

THE ALASKA ASSOCIATION

OLD CITY HALL 524 WEST FOURTH AVENUE, SUITE 203, ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99501

February 1992

VOL. 11 ISSUE 1

KENAI HISTORICAL SOCIETY DONATES FUNDS TO HOLY ASSUMPTION ORTHODOX CHURCH

By Mary Ford

A \$39,000 check, earmarked for "historic restoration and preservation of the Kenai Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church," changed hands on December 13, 1991 in an informal ceremony in Kenai.

The donor was the Kenai Historical Society, whose members have dedicated the proceeds of its publication, "Once Upon the Kenai," to help preserve the building and its historic contents. The church was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970. In 1991, the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation identified it as one of the ten most endangered historic properties in the state.

Receiving the funds was the Very Rev. Archpriest Paul Merculief, acting rector; Leda Schmidt, church treasurer; Swede Foss, restoration committee chairman, and the former rector, Macarius Targonsky.

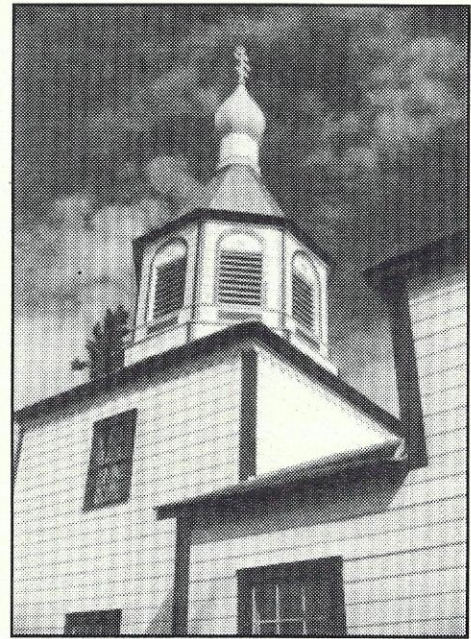
"It's a blessing," said Schmidt, who noted that the church restoration bank account was empty except for a token \$1 needed to keep the account open. A church committee will decide on a course of action and keep the historical society informed, Roger Meeks, society president, said.

Foss remarked that one of the first priorities would be to replace all the loose nails on the siding. Another immediate concern is a leak somewhere around the bell tower. Among other deficits is a humidity problem which has promoted mildew growth on the backs of some of the precious icons.

The Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church is nearly 100 years old. It shares honors with the Unalaska church as one of the two oldest standing Orthodox churches in Alaska. Made of logs in a classic Russian vessel or ship design, details have been changed during renovations over the years—but this building and the nearby log Chapel of St. Nicholas, as well as Orthodox Christianity itself, endure as continuations of Russian influence in Kenai.

The faith was introduced to the Kenai Dena'ina (Kenaitze) Athabascan Indians in 1795. The first chapel was built in 1841 near where an existing memorial chapel stands today. Igumen Nicholai (Father Nicholas) served as first resident when the Kenai parish was established in 1844. At that time, the chapel became a church but, by 1883, it had deteriorated to the extent that officials decided to build a new one rather than repair the old. Work on the present church was well underway in 1895 after the synod in St. Petersburg provided \$400 for construction.

"Once Upon the Kenai," the source of today's preservation grant as well as chapel repairs in 1991, was published in 1984 with Jetret Petersen as coordinator and Mary Ford as editor. A volunteer committee gathered and processed more than 250 first-person stories and 450 photographs from people who lived on the Kenai Peninsula's west central region at least 30 years ago. Now in its third printing, a few copies of the hard cover,



Holy Assumption Orthodox Church, Kenai

468-page book are still available for \$30 from the Kenai Chamber of Commerce or from the Kenai Historical Society, Box 1348, Kenai, AK 99611.

PRESERVATION WEEK, 1992

May 10-16, 1992 is National Historic Preservation Week. The 1992 theme is "Preservation Brings History to Life." Local preservation groups are urged to celebrate Preservation Week by featuring special events designed to focus attention on the benefits of historic preservation. AAHP will publicize those events in its next newsletter.

During Preservation Week, the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation will again release its list of Alaska's ten most endangered historic properties. This process will get underway in late January/early February when the Projects and Issues Committee will begin soliciting input from AAHP's Board of Directors and Board of Advisors on historic properties throughout the State which are in the greatest danger of being lost.

If you are aware of a National Register property which is endangered and wish to have it considered for AAHP's ten most endangered historic properties list, please submit your suggestion to: Projects and Issues Committee, The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation, Old City Hall, 524 West Fourth Avenue, Suite 203, Anchorage, Alaska 99501.

FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

1991 IN REVIEW

by Rolfe Buzzell, Outgoing AAHP President

1991 marked AAHP's eleventh anniversary and proved to be a busy and challenging year. Significant strides were made in meeting some of AAHP's goals. Highlights included the following:

- **Worked with legislators and local preservation groups to increase public funding for historic preservation in Alaska:**
 1. Advocated for a "Bricks and Mortar" grant program to help individual property owners repair, stabilize or restore historic structures. Although a Bricks and Mortar program was not established in 1991, AAHP laid out much of the groundwork and will continue to pursue this goal in 1992.
 2. Worked to help ensure adequate funding for the State Office of History and Archaeology.
 3. Advocated successfully for State and federal funds for emergency stabilization of critical buildings at the Kennicott site.
- **Inaugurated "Alaska's Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties" list.**

This list will be updated annually. It marks a significant step forward in educating the public about the plight of important buildings and structures in Alaska which are endangered by neglect, development or the elements.
- **Helped celebrate Historic Preservation Week.** The 1991 theme was "Celebrate Your Heritage." AAHP distributed posters and worked with several local groups to organize activities in honor of Historic Preservation Week. In addition, AAHP's education committee organized an exhibit on preservation by Anchorage elementary students in the Shops on the Village Green mall in Anchorage.
- **Supported an initiative to create a new National Park in the Aleutians** focusing on the commemoration of the defense of Alaska during World War II. The AAHP board passed a resolution supporting Congressional establishment of a new National Park which could include portions of Unalaska, Attu and Kiska Islands.
- **Co-hosted (with Anchorage Historic Properties, Inc.), a reception on September 17th at Old City Hall for representatives of local historic preservation commissions from around Alaska.** Representatives of seven local historic preservation commissions were in Anchorage for training sponsored jointly by the National Park Service and the State Office of History and Archaeology.
- **Published four quality newsletters.** For two years in a row, AAHP has attained its goal of publishing four newsletters per year.
- **AAHP's annual picnic**, held in Kenai on August 25, 1991. This is an annual tradition, combining a meeting of AAHP's board of directors with a visit to a community outside Anchorage. After the picnic and board meeting, participants toured historic buildings in the Kenai area.
- **Inaugurated an advisory board** to broaden the input into AAHP's decision making process. The Advisory Board has 15 seats of which 13 are currently filled. Advisory board members were chosen for their expertise and their commitment to the preservation of historic properties in Alaska. Members of the advisory board include:

- Joe Ashby (Sitka)
- Mary Ford (Kenai)
- Bonnie Hahn (Nome)
- Chuck Hawley (Anchorage)
- Wilda Marston (Anchorage)
- Marti Murray (Unalaska)
- Steven Peterson (Anchorage)
- Steven Reeve (Ketchikan)
- Elva Scott (Eagle)
- Barbara Smith (Anchorage)
- Ted Smith (Willow)
- Karen Stanley (Ketchikan)
- George Sullivan (Anchorage)

- **Increased Public Relations.** Activities included a number of news releases, resulting in newspaper and journal articles which have generated greater public awareness of AAHP's activities. The Public Relations Committee made considerable progress this year in designing a logo for AAHP and developing a brochure. You can expect to see tangible results of both of these two ongoing projects in 1992.



MEMBERSHIP APPEAL

1992 billing invoices were mailed in December 1991. The response to date has been very encouraging. Renewal rates are well above those for last year. In addition, many members have chosen to make a contribution over and above the base dues. Thank you for your support.

A reminder to those who have not yet renewed, i.e. if you do not have a "92" after your name on the mailing list. We would appreciate receiving your 1992 dues as soon as possible. AAHP relies heavily on dues to carry out its functions.



AAHP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1992

OFFICERS:

Executive Director:.....Bill Coghill
President:Russ Sackett
Vice President:.....Jerry Strang
Secretary:.....Rolfe Buzzell
Treasurer:.....Frank Norris

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS:

Education:.....Jack Sinclair
Fund Raising:.....Rolfe Buzzell
Legislation:.....Janet McCabe
Membership:.....Bill Coghill
Nominating:.....Jerry Strang
Projects & Issues (acting):.....Russ Sackett
Public Relations:.....Gloria Trueblood
Newsletter:.....Jill Smythe

The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation (AAHP) was founded in 1981 as a private, statewide, non-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation of Alaska's prehistoric and historic resources through education, promotion and advocacy. Preservation of the built environment provides a vital link and visible reminder of the past, emphasizing the continuity and diversity of Alaska.

EAGLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

by Russ Sackett

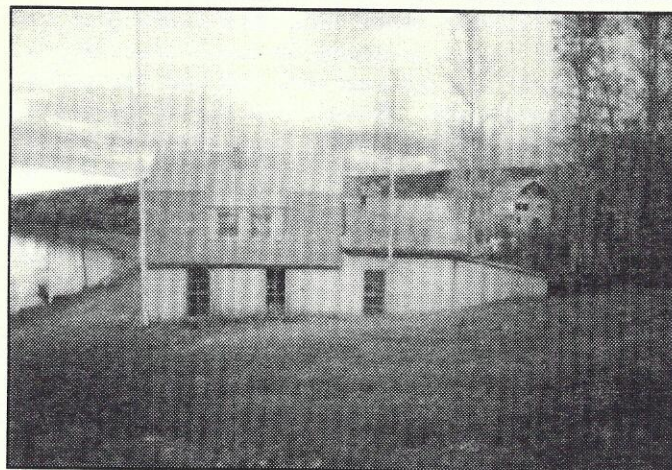
Eagle is a small community on the left bank of the Yukon River, about six miles west of the Canadian border. Traditionally, this area was occupied by the Han, a Northern Athabaskan group. However, the community's modern origins date from 1873 when Moses Mercier, a trader from Fort Yukon, established a trading post on Belle Isle, just offshore from the present town of Eagle.

With the discovery of gold at nearby American Creek in 1894, a small mining camp was established at Eagle. The camp's population grew rapidly as traffic on the Yukon increased and people began filtering through the region because of the 1898 Klondike gold rush. By 1898, the community reportedly had as many as 1,000 residents and a plat for "Eagle City" was drawn up.

In 1899, the U.S. Army established Eagle City Camp as a military reserve and as the site of a customs house for Treasury officials. Fort Egbert was established a year later to help maintain law and order on the frontier. Also in 1900, Judge Wickersham established the first federal court for the Interior with the courthouse located at Eagle. In the following year, Eagle became the first incorporated city in Interior Alaska and, with the establishment of the WAMCATS (Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System), the community became the communications center for all of Alaska.

Eagle's pre-eminence proved to be extremely short-lived as gold discoveries in the Fairbanks area soon drew population away from Eagle. By 1904, all of major gold mining activities in the Interior had shifted to Fairbanks and Judge Wickersham moved his court there. Similarly, Fort Egbert was no longer needed to maintain law and order and it was abandoned by the Army in 1911. In 1925, the WAMCATS was also abandoned and, by 1940, Eagle was close to a ghost town with a population of only 10 persons.

In large part due to its relative inaccessibility, Eagle's



Eagle Historic District

historic fabric has survived essentially intact. In recognition of its historic integrity and its significance in the history of Alaska, Eagle was listed in the National Register for Historic Properties as an historic district in 1970 and, later, was identified as a National Historic Landmark.

Today, some 27 historic buildings make up the Eagle Historic District. Fourteen of these structures were part of the original Fort Egbert. In addition, numerous ruins and archaeological sites (both pre-historic and historic) are found within and are part of the District. Nature, however, has begun to threaten the District's core area.

A combination of groundwater flowing beneath the community into the river and spring ice break-up, has seriously eroded the river bank, threatening the historic buildings lining the Yukon River. The Eagle Historic Society has been successful in acquiring funds to move the Old Customs House (originally an NCO building from Fort Egbert and now a museum) away from the bank. However, the Old Customs House is only one of a number of historic buildings within the District which are threatened by the river.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership runs from January 1 through December 31. Dues are payable by December 31 of preceeding year.

Benefits include subscription to the quarterly AAHP newsletter * workshops & seminars * annual meeting * historic preservation advocacy.

<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$ 10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributor	\$ 50.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$ 15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend	\$ 100.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$ 25.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor	\$ 250.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit	\$ 25.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$ 500.00 & above

(federal, state, and municipal agencies included)

Donations to AAHP are tax deductible, as allowable under IRS regulations.

\$_____ is enclosed. Also, I would be glad to participate in AAHP activities in the following areas:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Legislation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Projects & Issues |

NAME _____ PHONE w. _____ h. _____

ADDRESS _____

Please Return To: The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation
Old City Hall, 524 West fourth Ave., Suite 203
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
Attention: Treasurer

EAGLE HISTORIC DISTRICT (continued)

A Corps of Engineers' study undertaken several years ago recommended that the community be moved away from the river because the costs associated with river bank stabilization were inordinately high. Nevertheless, the city has begun erosion control efforts. To date, these efforts have been centered on the placement of culverts to direct groundwater away from the river bank, plus the placement of vertical logs backed by rock along the bank. However, this work has not been completed. The community proposes to continue these efforts if it is successful in obtaining a Corps of Engineers' permit plus \$40,000 requested from the Legislature.

BUILDING 29, SITKA

by Russ Sackett

Building 29, located in the heart of Sitka, is believed to have been built in the 1850's. This three story, 10,000 square foot log structure, also known as the Tilson Building, probably served as a residence for Russian-American Company employees and is the only remaining Russian-American Company building in Sitka.

Before the St. Michael's Cathedral fire in Sitka in January 1966, a total of 16 buildings remained in North America from the Russian colonial period. Today, there are only four, three of which are in Alaska. Thus, although its facade has changed over the years, Building 29 has exceptional significance as a rare example of a Russian-American colonial structure. This

significance is recognized through the building's designation as a National Historic Landmark.

Few details of Building 29's early history have been verified. However, detailed information on its construction was gained in 1990 when the National Park Service undertook an Historic American Buildings Survey, including the development of detailed architectural drawings.

Today, Building 29 is threatened due to years of commercial use and remodeling efforts. The historic appearance of this structure has been hidden under layers of siding and "improvements." The ground floor of the building is now in commercial use, while the upper stories are used as apartments.



Building 29, Sitka

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