

Three Saints Russian Orthodox Church  
Old Harbor  
Kodiak Island  
Alaska

HABS No. AK-53

HABS  
AK,  
12-OLHAR,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS.

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
THREE SAINTS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

HABS No. AK-53

HABS  
AK,  
12-OLHAR,  
1-

- Location: Old Harbor, Kodiak Island, Alaska.
- Present Owner: Orthodox Church in America.
- Present Occupant: Three Saints Russian Orthodox Church.
- Present Use: Church.
- Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. This 1953 church, although somewhat lower and wider in proportions than earlier churches, has the same elements of separate sanctuary, nave, and belltower that identify it as an Alaskan Russian Orthodox church.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1953.
2. Builders: The building was constructed by local men.
3. Original plans and construction: Low-pitched gable roofs cover the sanctuary, nave, and narthex, each at a separate level. The form of the building has not changed since construction.
4. Alterations and additions: The three onion domes, later additions, lend a distinctive profile to the building. The ornamented cross on the wall above the entrance is also not original.

B. Historical Context:

1. Previous churches on the site: Sometime in the nineteenth century, a church was built higher up the hill, where the cemetery is now located; a shrine marks the site. The next church, built in 1911, was located just south of the site of the present one; it is marked by a shrine to St. Basil.
2. Present church: The church is named for the Three Saints, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom; shrines to each are located throughout the town.

THREE SAINTS RUSSIAN  
ORTHODOX CHURCH  
HABS No. AK-53 (Page 2)

During the tidal wave of 1964, the town suffered enormous destruction; only two buildings survived. Although water rose above the pilings, the church was unscathed.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The separate elements of sanctuary, nave, and belltower are distinct; the three onion domes topped with Orthodox crosses add to the exotic nature of the building.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building measures 30'-5" x 57'-9". The sanctuary measures 20'-2" x 11'-0", the nave 30'-5" x 36'-6", and the narthex 17'-0" x 10'-3".
2. Foundations: Post foundations, protected at the perimeter by plywood.
3. Walls: The walls are clapboards with cornerboards, painted white with light blue trim. On the west front and east walls are wooden applied ornaments in the shape of crosses, both painted blue.
4. Structural system, framing: Light wood frame.
5. Chimneys: There is a stovepipe in the southwest side of the vestibule.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The double doors are plain metal, set in a plain surround.
  - b. Windows: The windows have one-over-one-light double-hung sash, set in plain surrounds.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The gable roofs are clad in corrugated metal. The narthex, belltower, and each cupola roof are covered with wood shingles. All roofs are painted blue.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: The rafter ends are exposed.

THREE SAINTS RUSSIAN  
ORTHODOX CHURCH  
HABS No. AK-53 (Page 3)

- c. Towers, cupolas: The square belltower rises from the roof of the narthex. It has round-arched openings on three sides and is crowned with a pyramidal roof, from which rises an onion dome.

The cupola above the nave is hexagonal in plan, with clapboard-covered walls and a polygonal roof. The cupola above the sanctuary is square in plan, also with clapboard-covered walls and a pyramidal roof. Both are topped with onion domes and crosses.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Each of the three elements of the plan -- the narthex, nave, and sanctuary -- is an open space.
2. Flooring: There is linoleum and carpeting over tongue-and-groove boards. The narthex floor is covered with linoleum.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceiling are wallboard painted white; the wainscot is varnished plywood, laid in designs. The cornice, a simple molding, is painted brown. The narthex has horizontal, narrow beaded boards on the walls.
4. Doorways and doors: The double doors between the nave and narthex are varnished wood.
5. Decorative features: The iconostas is divided into seven parts, and consists of a wallboard wall with varnished wood doorway surrounds and frames of the icons. There are large, framed and glassed icons flanking the royal doors, which are recently acquired. Other icons in the church include relics of the three saints for whom the church is named.

There is an interior dome, which is octagonal and about 3' high, with a flat ceiling. It does not project above the roof and has no windows.

The window and door trim is painted brown. The cornices over the windows have curlicue endings in a Chinese style.

6. Mechanical equipment: The chandelier in the center of the church is said to date from the first church. Although the church raised money for a new chandelier, it decided to keep the candle-lit old one, and with the money it gathered it purchased seven smaller electrified chandeliers.

The building is heated by an oil-fired furnace, located in a plywood closet off of the narthex.

THREE SAINTS RUSSIAN  
ORTHODOX CHURCH  
HABS No. AK-53 (Page 4)

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces southwest, but for simplicity in this report the building has been described as if it faced west, with the sanctuary on the east end. The church is located at the southwest end of town, near the harbor. Hills rise sharply to the south and west.
2. Church house: To the north is the church house, a one-story gable-roofed building.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

"Concerning the Orthodox Mission in America," October 14, 1895, trans. Sister Victoria Orthodox Alaska 6 (January 1977): 36-46.

Davis, Nancy Yaw. "The Role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Five Pacific Eskimo Villages as Revealed by the Earthquake," The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964: Human Ecology (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1970), 125-146.

Haakanson, Sven, mayor of Old Harbor, interviewed by author, July 5, 1989.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Three Saints 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 1989 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jean Swearingen, curator; John Lowe III, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO  
THREE SAINTS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH  
Old Harbor  
Kodiak Island  
Alaska

HABS No. AK-53

HABS  
AK,  
12-OLHAB,  
1-

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013