with wood shingles, painted green. The vestibule is covered by a lower gable roof, also covered with wood shingles.
 - b. Cupolas: There is a small cupola over the nave, topped by a cross.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is one open space, separated by the iconostas from the sanctuary on the east. The vestibule is on the west.
2. Stairways: There is a one-step amvon, with a semi-circular projection in the center and krilos with jigsaw balustrades on the sides.
3. Flooring: The floors are covered with wall-to-wall carpeting.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are finished with 4"-wide horizontal planks. The ceiling, covered with narrow beaded boards, is in an odd stairstep configuration: the ceiling rises 8'-0" from the ground for a width of 2'-2", then rises another 2'-0".
5. Doorways: There is one paneled door between the nave and vestibule.

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6. Decorative features: The iconostas is three-tiered, rising the full height of the wall. The deacons doors are paneled, while the royal door is lattice, with a sunburst decoration above. The icons are oil on canvas, and several appear to be quite old.
7. Bells: Two bells are located in the attic of the vestibule.
8. Mechanical equipment: The building is equipped with electricity and an oil furnace.

D. Site:

The church, located near the shore, faces northwest, but for simplicity in this report has been described as if it faced west, with the altar on the east end. The church is set in a graveyard.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Petroff, Ivan. Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska. Washington: GPO, 1884.

Stepetin, Jacob, mayor of Akutan, interviewed by author September 17, 1990.

Wallace, Fern A. The Flame of the Candle. Chilliwack, B.C.: SS. Kyril and Methody Society, 1974. Plates 22 and 66 show the previous church. Plate 67 shows the present church, before alteration of the vestibule.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of St. Alexander of Nevsky 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 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO
ST. ALEXANDER OF NEVSKY RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Akutan
Aleutian Islands
Alaska

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