

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received MAR 31 1987  
date entered MAY 6 1987  
~~MAY 7 1987~~

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic St. Philip's Episcopal Church (AHRS SITE NO. PET-315)

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 446 Church Street not for publication

city, town Wrangell vicinity of

state Alaska 99929 code 02 county Wrangell-Petersburg code 280

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Diocese of Alaska, George C. Harris, Bishop

street & number P.O. Box 441

city, town Fairbanks vicinity of state Alaska 99701

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. State of Alaska District Recorder's Office

street & number 415 Main Street

city, town Ketchikan state Alaska 99901

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wrangell Building Survey and Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date April 1986 federal state county  local

depository for survey records Wrangell Historical Society, P.O. Box 1050

city, town Wrangell state Alaska 99929

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Built in 1903, the Pioneer style\* St. Philip's Episcopal Church stands on the crest of a hill east of downtown Wrangell. The single story wood frame building is 50 feet long and 30 feet wide. The church's quiet dignity is defined by 8" drop siding and corner boards painted white. All windows are wood sash, double-hung, two-over-two, with dark brown sashes and trim. The structure has a "T" shaped floor plan and is capped by a cross gable roof and bell tower. The front facade, located in the cross bar of the "T", is divided into three bays. The center bay contains a four-cornered arch with a recessed double door entrance. Above this bay is a gabled pediment with fish scale shingles in the tympanum; it is topped with a simple wooden cross on the ridge line. The first and third bays contain single windows. The octagonal bell tower, with arched openings in the white barrel and a tall, shingled cap, is perched on the intersecting hip and ridge lines of the main roof.

The building has been altered. Originally, a wooden stairway was located perpendicular to the front entrance. In 1934, stairs set parallel to the entrance replaced the original stairway. (Wrangell Sentinel, May 4, 1934). In February, 1939, three arched stained glass windows were added to the rear gable. The central window depicts Jesus ascending and is dedicated to The Reverend H.P. Corser. The other two windows depict angels and are dedicated to members of a prominent local family. In 1949 composite asphalt shingles replaced the original red cedar shingled roof. More recently, a poured concrete foundation replaced the original wood foundation.

The interior of the church has been modified. The original sanctuary consisted of a raised platform at the east end of the church fronted by an arched apse that echoes the arched entrance. Tongue and groove wainscoting topped by a formal pattern wallpaper covered the walls. The same tongue and groove panelling covered the ceiling. The sanctuary featured a marble altar of locally quarried stone, sanctuary furniture and rails built of locally grown yellow cedar, and tongue and groove panelling on the arched apse.

The interior was remodeled in the mid-1950s. The walls are presently covered with varnished plywood wainscoting, topped by celotex panels painted white. The original wall finish is in place beneath the new wall covering, however. The shape of the interior room has not been changed, the ceilings retain the tongue and groove panelling, the windows are unaltered, and the sanctuary (with its distinctive rails, altar, and arched ceiling) remains unchanged.

St. Philip's Episcopal Church has not lost its architectural integrity. The change of stairs in 1934 and addition of arched windows in 1939 were executed many years ago and contribute to the character of the building. The asphalt shingle roof that replaced the original red cedar shingle roof in 1949 retains enough of the color, texture, shape, and character of the original and does not create a significant exterior modification. The new roof provides protection against fire; both the roof and new foundation help preserve the remaining historic fabric. The 1950s remodeling did slightly affect the way the interior reads, architecturally. This modification does not, however, affect the majority of the features that illustrate the

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1934	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1903 - 1934

**Builder/Architect** Oscar Carlson and H.D. Campbell

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

St. Philip's Episcopal Church is historically significant for its association with Reverend Harry P. Corser, early twentieth century civil rights activist, educator, and author. Built as a statement of fraternity and equality in 1903, the church reflects Corser's stand against discrimination. He further influenced Wrangell society by promoting education for both Native and non-Native boys. His work as an author helped preserve vanishing Tlingit Indian traditions. Although a religious property, the church is the only building that remains to mark Corser's life.

Before the town of Wrangell was established, a Tlingit Indian village stood at the site. In 1834 Russian and British trading companies opened fur trading posts near the Indian village. The non-Native population increased after the U.S. Army built a fort at the site in 1867 and the settlement became a supply point for gold seekers in the later nineteenth century. During the same period, fishing and timber industries began operations nearby and created a stable economic base for the community. By the turn of the twentieth century, the trading post/supply center had grown into a small town. The City of Wrangell incorporated in 1903.

The town's population during the first decade of the twentieth century totaled roughly 800 people, including both Natives and non-Natives. Many early prominent non-Native businessmen had married Indian women; however, the Native and non-Native communities remained separate. The Natives occupied the south end of town, went to a separate school, and had limited opportunities to participate in Wrangell's economic life.

Harry P. Corser influenced the social history of Wrangell when he boldly defied convention by supporting the rights of Natives to worship with the non-Native community. His defiance of convention and open admiration of Native culture influenced the non-Native community, an influence illustrated by the election of a Native leader to the City Council in 1904.

In 1899, Corser arrived at Wrangell as the Presbyterian minister for the First Presbyterian Church. Organized in August, 1879, the congregation was principally composed of Tlingit Indians. The non-Native Presbyterian population created a separate church, the Second Presbyterian Church, in 1898. (Stikeen River Journal, April 2, 1898). Corser ministered to both churches until 1903. That year, Corser led a faction composed primarily of Indian church members in rebellion against the church's discriminatory policy. They organized a new religious group called the Peoples' Church. They constructed a church on donated land with donated labor and materials that was to become St. Philip's Episcopal Church.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Stikine River Journal, 1898-1899; Alaska Sentinel, 1903-1909; Wrangell Sentinel, 1909-1950; "Under God, a Golden Past for a Golden Future", in files of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Wrangell, Alaska; Who's Who in America 1938-1939, Vol. 2 (Chicago 1938).

# 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Petersburg (B-2)

Quadrangle scale 1:63 360

### UTM References

A 

1018	661141610	6126116000
Zone	Easting	Northing

B 

Zone	Easting	Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 11, Block 20, USS 1119 Wrangell Townsite according to the official plat thereof approved by Commissioner of General Land Office, September 12, 1917.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kathryn Cohen

organization Phoenix Associates date July 18, 1986

street & number P.O. Box 501 telephone N/A

city or town Wrangell state Alaska 99929

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Judith E. Butler

title State Historic Preservation Officer date Mar 25, 1987

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for William B. Bushong date 5/6/87  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

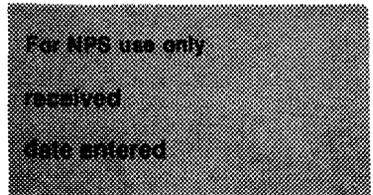
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(AHRS No. PET-315)

Continuation sheet St. Philip's Episcopal Church Item number 6

Page 2 of 2



Title: Alaska Heritage Resources Survey  
Date: October 13, 1986 x state  
Depository: Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation  
Office of History and Archaeology  
P.O. Box 107001  
Anchorage, Alaska 99510-7001

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Continuation sheet St. Philip's Episcopal Church Item number 7

Page 2 of 2

Pioneer style with regard to the room's form, its spatial relationships, overall proportion, and pattern of windows and doors.

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\* Pioneer style was defined by architect Janet Matheson during her historic building surveys of Fairbanks and Ketchikan. (Janet Matheson, Fairbanks: A City Historic Building Survey, 1978; Ketchikan Gateway Borough, Ketchikan A City Historic Properties Survey, Volume II, 1984.) Pioneer style buildings are one and a half stories high and have a long, narrow footprint. Other features include a gable roof, symmetrical double-hung windows, and horizontal shiplap siding with corner boards. This style structure replaced the log cabin as the common building style when milled lumber became available.

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Continuation sheet St. Philip's Episcopal Church Item number 8

Page 2 of 2

The Presbyterian Church attempted to bring the strayed faction back into the fold. In an open letter from Presbyterian Rev. James Kirk to Rev. H.P. Corser, Kirk offered to give the Natives the old Presbyterian Church in exchange for the new Peoples' Church which would be used by the non-Native congregation including "persons of mixed blood, who speak the English language. . ." (Alaska Sentinel, February 23, 1905). The trustees of the Peoples' Church rejected Kirk's offer. They wrote: "The Peoples' Church represents, to a large extent, the money and labor of the Natives, having been started by them with the understanding that it was to be their church, and they are both willing and pleased that the White people shall worship with them, as they have always done heretofore. . ." (Alaska Sentinel, April 27, 1905).

The church did not languish long without organized religious affiliation. In August of that year the Protestant Episcopal Church led by Bishop Peter Trimble Rowe took the Peoples' Church under its "protecting wing" and the church became St. Philip's Episcopal Church (Alaska Sentinel, August 24, 1905). In 1907, Corser was ordained an Episcopal priest. He continued to serve the church until he retired in 1934.

Corser, a former teacher, also supported education at Wrangell. He served as a member of the Wrangell School Board. In 1907 he started a free night school in the church building. He supported the construction of St. Philip's Hall. Completed in 1910, the hall housed a gymnasium and reading room (Wrangell Sentinel, January 27, 1910). Corser provided the first educational opportunity for Native boys in Wrangell beyond the eighth grade when he began St. Philip's Academy, open to both Native and non-Native boys, in the reading room of St. Philip's Hall.

As an author, Corser worked to record Native oral traditions. His lectures and writings on the Tlingit and Haida brought him national attention. The American Archaeological Institute asked him to become a member in 1929. He authored a number of books on southeast Alaska Natives including The Totem Lore of Alaska (fourth edition, 1921), Through the Ten Thousand Islands (1929), Totem Lore and the Land of the Totem (tenth edition, 1932). Corser was an official lecturer for the Pacific Steamship Company. He also wrote numerous magazine articles promoting Wrangell, and a number of plays and short stories for boys.