

St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Churches
Igiugig
Alaska *< Dillingham*

HABS No. AK-81

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
ST. NICHOLAS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

HABS No. AK-81

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- Location: Igiugig, on south shore of Kvichak River at southwest end of Lake Iliamna, Alaska.
- Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.
- Present Occupant/Use: Vacant.
- Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. The wood-framed church at Igiugig is one of the smaller ones, with nave and sanctuary incorporated under a single gable roof.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1929, according to Murphy Nikolai, church member.
2. Architect, builder: The church was built by Nicolai Wasillie (1905-1983), chief of the village.
3. Original plans and construction: The wood-framed church appears to have been built as a 13' x 25' rectangle, including both nave and sanctuary.
4. Alterations and additions: The corrugated-metal vestibule appears to be an addition. A bell stand on the south side of the vestibule was removed, probably when the bells were moved to the new church.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The small wood-framed church has a rectangular, gable-roofed form encompassing both nave and sanctuary.
2. Condition of fabric: Deteriorating.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building measures 13'-4" x 25'-2", with a 7'-8" x 5'-10" vestibule on the west.

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2. Foundations: Wood post.
3. Walls: The walls are covered with shiplap siding, painted white with green trim.
4. Structural system: Wood frame.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is a metal door.
 - b. Windows: The windows are six-light, fixed sash.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The gable roof is covered with corrugated metal, as is the shed roof over the vestibule.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: There are exposed rafter ends at the eaves.
 - c. Cupolas: There is a small cross on the ridge of the nave roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is one open space, separated from the sanctuary on the east by the iconostas. The sanctuary has slightly chamfered corners on the interior.
2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: Tongue-and-groove boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the nave and sanctuary, there is a wainscot of horizontal boards below plywood-covered walls. The tray ceiling of the nave has boards on the angled portion, and plywood on the flat ceiling. The tray ceiling of the sanctuary is all plywood. The vestibule is unfinished.
5. Doorways: There is one five-panel door between the nave and vestibule.
6. Decorative features: The three-bay iconostas is constructed of the same material as the walls. The icons have been removed. There is a chandelier of turned wood with metal ornament.

There is a squarish recess in the ceiling in front of the iconostas, with a slightly gabled ceiling.

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D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church is set in a churchyard, enclosed by an anchor fence, next to the river. The building faces west, with the altar on the east, as is traditional among Russian Orthodox churches.
2. New church: There is a new church just to the south. Rectangular in plan, with a gable roof, the wood-framed building is covered with plywood, painted a mustard color. There is a semi-octagonal vestibule. The octagonal belfry with onion dome is reflected on the interior by a rectangular recess in the ceiling. Decorations on the interior are profuse.

The church was built in 1980 by Gregory Andrew. Chief Nicolai Wasillie aided in the construction, as did many of the villagers.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Murphy Nikolai, resident of the village since 1938, and church member, interviewed by author May 29, 1990.

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