

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

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

**1. Name**

historic Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel

and or common St. Michael Cathedral

**2. Location**

street & number Lincoln and Maksoutoff Streets      not for publication

city, town Sitka      vicinity of

state Alaska code 02 county Sitka Division code 220

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name Orthodox Church in America

c/o Diocese of Sitka and Alaska

street & number Box 697

city, town Sitka      vicinity of state Alaska

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Borough Recorder

street & number City and Borough of Sitka

city, town Sitka, state Alaska

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title See Continuation Sheet has this property been determined eligible?   X   yes      no

date      federal      state      county      local

depository for survey records

city, town      state

# 7. Description

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

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

The Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel (commonly known as St. Michael's Cathedral) is in the center of the business district of Sitka, Alaska, the town which was the capital of Russian America from 1808 to 1867. Sitka is on the southwestern coast of Baranof Island in the Alexander Archipelago of Southeastern Alaska and is today a community of 8,000. The Cathedral stands at the junction of Lincoln and Maksutoff Streets, the former being a through-street, which divides and flows around the cathedral, while the latter dead-ends at the cathedral. The site is surrounded closely on all sides by the activities of the small town; a Lutheran church, an apartment house, and small businesses are across one street or the other from the cathedral. The visual appearance of the cathedral in respect to its surroundings has changed little in over 100 years. Its green domes and golden crosses dominate the skyline today as in the past, while the life of the community flows around it (Figures 1-6).

The present cathedral is a reconstruction of the original building which burned to the ground in January 1966. The first structure was built between 1844 and 1848 and had had relatively little modification or renovation in 118 years. At the time it burned, it was the oldest church structure from the Russian era in Alaska. The initial cathedral was built of native logs with clapboard siding. The roofs, with the exceptions of the domes which were metal, were of wood shingle and later replaced with asphalt shingles. The architect was the first Orthodox Bishop of Alaska, Innocent (Ioann Veniaminov) (Figure 7).

After the cathedral was destroyed in 1966, it was reconstructed using drawings made in 1961 by the Historic American Buildings Survey. The object of the reconstruction was to create a reproduction of the original structure, while incorporating modern fire-resistant materials. The building today is constructed of concrete and steel walls with vinyl siding recreating the original texture, with asphalt roof shingles and copper roofing on the domes. As the HABS drawings with measurements are available, and the cathedral is built to these specifications, only a general description will be given of the exterior and interior design, the emphasis here being on the interior furnishings, which will be described in detail (see HABS drawings, Nos. AK-1).

The Cathedral of the Archangel Michael is constructed in the form of a Greek cross with a belltower, with the exterior elevations expressing interior spaces. The design of the church is described by one authority as "neither Byzantine nor Gothic. One often encounters churches of this style in St. Petersburg in Russia. It originated at the end of the last (18th) and beginning of the present (19th) centuries."<sup>1</sup> The favored architects of this

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" 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-	<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** 1844-48/1972-76      **Builder/Architect** Bishop Innocent (Veniaminov)/  
Sergei Padukov

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Significance

The Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel in Sitka, Alaska, is the principal representative of Russian cultural influence in the 19th century in North America. Sitka was the capital of Russian America from 1808, and after 1867, the capital of Alaska until 1906. From 1840 to 1872, Sitka was the seat of an Orthodox diocese which governed all of North America, and thereafter, it continued as the seat of the diocese of Alaska. The cathedral was at the geographical center of the community and was also its educational and religious hub. From this post the church reached thousands of Native Alaskans, having a profound cultural impact, offering them not only a new religion and way of life, but also providing them with education, health care, and often protection against civil authorities. The cathedral was by the far the largest and most imposing religious edifice in Alaska until well into the 20th century. It was, as well, an excellent example of Russian church architecture, incorporating classic Russian features of the cruciform design with elements of the Italian Rococo, popular in Russia in the early 19th century. Although the present cathedral is a reconstruction of the original, it has lost none of its significance. Nearly all of the ikons and religious artifacts, many donated by wealthy Russians and Imperial government officials in the early 19th century, were saved from the fire which destroyed the cathedral in 1966 and have been replaced in the new building. The structure itself has been rebuilt on the original site according to measured drawings of the Historical American Buildings Survey. The building, although varying from the original in use of fire-resistant materials and some interior details, is a very close reproduction. The cathedral is also intimately identified with its designer and first officiant, the first Bishop of Alaska, Innocent, renowned not only for his religious writings, but also for works on the ethnography of Alaska, linguistics, and history, and as a church designer. In 1977, Innocent was declared a saint by the Orthodox Christian church. Under the bishop's aegis, the cathedral was closely associated with a Seminary and a school, both of which operated for many years. These were housed in the bishop's residence, the Russian Bishop's House, which is now a National Historic Landmark within the Sitka National Historical Park. The cathedral is still in use as a house of worship and is still the seat of the Orthodox Bishop of Sitka and Alaska, thus providing a continuing link with America's Russian heritage.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 0.16 acres

Quadrangle name Sitka (A-5), Alaska

Quadrangle scale 1:63,360

### UTM References

A 

0	8	4	7	9	8	3	0	6	3	2	2	7	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Page.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Barbara Sweetland Smith

organization National Park Service date 11/29/85

street & number 2525 Gambell Street telephone 907/261-2632

city or town Anchorage state Alaska

# 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

title date

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

date 4/29/86

Keeper of the National Register

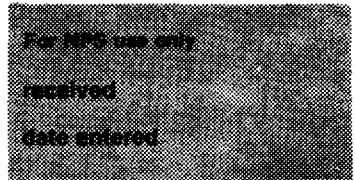
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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ITEM 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Title: Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (#SIT-010)  
Date: June 13, 1962 State X  
Depository for  
Survey Records: Office of History & Archeology  
State Division of Parks  
Pouch 7001 (99510) or 3601 "C" Street  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Title: Historic American Buildings Survey (AK-1)  
Depository: Library of Congress  
Washington, D. C.  
Date: 1962 Federal X

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era of the European Enlightenment in Russia were two Italians, Count Bartholomew Rastrelli and his son, who designed such Rococco edifices as the Winter Palace and the Smolny Institute. The Cathedral, while a simple wooden building, bears the hallmarks of the Rastrelli touch, that is, a large dome with interior expression, affixed on a typical Russian village church with chapel wings. The origin of this concept in Alaska may be seen in drawings of another church designed by Bishop Innocent, the Church of the Holy Ascension, built at Unalaska in the Aleutian Islands in 1825. There, too, the church had two domes, one reflecting the inner space of the center of the cross (Figure 8).

The cathedral is 67 feet in facade by 96 feet 8 inches in depth. It is painted light blue-grey, with white trim. In the center of the western facade is a 40 foot-one inch belltower topped by a cupola with eight arched openings and a bell in each, a needle-like dome and a three-bar Orthodox cross. A balustrade encircles the cupola. On the top half of the tower all of the windows are false. Between two 15-light false windows on the north, south, and west elevations is a round clock with Roman numerals and a pediment. The entrance to the cathedral is through central double doors in the lower floor of the belltower into the vestibule or narthex. The nave is directly east of the narthex. Its exterior walls extend west of the two chapels which form the arms of the cruciform plan. The dome is octagonal, each side having a window. An eight-sided cupola with an onion-shaped dome is atop the structural dome. On top of the decorative onion dome is a three-bar cross. The apse is the eastern-most section of the cathedral and exactly duplicates the exterior walls of the nave in dimension. Two chapels extend from the north and south sides of the nave and are identical in measurements. In both the north and south elevations there is a double door, neither of which is in use. The public areas of the cathedral are well-lighted by the windows in the dome, two large windows in each chapel and a window on the north and south walls of the nave. There are, in addition, a number of false windows decorating the exterior elevations (Figures 10-15).

The interior of the cathedral is similar in design, for the most part, to the original, but there are a few significant variations. The cruciform plan of the interior is immediately apparent as one enters the doors from the west, as it would have been prior to 1966 (Figures 16-23). The walls and ceiling are covered in a rough natural-colored sail-cloth, as was the original, although in the prototype the cloth was painted blue.<sup>2</sup> The ceiling over the western portion of the nave is horizontal and also covered with natural-colored sailcloth. This gives way over the center to an open dome which covers the middle of the naves and is centered over the Bishop's Throne. In the original church this dome was supported by eight columns; in

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the present structure there are four columns. Now the columns are of steel and concrete, covered by sail-cloth (Figure 24); they formerly were of wood painted to look like marble (Figures 25, 26).

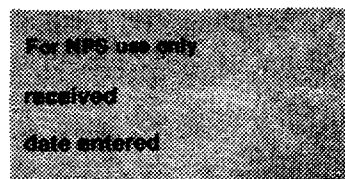
It is the presence of a remarkable collection of Russian religious art, encompassing the entire epoch of the Russian presence in America that distinguishes this cathedral. Works of extraordinary beauty are on the ikon screens which divide the nave and the chapels from the altars, and because this is still an active church, several of the cathedral's most valuable ikons, in terms of age and quality of workmanship, are hung on the walls. Many additional ikons which once were displayed on the walls of the chapels or in the sanctuaries are now protected in five sealed cases. All of these ikons were preserved when the original cathedral burned.

In the center of the nave on a raised dais is a backless cushioned seat which is the Bishop's Throne, designating this as the ruling cathedral of the diocese. On the floor in front of the throne is an elaborately embroidered rug or "orlets" upon which the bishop stands during divine services. This item and a companion orlets in front of the altar behind the ikonostasis are associated with the cathedral from its earliest days.<sup>3</sup>

The ikonostasis in the main sanctuary is dedicated to the Archangel (or St.) Michael. The framework is a reconstruction, while the Deacon's Doors, the Royal Doors, and all but one of the ikons are original. The Italian Rococco design of the framework is in marked contrast to the simple lines of the exterior and interior walls of the cathedral (Figures 27, 28). The screen is of wood, painted white with lavish gold trim along the margins of the screen and around the ikons, and is a copy of the original, a fragment having been saved from the fire. There are twelve ikons on this screen, six large ones on the screen itself and six on the Royal Doors in its center. All are from the original building. Both the ikon of Christ the Savior to the right of the doors and of the Virgin to the left are partially embellished by a silver riza, skillfully carved to render the draperies of the figures' clothing. There is little known about the origin of these ikons, except that they are of the 18th- and 19th-century naturalistic style of ikonography popular in Russia at the time the cathedral was built. They, as all of the six large ikons on the screen, are built into the wooden frame and each is surrounded by an elaborate gilt frame. Also of note on the ikonostasis are the ikons of the Archangel Michael on the far right (Figure 29) and of St. Nicholas on the far left (Figure 30). Both of these figures are also draped in silver robes. The Royal Doors in the center of the ikonostasis are ornately carved in silver, covered with gold paint. The six

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ikons in the door are carved in relief in silver and represent the four evangelists on the four corners while the Annunciation and the Theotokos (Mother of God) are in the middle tier. It is reported that "For the twelve ikons which adorn the entire screen, over fifty pounds of silver were used, of the aggregate value of no less than \$6,000.00."<sup>4</sup> All of these ikons and the Royal Doors were in the original church and have been recently restored (compare Figures 31, 32).

On the walls of the dome and of the chapels are a number of large paintings of fine quality which are representative of western religious art (Figures 33, 34). They depict scenes from the Old and New Testament, and according to one authority, were presented to the cathedral by Count Victor Kochubei and/or Countess Anna Orlova, closely identified with both Tsars Alexander I (1800-1825) and Nicholas I (1825-1855).

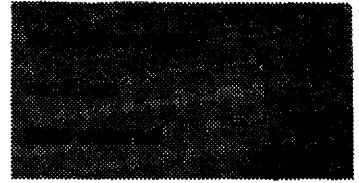
The ikon screens of both side chapels are in reality walls which project several feet into the chapel interiors, with central double doors and ikons hung on either side (Figures 35, 36). The chapel on the north is dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan. On the left side of the Royal Doors, leading to the chapel's sanctuary and altar, is an ikon of the Virgin of Kazan (Figures 37-39). It is popularly known as "the Sitka Madonna" and is frequently on tour throughout the United States and Europe. This ikon has a finely carved silver riza with gold highlights covering all but the faces of the Virgin and Child and the latter's right hand. This ikon has been attributed to a famous Russian portrait artist, Vladimir Lukich Borovikovsky (1758-1826), who was a favorite of Empress Catherine II (the Great). Also by Borovikovsky is an ikon to the right of the chapel doors of Christ Pantocrator, or Christ the Judge (Figure 40). It too has a riza of silver and gilt which drapes the figure, and is the same size as the Sitka Madonna. The two are clearly a pair, the intricate working of the riza as well as the haloes being the same.

The chapel on the south was dedicated originally to St. John the Baptist and Prince Alexander Nevsky. Following the cathedral's reconstruction, this chapel was dedicated in 1978 to honor the builder of the cathedral, Bishop Innocent, who in 1977 had been declared a saint by the Orthodox Church. Hence, the chapel once known as the Chapel of the Precursor (St. John the Baptist) is today the Chapel of St. Innocent. Its "ikon screen" duplicates the pattern of the other chapel, being a wall with double doors and ikons hung on either side. Above the door is an ikon of the Last Supper with a riza artfully carved to form the bodies of Christ and His disciples with silver rays forming haloes around each figure (Figures 41-43).



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There are five display cases containing some of the notable treasures of the cathedral, two in each chapel and one in the nave (see drawing of interior and Figures 44-46). The lists of case contents which follow do not, however, include every item in the cases, but those about which information is available or positive identification has been made.

Case One (in the north chapel, Figure 47):

The Festival Ikon of St. Michael, with a riza stamped 1815, is oil on canvas. There is a central panel of the Archangel Michael with a snaxis (gathering) of angels and 24 surrounding scenes, twelve representing the major feasts of the church calendar and twelve being scenes depicting the miracles attributed to the Archangel. The scenes are depicted in the neoclassical style. Repousee silver covers much of the surface, each scene being well defined in relief.

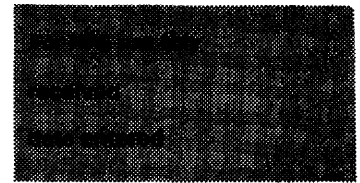
A large Gospel with silver detailing and a chalice of silver. These are a set which were taken to Fort Ross, the Russian colony in California, in 1816 and brought to Sitka in 1841, when the Russians sold their possessions there to John Sutter. The Gospel has a red velvet binding. The silver plaques on the corners are stamped 1814, with the inspection stamp of Moscow. There is a central scene of the Resurrection with the evangelists represented on the four corners. St. Luke is missing, and the plaque has been replaced by a plain metal corner. It is inscribed to the church by the Russian Imperial Chancellor Nicholas Rumiantsev. The Gospel itself bears the date of publication of 1809.

Two silver chalices, one dated 1819 and another, 1821. The former has four miniatures on its base and cup; those on the cup are painted on mother-of-pearl, while those on the base are painted on silver. This distinctive piece, with filigree detailing, is a companion to a Gospel in Case 5 (below) and a crucifix in Case 3.

A pair of wedding crowns used in Orthodox marriage ceremonies. They are of silver and gilt and date from 1866. Each has four oval porcelain enamel medallions.

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A chalice cover which was once used in the Chapel of the Annunciation in the Bishop's Residence. It is embroidered with pure gold thread.

Richly embroidered vestments also are in this case.

**Case Two (in the north chapel, Figure 48):**

The oldest ikon in the cathedral's collection. This is an ikon of the Holy Trinity, which originally hung on the wall of the south chapel across the cathedral. This ikon is in the Byzantine style.

Another early ikon, the Virgin of the Sign, also in the Byzantine style.

An ikon of the Annunciation rendered entirely in ivory.

**Case Three (in the front left of the nave, Figure 49):**

Items associated with the designer and builder of the cathedral who was also the first Orthodox Bishop of Alaska, Bishop Innocent (Veniaminov), including:

A crucifix inlaid with pearl, which was presented to Bishop Innocent upon his consecration as bishop in 1840.

A Gospel printed in 1759 which was donated to Bishop Innocent in 1846 by the Archimandrite of Holy Trinity and St. Sergius Monastery in Russia.

A Gospel bound entirely in silver, in Aleut, translated by Bishop Innocent himself using the alphabet which he created. It was originally completed in 1828 and published in 1840.

Bishop Innocent's miter (Figure 50).

An embroidered communion set for the sick.

A heavy silver crucifix, made in 1824 and decorated with six cloisonne miniatures.

A chalice cover embroidered in silk thread.

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Case Four (in the south chapel, Figure 50):

A scale-model 13-inch miniature of the cathedral made of silver with gilt overlay. The domes and the cupola of the bell-tower are of cloisonne. There are three oval porcelain enamel plaques on the bell tower representing the Sitka Madonna, St. Michael the Archangel, and Bishop Innocent of Irkutsk (not to be confused with Bishop Innocent of Alaska). This exquisite tabernacle which, before the fire, was used to carry communion to the sick, was made in Russia and donated to the cathedral by its St. Nicholas Brotherhood in 1906.

An ikon, almost entirely covered by a silver riza, of Sts. Zosimas and Sabbatius. It bears the date 1843 and an inscription indicating that the ikon was presented to the cathedral by the crew and passengers of the ship "Heir Alexander" in gratitude for their survival through a severe storm in 1842. A companion of this ikon, presented by one George Chernik, is in an adjoining case and is known as "The Protection of the Virgin" (see below).

A Gospel, weighing some 25 pounds and bound entirely in silver with repousee scenes of the Resurrection (on the front) and the Nativity (on the back). This Gospel originally stood on the altar of the main sanctuary. It is part of a set with a Chalice and Crucifix which both bear the dates 1819; these companion pieces, however, are in other cases (see Case 1 and Case 3 above).

Case Five (in the south chapel, Figure 52):

An ikon of Our Lady, Joy of the Afflicted, which bears the date 1763. It is of tempera on wood with a silver gilt frame and applied pearls, beads and semi-precious stones decorating the robes of the Virgin. This ikon was in the Chapel of Our Lady of Kazan prior to the fire.

An ikon of the Protection of the Virgin, which is the companion to the ikon of Saints Zosimas and Sabbatius, noted above. It bears an inscription commemorating a perilous escape at sea in 1842 and the riza is stamped "1843." Its elaborately carved riza covers all but the faces of the figures.

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An ikon of Our Lady of Vladimir with the date 1847 stamped on the silver gilt riza. The haloes of the Virgin and Child are of semi-precious stones.

An ikon of the Appearance of the Virgin to St. Sergius of Radonezh, which is tempera on wood with a silver gilt riza. The date is illegible, but the Moscow inspection seal has been dated ca. 1780.

An ikon of the Image of Christ Not Made by Hand, of tempera on wood with a silver riza and a silver gilt halo. The riza bears the date 1826.

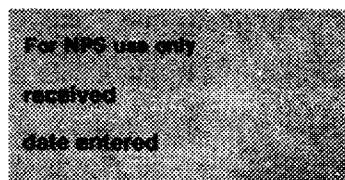
An ikon of St. Nicholas, oil on wood, with silver riza and silver gilt halo. The date on the riza is 1825. The ikon is painted in the naturalistic Western style.

An ikon of St. John the Baptist, an ikon believed to be from the 17th century, with a silver riza of later origin.

The above items do not exhaust the treasures of the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel. On the walls and behind the ikonostasis within the three sanctuaries are other ikons, church utensils, and furnishings which have been identified with Orthodox worship in Alaska from the middle of the 19th Century when the diocese was created and the cathedral built (Figures 53-37). They are displayed in a manner consistent with the atmosphere of the cathedral, which is still a house of worship.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Archimandrite Anatolii (Kamenskii), "Sitka. Istoricheskko-statisticheskoe opisaniie sitkhinskago pravoslavnago prikhoda [Sitka. An Historical-Statistical Sketch of the Sitka Orthodox Parish]," Russian Orthodox American Messenger, II (1898), 12:366.
2. Bishop Gregory (Afonsky), ed., "St. Michael's Cathedral: Its History and Restoration of Icons," (Sitka, Alaska: n.d.), p. 5.
3. Rev. A.P. Kashevaroff, "St. Michael's Cathedral, Sitka, Alaska," (Juneau, Alaska: Empire Printing Co., n.d.), [8].
4. Hieromonk Antonii (Dashkevich), "The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Archangel Michael at Sitka," Russian Orthodox American Messenger, III (1899), 10:284.

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History

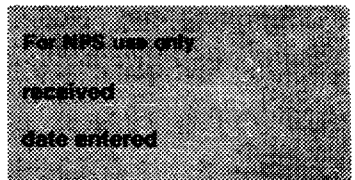
In 1808, the Chief Manager of the Russian American Company, Alexander Baranov, moved his main office from Kodiak to the newly fortified site of New Archangel (Novo-Arkhangel'sk) in Southeast Alaska. The town, which came to be called Sitka after the Russians left America, thus became the administrative center of Russia's possessions not only in Alaska but also in California. In 1867 Russia sold her possessions in Alaska to the United States. Sitka continued as the administrative center of the region, and when a Territorial Government was formed, it became the capital. It was the seat of government and principal town of Alaska until 1906, when the capital was moved to the new boom town of Juneau.

From the first, Alexander Baranov envisioned Sitka as more than just another fortified post. Although he had shown little interest in the Orthodox Mission at Kodiak and had often been at odds with its leadership, he set about equipping the new town with a church suited to the grand role he foresaw for his capital. He requested that the finest of church furnishings be sent to Sitka from Russia for use in the chapel which one of his employees had erected. He also asked for a priest. In 1813, a quantity of religious treasures destined for Sitka were lost when the Russian ship "Neva" sank off the coast of Baranoff Island, not far from Sitka. A number of items were salvaged from the wreckage, however, most notably a large silver-covered ikon of the patron saint of the chapel, St. Michael the Archangel.<sup>1</sup> Three years later, in 1816, Fr. Alexander Sokolov arrived from Russia to become Sitka's first priest; he brought with him the Festival Ikon of St. Michael.<sup>2</sup> Both of these ikons of St. Michael are still part of the interior furnishings of the present-day reconstructed cathedral, the silver-covered ikon being on the right side of the main ikonostasis and the Festal Ikon of St. Michael in a display case in the Chapel of Our Lady of Kazan (Case 1). In 1834, the Russian American Company replaced the old and decrepit chapel-church with a new one, also dedicated to St. Michael.

The construction of the new church coincided with the arrival in Sitka of a new priest, Fr. Ioann Veniaminov. This Siberian-born priest had had experience in Alaska, having served for ten years at Unalaska, where he had designed and built a two-domed church, introduced an alphabet and literacy to the Aleuts, founded a school, and prepared extensive analyses of Aleut customs. In New Archangel he conducted the same kind of broadly-conceived evangelizing. The Tlingit Indians of Southeast Alaska had been resistant to Christian missions, but Father Veniaminov won the confidence of the Tlingit

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chiefs by introducing smallpox vaccine to them in 1836 and saving many lives. He also developed a Tlingit alphabet and vocabulary, thereby encouraging literacy. In 1840, the Russian Holy Synod consecrated Fr. Ioann as Bishop Innocent, the first Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands (that is, Alaska). New Archangel was designated as the seat of a diocese which spanned the Pacific, embracing all of Russia's eastern-most territories. In 1858 Innocent became an Archbishop retaining jurisdiction over Alaska but with his headquarters in Siberia. Innocent became the head of the church in Russia when, in 1868, he was named Metropolitan of Moscow. In 1977 the Orthodox Christian Church declared him a saint. Innocent's career in Alaska embraced architecture, linguistics, ethnography, history, public health, education, as well as ecclesiastical administration. His books on Aleut ethnography are still considered authoritative; the cathedral which he designed was considered the finest representative of Russian church architecture in North America; the schools which he founded operated well into the 20th century, educating scores of Native Alaskans for participation in public life. The instructions which he gave the Russian missionaries serving in his diocese were extremely tolerant of Native customs and helped to ease the meeting of western and Native cultures.

In his first year as Bishop at New Archangel Innocent began to design a cathedral for the new diocese. Three years later, in 1844, the cornerstone was laid and on November 20, 1848, the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel was dedicated. It was constructed with funds provided by the Russian-American Company. The bells were forged in the local foundries, and Bishop Innocent himself built the clock which was placed in the belltower.

From the outset and until the present day, St. Michael's Cathedral has served as the hub of an educational and cultural center which influenced lives as far away as Russian Mission on the Yukon River and Atka in the Aleutian Islands. In 1841, Bishop Innocent founded a Seminary, attached to the Cathedral. This institution offered a rigorous curriculum of higher education, designed primarily for Natives destined to serve the church in Alaska, but it also provided the education that gained many Natives and creoles (those of Russian and Native parentage) access to upper-rank employment with the Russian-American Company.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Seminary, the Bishop started a school for elementary and secondary education; orphanages were often associated with these schools. These establishments functioned throughout the bishop's term in Alaska and sporadically thereafter. Not until 1929 were the school and orphanage permanently closed. The seminary transferred to Siberia when Bishop Innocent moved there as Archbishop, but re-opened again in 1906 and functioned for several years thereafter. The students of these schools came from all over Alaska; most returned to their home communities to take up leadership positions

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there, but many went on to advanced work in Russia and were posted to churches outside Alaska, elsewhere in North America. The schools were housed in the bishop's residence, which is now known as The Bishop's House, or the Russian Orphanage, and is a National Historic Landmark currently being restored by the National Park Service (Figure 58).

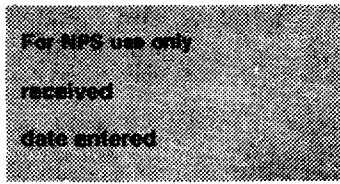
The Orthodox Church in Alaska went into a period of decline after Bishop Innocent and particularly after the see was removed to San Francisco in 1872. For thirty years, the Bishop of Alaska lived outside Alaska and only visited the northern parishes on occasion. Many of the treasures of the cathedral were taken to San Francisco. But in 1904, Alaska was made a vicariate and received its own bishop for the first time since 1872. For a period of 20 years, that is until the Soviet government in Russia cut off all funds for the American Orthodox church, there was a revival of diocesan life and new forms of activity. In addition to the school-orphanage and seminary which were re-opened, a Temperance Society and Brotherhood were formed within the Cathedral. The latter, with the dean of the cathedral always as president, promoted health by financially supporting literacy through a program of translations and teaching the membership to read. The Brotherhood, which included women members, also was responsible for a number of gifts to the cathedral, most notably an exquisite golden miniature which was used to carry communion to the sick.<sup>4</sup> This organization also proved vital in maintaining the cathedral throughout the many lean years after Russian funds were cut off and in promoting projects aimed at repair and restoration of the project; in 1909, the Brotherhood, for example, financed another scale-model replica of the cathedral, this designed for display at the Smithsonian Exposition in San Francisco (Figures 59 and 60). The Temperance Society was somewhat older than the Brotherhood, being formed in 1896, and included non-Orthodox members, both male and female. It was active for several decades in promoting sobriety and producing educational literature on the dangers of alcoholism. Under the leadership of the cathedral deans and, subsequently, the resident bishops, similar brotherhoods and societies were formed in other parishes, providing education, health, and charitable support for many communities.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the support from its Brotherhood, the Cathedral of St. Michael received the patronage of many wealthy Russians and grateful parishioners. Until the North American Orthodox see was moved to San Francisco, the Sitka Cathedral was the only Orthodox Cathedral in North America. And, thereafter, the cathedral and its diocese were recipients of gifts through the Russian Imperial Mission Society, founded by Metropolitan Innocent, the same who had been the first bishop in America. Some gifts were from the humble workers of the Russian-American Company; most notable among these is the icon of Our Lady of Kazan, or the Sitka Modonna.<sup>6</sup> Other gifts were from



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the exalted ranks of the nobility, such as Prince Kochubei and Countess Orlova, associates of the Emperors Alexander I and Nicholas I.<sup>7</sup> Survivors of shipwrecks presented the cathedral with works of art in gratitude.<sup>8</sup> The Orthodox hierarchy in Russia looked fondly on the fledgling mission and supplied the cathedral on the far reaches of empire with costly utensils and elegant books. This rich collection of art and artifact accumulated through 120 years.

The cathedral structure itself influenced church life elsewhere in Alaska. The architectural style of the cathedral was copied at Russian Mission on the Yukon River. In 1894, the priest there, Zakharii Bel'kov, who had spent several years in Sitka as a young man, designed and built a domed church which closely resembled the Sitka Cathedral. This church graced the shores of the Yukon until 1930 (Figure 61). The present Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross on the same site is designed to recall the features of that original "cathedral on the Yukon," and is, therefore, an echo of the Sitka cathedral.<sup>9</sup>

In 1962, St. Michael Cathedral was named a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. At the time of its nomination it was the oldest surviving church of the Russian era in Alaska and, therefore, in all of North America. Its exceptional architecture, its identification with Bishop (Saint) Innocent, its artistic treasures representing the best of the Russian ecclesiastical art in North America -- all were mentioned as justification for the honor of NHL status.

On Sunday, January 2, 1966, tragedy struck. A fire which destroyed much of downtown Sitka, also razed the cathedral (Figure 62). Residents and parishioners were able to save nearly all of the cathedral's artistic and religious treasures, including the Royal Doors in the center of the ikonostasis and the chandelier. Of the most valuable or revered items, only the bells, hand-wrought in Sitka, the large ikon of the Last Supper above the Royal Doors, and the clock in the bell-tower, constructed by hand by Bishop Innocent, were lost. Almost immediately state government and community leaders began an ecumenical and secular campaign to rebuild the cathedral. Measured drawings made by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1961 were used in the reconstruction by the project architect, Sergei Padukov of Toms River, New Jersey, and an extensive project to restore the ikons was undertaken.<sup>10</sup> Although the building today appears to be a faithful reconstruction of the original, there are some variations from the first structure due to the requirements of fire-resistant materials and structural safety, and limited funds. In 1976 the newly reconstructed

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Cathedral of St. Michael was dedicated, and in 1978 the old Chapel of St. John the Baptist (The Precursor) was rededicated in honor of St. Innocent (Veniaminov) of Alaska.

The minor deviations on the exterior and the incomplete or nonhistoric appearance of certain interior finishings do not affect the basic significance of the structure. The interior failings are overshadowed by the presence of the original furnishings, ikons, and paintings. In 1973 the cathedral, while under reconstruction, was re-entered in the National Register of Historic Places because of the church's social and cultural impact, the priceless ikons, furnishings, and metal items from the original building, and because of the near-accurate reconstruction made possible by the availability of HABS drawings.<sup>11</sup> Those considerations remain valid today.

St. Michael's Cathedral is viewed by residents and visitors alike as a unique representative of the Russian presence in Alaska. Its location on its original site in Sitka, its continuing use as an Orthodox house of worship and as the seat of the Bishop of Sitka and Alaska, its store of priceless and beautiful ikons and other art, all evoke the days when Sitka was the capital of Russia's eastern-most territory, and the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel was its crowning jewel.

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FOOTNOTES

1. P.A. Tikhmenev, A History of the Russian-American Company, trans. and ed. by Richard A. Pierce and Alton S. Donnelly (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1978), 146; Hieromonk Antonii (Dashkevich), "The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Archangel Michael at Sitka," (in English) Russian Orthodox American Messenger, III (1899) 10:284.
2. Tikhmenev, p. 146.
3. Tikhmenev, p. 379.
4. "Zolotaia tserkov' [The Golden Church]," (in Russian), Russian Orthodox American Messenger, X (1906), 6:101-104.
5. Barbara S. Smith, Alaska Names and Places in the "Russian Orthodox Messenger": An Index and Annotated Bibliography, Alaska Historical Commission Studies in History, No. 136 (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Historical Commission, 1985). This index and annotated bibliography contains notices of many such organizations under town and parish headings.
6. Rev. A.P. Kashevaroff, "St. Michael's Cathedral, Sitka, Alaska," (Juneau, Alaska: Empire Printing Co., n.d.), [23].
7. Archimandrite Anatolii (Kamenskii), "Sitka. Istoricheskoe statisticheskoe opisanie sitkhinskago pravoslavnago prikhoda [Sitka: An Historical-Statistical Sketch of the Sitka Orthodox Parish]," Russian Orthodox American Messenger, II (1898), 12:367.
8. R.L. Shalkop, "Russian Orthodox Art in Alaska," (pamphlet) (Anchorage, Alaska: Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum, 1973), 17, Illustrations Nos. 23 and 24.
9. Barbara S. Smith, "Cathedral on the Yukon," Alaska Journal XII, No. 2 (Spring, 1982), pp. 4-6, 50-55.

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10. Bishop Gregory (Afonsky), ed., "St. Michael's Cathedral: Its History and Restoration of Icons," (Sitka, Alaska: n.d.).
11. John E. Cook, memorandum to Associate Director, Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 23 April 1982.

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Antonii (Dashkevich), Hieromonk. "The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Archangel Michael at Sitka." Russian Orthodox American Messenger, 3 (1899):277-286, 296-305.

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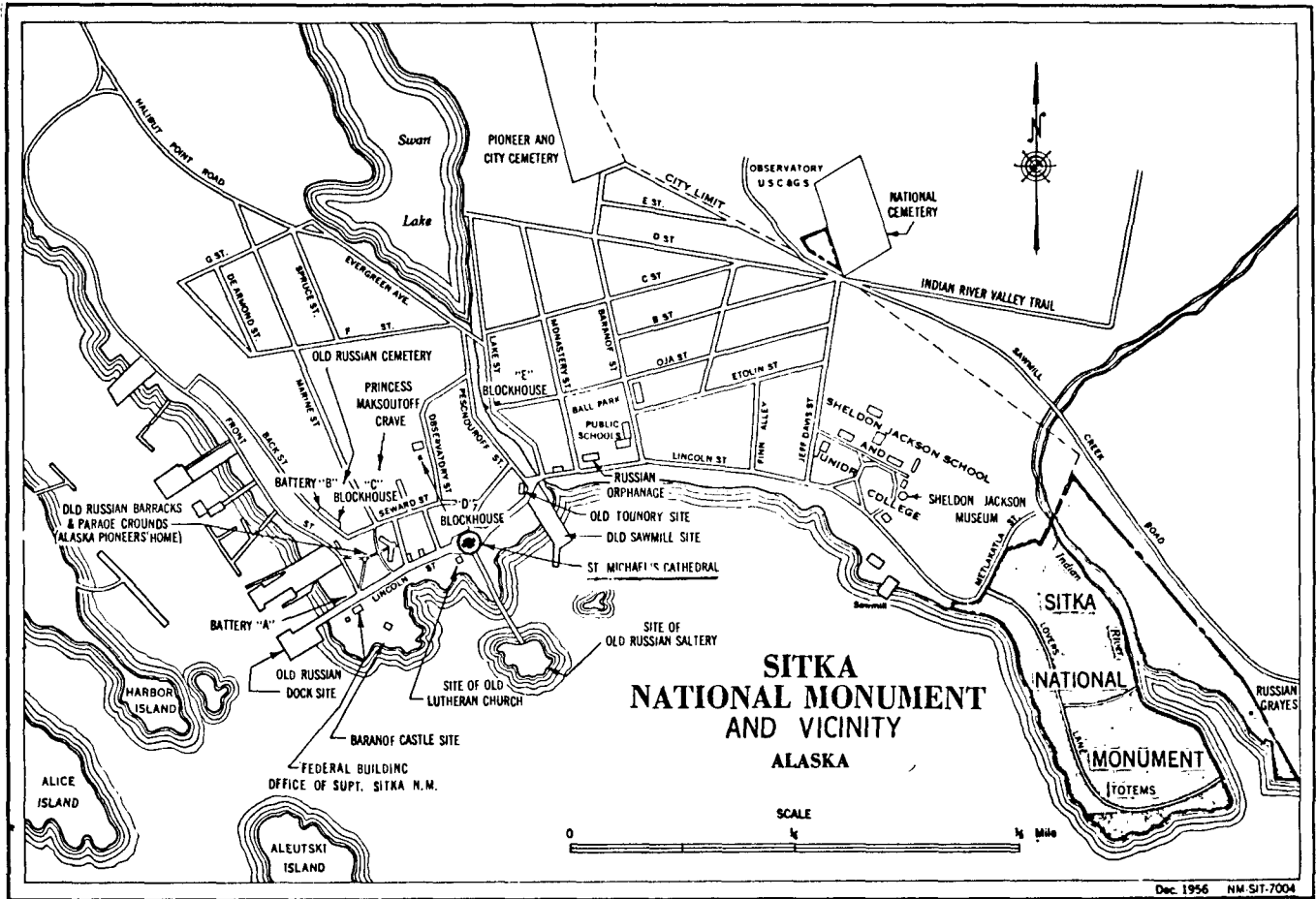
Verbal Boundary Description

St. Michael Cathedral is on Tract L of the Russian Greek Church Mission Reserves pursuant to Act of Congress, June 6, 1900, and recorded on U.S. Survey No. 404, 1905. It consists of 0.16 acres.

Commencing at corner number 1 as designated on the plat of U.S. Survey No. 404, situate at Sitka, District of Alaska, such corner being the point of beginning, thence S. 29° 36' E, a distance of 0.39 chains to corner number 2; thence S. 88° 45' E. a distance of 0.79 chains to corner number 3; thence N. 62° 31' E. a distance of 0.60 chains to corner number 4; thence N. 22° 34' E. a distance of 0.50 chains to corner number 5; thence N. 27° 49' W. a distance of 0.52 chains to corner number 6; thence N. 64° 59' W. a distance of 0.41 chains to corner number 7; thence S. 63° 53' W. a distance of 0.78 chains to corner number 8; thence S. 29° 33' W. a distance of 0.77 chains to corner number 1, the point of beginning.

The boundaries of St. Michael Cathedral National Historic Landmark conform to the historic plat contained in the U.S. Land Survey conducted in 1904 and recorded in 1905. Widening of Lincoln Street on the north side of the Cathedral has intruded approximately 4-5 feet into the property, rounding corner number 8, but not affecting the structure.

The dotted line on the accompanying site drawing represents the original boundary as described above, while the solid line marks the curb around the structure.



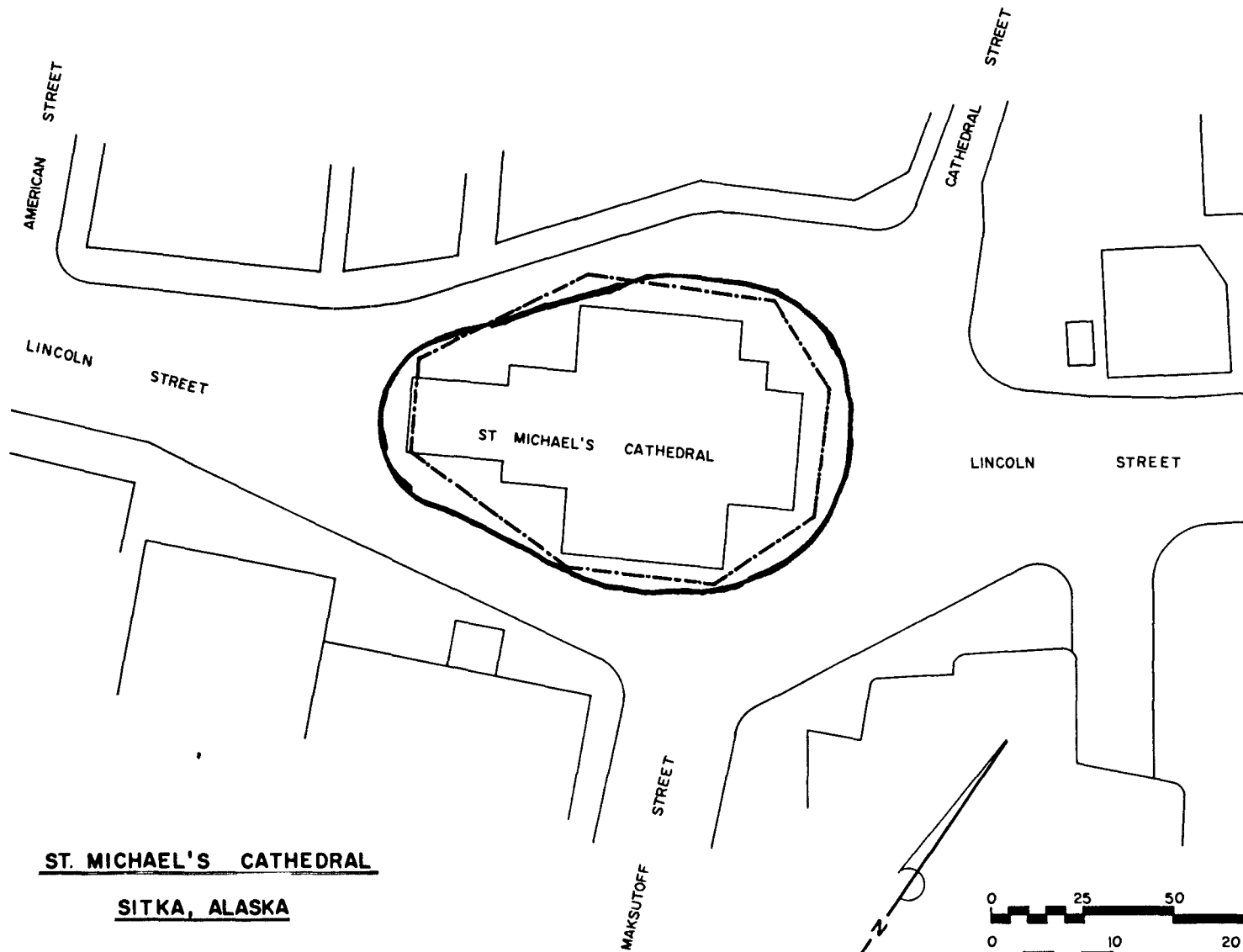
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Swart Lake  
PIONEER AND CITY CEMETERY  
CITY LIMIT  
OBSERVATORY U.S.C.A.G.S.  
NATIONAL CEMETERY  
INDIAN RIVER VALLEY TRAIL  
E ST., D ST., C ST., B ST., A ST.  
DE BARON ST., SWICK ST., EVERGREEN AVE., F ST., G ST.  
OLD RUSSIAN CEMETERY  
PRINCESS MAKSOUTOFF CRAVE  
BLOCKHOUSE  
BALL PARK  
PUBLIC SCHOOL  
RUSSIAN ORPHANAGE  
OLD TOWNORY SITE  
OLD SAWMILL SITE  
ST. MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL  
SITE OF OLD RUSSIAN SALTERY  
SHELDON JACKSON SCHOOL AND JUNIOR COLLEGE  
SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM  
SITKA NATIONAL MONUMENT  
TOTEMS  
RUSSIAN GRAVES  
RIVER  
CHIEF POOND  
SUNNELL  
ETOLIN ST., OJA ST., LINCOLN ST., PINK ALLEY, REP. DAVIS ST., WEDARTEL ST.  
OLD RUSSIAN BARRACKS & PARADE GROUNDS (ALASKA PIONEERS' HOME)  
BATTERY "B" BLOCKHOUSE  
BATTERY "C" BLOCKHOUSE  
BATTERY "D" BLOCKHOUSE  
BATTERY "A"  
OLD RUSSIAN DOCK SITE  
BARANOF CASTLE SITE  
FEDERAL BUILDING OFFICE OF SUPT. SITKA N.M.  
SITE OF OLD LUTHERAN CHURCH  
HARBOR ISLAND  
ALICE ISLAND  
ALEUTSKI ISLAND





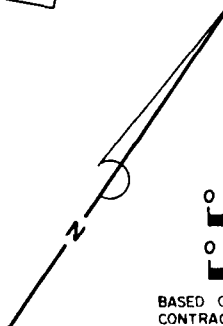
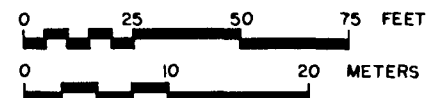
Orthodox Mission Reservation Survey Line (1906)

NHL Boundary



ST. MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL

SITKA, ALASKA



BASED ON SHEET 50 of 59, CITY & BOROUGH OF SITKA  
CONTRACT NO 5, MAY 1981

DRAWN BY RUSSELL H. SACKETT, 1984

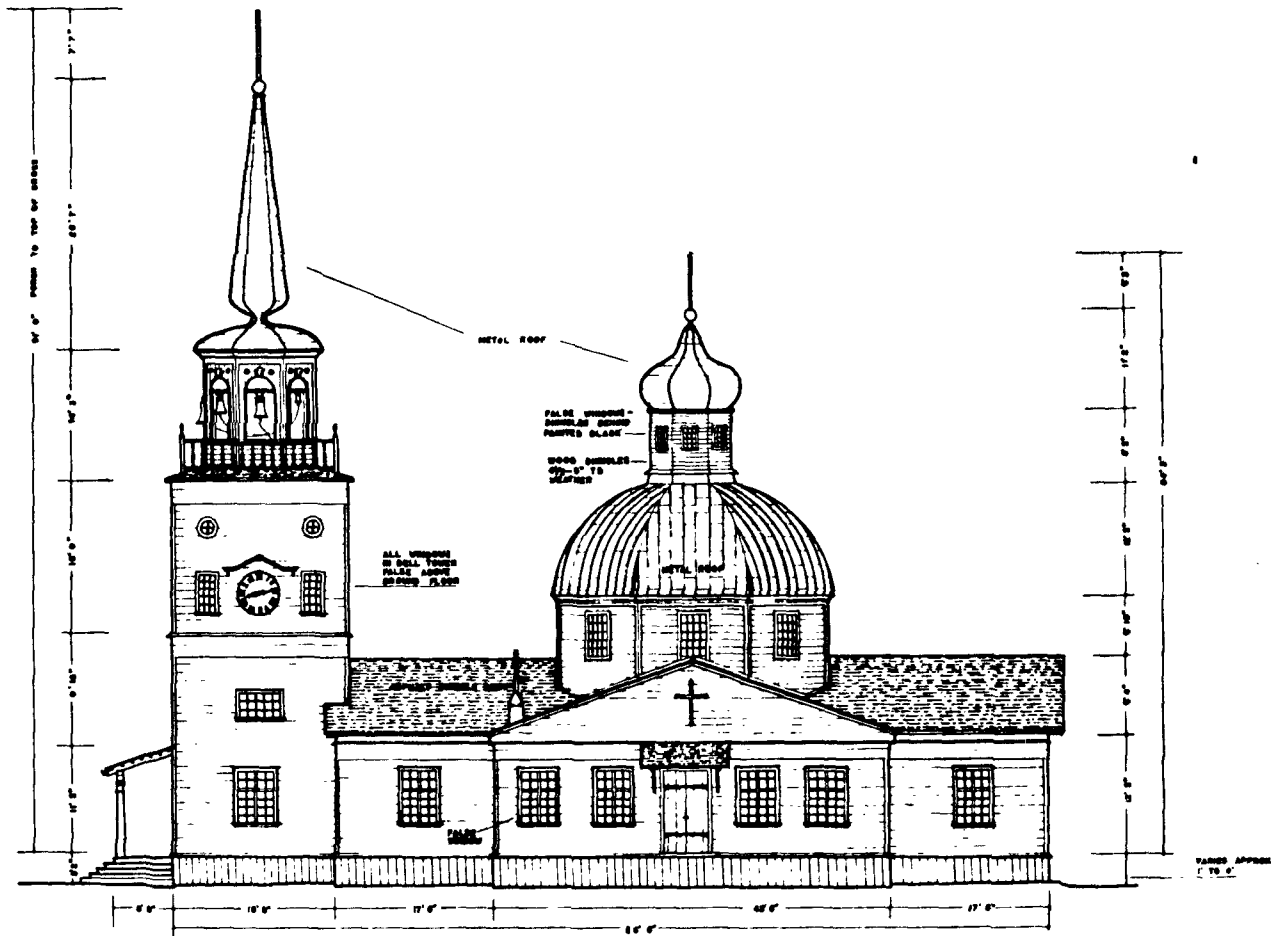
NAME AND LOCATION OF STRUCTURE

SURVEY NO.

HISTORIC AMERICAN  
BUILDINGS SURVEY  
SHEET OF SHEETS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
DICKSON

OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICES  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



ROBERT S. HIGGINBOTHAM - DELINEATOR

SOUTH ELEVATION  
 SCALE: 1/8" = 1' 0"  
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 FEET  
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 METERS

WESTERN OFFICE  
 SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA  
 UNDER DIRECTION OF UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

NAME OF STRUCTURE  
**ST. MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL**  
 SITKA, ALASKA

SHEET NO.  
 ALAS-1

HISTORIC AMERICAN  
 BUILDINGS SURVEY  
 SHEET 2 OF 6 SHEETS

DATE OF SURVEY  
 1938

