

SITKA

NATIONAL
MONUMENT

ALASKA





SITKA

NATIONAL MONUMENT

Here are commemorated the bravery and the culture of Alaska's Indians.

SITKA NATIONAL MONUMENT, located on Baranof Island, in Southeastern Alaska, protects an outstanding collection of Alaskan Indian totem poles and preserves the historical values of the vicinity. Within the area are 18 totem poles of finest native craftsmanship and the site of the fort in which the Sitka Indians made their last stand against the Russians.

Sitka Indians

When European navigators first visited Alaska during the 1700's, they found the west coasts of Baranof and Chichagof Islands inhabited by the Sitka Indians. These natives were a subdivision of the powerful Tlingit group which occupied most of the coast and islands of the Alaska "Panhandle."

The Tlingits were a vigorous, warlike people, shrewd and physically strong. Their main livelihood came from the sea, and they were skillful boatmen. Their graceful canoes, hollowed from logs, were sometimes large enough to carry 60 persons, and were used for travel and war. They also made

smaller boats for fishing and for hunting otters, seals, and porpoises.

Tlingit villages were usually placed along narrow sea beaches, for steep mountains and dense forests pressed closely on the shores and left few open building sites. Houses, made of planks, were generally large and served several families.

Totems and Arts

The Sitkas painted their family totems over the doors of their houses to symbolize the Tlingit clan to which they belonged. They did not display their totems on poles in front of their houses as did the Haidas and other Indians to the south.

The Tlingits were skillful carvers of wood and stone. They worked copper, wove blankets from the hair of wild goats, and made beautiful baskets. They also fashioned wooden boxes and elaborate ceremonial masks.

Another phase of Tlingit culture was the high valuation placed upon wealth, rank, and prestige. A Tlingit won respect by his ability

to give away or destroy large quantities of property. At feasts called potlatches, the host would present to his guests valuable articles such as blankets, canoes, sheets of copper, and even slaves. Guests who could not return gifts of equal value lost prestige.

White Traders

In the last quarter of the 18th century, ships from Spain, Britain, Russia, and the United States visited southeastern Alaska in ever-increasing numbers. Most of them were merchantmen trading with the natives for sea otter skins. They found the Sitka area rich in furs. They also found that the Sitkas were shrewd bargainers and dangerous enemies. Shore parties were in constant danger of ambush and robbery; ship captains remained alert against seizure of their vessels by the natives.

The presence of foreign traders in southeastern Alaska aroused the fears of the Russians, who had founded trading settlements in the Aleutians and along the Alaska coast north of the "Panhandle." By 1799 sea otters were growing scarce near the Russian posts, and Alexander Baranof, general manager of the Russian-American Co., decided to expand his settlements to the southward.

In that year he established the fortified post of St. Michael, about 6 miles north of the present Sitka. In 1802 the Sitkas surprised the settlement and wiped out most of the Russian and Aleut inhabitants. The fort was completely destroyed. Its site is still known as "Old Sitka."

Battle of Sitka

Baranof determined to reestablish his colony, but it took 2 years to marshal sufficient resources at the company's headquarters on Kodiak Island. In 1804 he appeared off the site of the present Sitka with a force of about 150 Russian hunters and 800 Aleuts, who had made the long journey in their tiny skin bidarkas. Here Baranof received an unexpected reinforcement in the *Neva*, a Russian warship.

The Sitkas awaited the attack in a position atop Baranof Hill. But when they saw the strength arrayed against them, they retreated to a stronger fort near the south boundary of the present Sitka National Monument. Here, behind thick log walls, they defied the Russian cannon, which did little damage. An assault, led by Baranof himself, was repulsed by murderous fire; the Russians were fortunate to regain their ships with a loss of about 10 men killed and 26 wounded. Among the latter was Baranof.



St. Michael's Cathedral. Courtesy Photo Shop, Sitka.

The Russians then brought their guns closer and settled down for a siege. After several days the Indians ran out of ammunition and, believing their cause to be hopeless, fled in the night and made their way to the northeast side of the island. As a result of this battle, the way was left open for the development of Sitka, which became the center of Russian activities in the New World.

Growth of Sitka

Baranof at once reestablished his settlement on the site of the present town. A fortified residence for the general manager and his officers was built on Baranof Hill, and by the next spring eight substantial buildings and several gardens gave the place an air of prosperity. The post was officially named New Archangel, but it was generally known as Sitka, after the Tlingit village which formerly occupied the site.

Sitka rapidly became a thriving industrial city. Products from its iron and brass found-

ries, its flour and lumber mills, and its tanneries were traded as far away as Spanish California and the Hawaiian Islands. Baranof soon transferred the company's American headquarters to Sitka, which remained the capital of Russian America until Alaska was purchased by the United States in 1867. It was the capital of the new American territory until the administration was moved to Juneau in 1906.

Features of the Monument

SITKA FORT SITE. Shallow depressions now mark the foundations of the fort where the Sitkas made their last stand against European conquest. This fort was burned by Baranof immediately after the Battle of Sitka.

THE TOTEM POLES. Within the monument is one of the finest exhibits of totem poles in the world. These 18 poles were part of the Alaska exhibit at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904. At the end of the fair, Gov. John Brady of Alaska, and others, succeeded in having them brought to Sitka for display at Indian River Park, which later became Sitka National Monument. Seventeen of the totems were originally gathered from old villages of the Haida Indians in southern Alaska. One came from a Tsimshian Village.

The largest and most famous totem pole stands on the site of the old Sitka fort. This totem, called "Fog Women," belonged to Son-I-Hat, a Haida chief who lived at Old Kasaan. It is 59 feet high, one of the tallest in the world, and has more carved figures than any other Alaskan totem pole. Around it are four smaller "house" totems.

The poles were not objects of religious worship. They record family and tribal history, describe significant events, and are monuments to the fame or ill repute of outstanding persons. Their carvings and paint tell of the earth's origin and the creation of certain fish, birds, and animals. The bright, contrasting colors were made from crushed rock, minerals, and clam shells mixed with fish eggs as the binding agent.

MERRILL PLAQUE. In 1934, the American Legion Post at Sitka dedicated a plaque

Sitka in 1869 during the period of U. S. Military occupation.



The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

at the monument entrance in memory of Elbridge W. Merrill, prominently associated with the National Monument in the years following its establishment. He was an artist, lover of nature, and well-known photographer of Alaskan scenes. He died in 1932.

INDIAN RIVER. Indian River, or Kolosh Ryeku as it was called by the Russians, flows through the monument. In former times the annual salmon runs in this stream were spectacular. During recent years, however, they have diminished.

Nearby Points of Interest

Sitka National Monument adjoins the town of Sitka, which contains many points of historic interest. Baranof Hill, on which the general managers of the Russian-American Co. lived from 1804 to 1867, is near the Sitka Post Office. On this hill the American flag was first raised over Alaska during the ceremony marking the transfer of the territory to the United States on October 18, 1867.

St. Michael's Cathedral, built between 1848 and 1850, still serves as a spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska. In it are ikons and other religious treasures from Russia brought across the Siberian wilderness and shipped to Sitka.

The Alaska Pioneers' Home occupies the site of the old Russian and American parade grounds. Back of the home is the first Russian cemetery. Crumbling marble slabs mark the graves of many persons prominent in Sitka's history. Farther on is the old Lutheran cemetery where Princess Maksoutoff, wife of the last Russian chief manager, is buried.

Adjacent to the monument is the Sheldon Jackson Junior College. The museum here contains fine exhibits on Indian and Eskimo culture and Alaska history.

The Monument

A Presidential proclamation on June 21, 1890, established the area as a public park; on March 23, 1910, it was proclaimed a National Monument. Its 54 acres are covered by a dense stand of second-growth timber. The original forest was cut by the Russians and by American soldiers who were stationed in Sitka after the transfer of Alaska to the United States. Footpaths through the monument lead into the heart of an Alaska forest, with its towering stands of Sitka spruce and western hemlock. The forest floor is carpeted with ferns and moss, with spreading devilclub and berry thickets. Large alders enhance the beauty along the Indian River.

About Your Visit

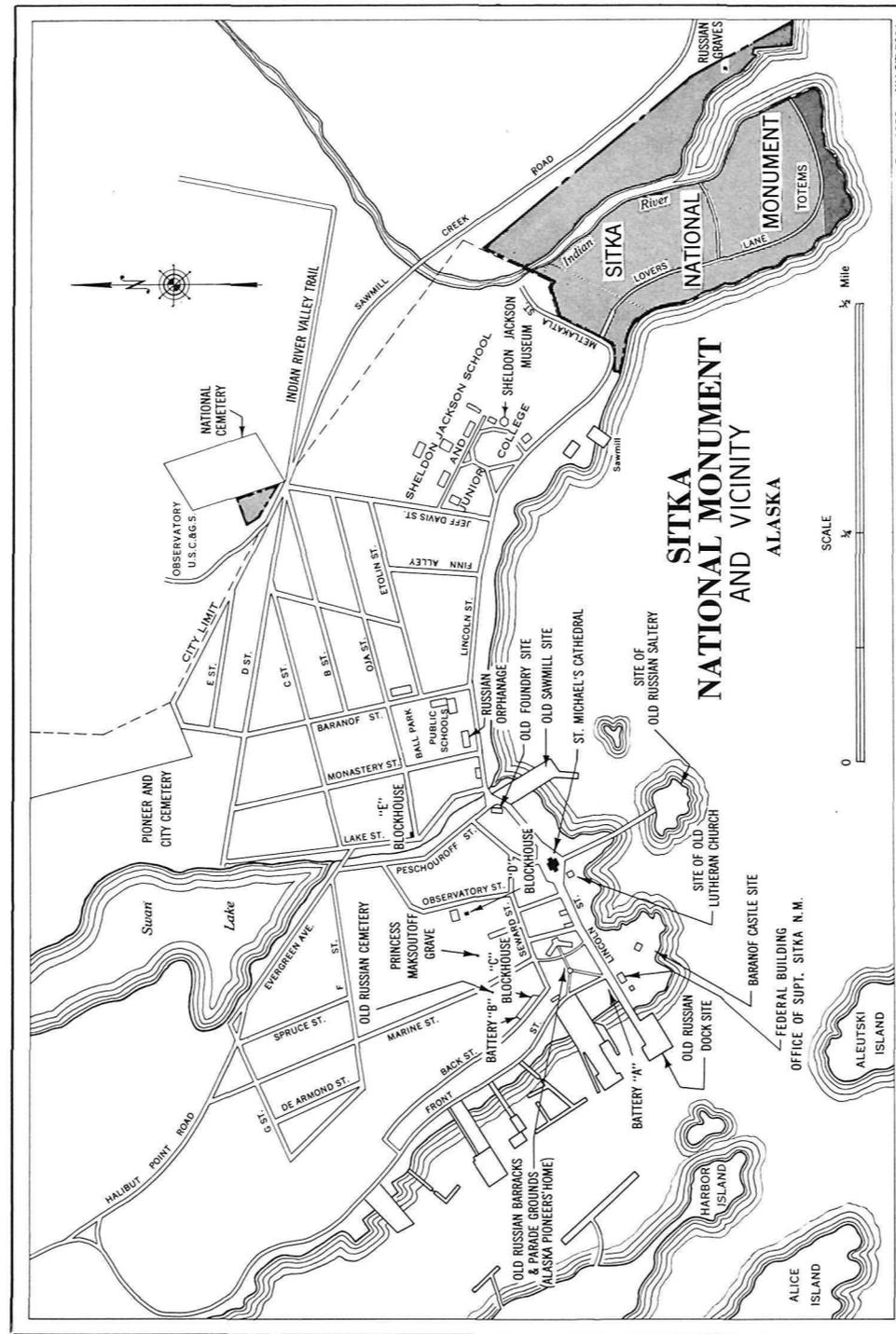
The monument, which is open all year, is within walking distance of downtown Sitka, where hotel accommodations and taxi service are available. The town can be reached by scheduled airline from Juneau, and, in summer, is a port of call for occasional passenger vessels.

Administration

Sitka National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For further information, write to the Superintendent, Sitka and Glacier Bay National Monuments, Box 1184, Juneau, Alaska.

Mission 66

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.



SITKA

NATIONAL MONUMENT

ALASKA



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fred A. Seaton, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conrad L. Wirth, Director



(Cover) Totem poles on Sitka fort site.

