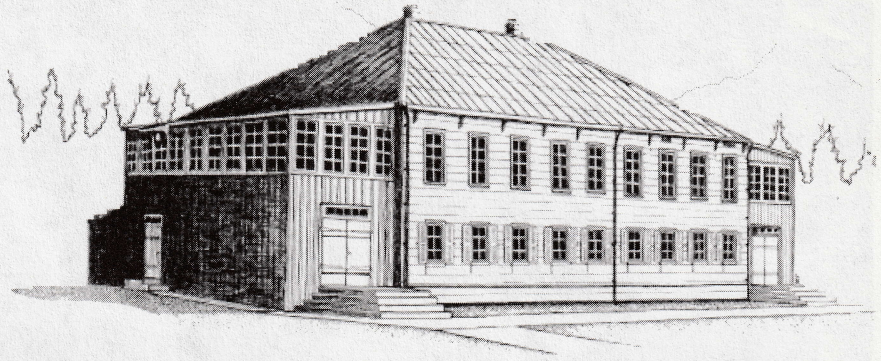


THE RUSSIAN BISHOP'S HOUSE



A Home For The Bishop



By the terms of its operating charters granted by the imperial tsars, the Russian American Company was required to assist the missionary work of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America.

In New Archangel (Sitka), the Russian colonial capital, Company assistance took form in a residence for the Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kuriles, and the Aleutian Islands.

Built of Sitka spruce by Finnish shipwrights in the Company's employ, the unfinished Bishop's House welcomed its first occupant, Bishop Innocent, Evangelizer of the Aleuts and Apostle to Alaska, in 1841.

Completed in 1842, the House served as a bishop's residence for 127 years. The Bishop's House was the center of Russian ecclesiastical authority in a diocese that stretched

from California to Siberian Kamchatka.

Pursuing the spread of Christianity, Orthodox missionaries traveled vast distances by ship, baidarka (Aleut kayak), dog sled, and foot. To this day, long after the transfer of Russian America to the United States and the demise of the Russian American Company, Orthodoxy continues to thrive in Alaska. It is the most durable legacy of Alaska's Russian past.

For God and Tsar



In 1969, the Church closed the Bishop's House as a residence. The House was in very poor physical condition. Weather and age had taken a severe toll on the building's spruce walls. Rot had destroyed 75 percent of the south wall, and over a quarter of its north side. The roof leaked and sagged, and the floors and doorways tilted. The building lacked modern electrical, plumbing, and heating systems, and it seemed in danger of collapse.

The National Park Service project to restore the venerable "ecclesiastical palace" to its former glory began in 1973, and has continued for over 16 years.

Restored to its 1853 appearance, the Russian Bishop's House offers visitors a glance back into history. Within its walls, visitors can witness the magnitude of the Russian American experience. They can see evidence of the efforts, plans, failures, and joys of the Euro-Americans who came to this coast, and the Native Americans they met, fought, baptized, and married.

The magnificence of the Chapel of the Annunciation testifies to the strength of spirit, body, and faith that brought men and women to this farthest edge of empire in the service of God and Tsar.



The House Reclaimed

The Russian Bishop's House, youngest of four surviving Russian buildings in the Western Hemisphere, represents the epitome of Russian log architectural development. Over 70 percent of the original structure remains following the restoration.

Aided by information and assistance from the Soviet Union, National Park Service historians, architects, and archaeologists have discovered much

about frontier building techniques, energy conservation measures, and Russian American history.

Few Russian colonists lived in the same comfort and splendor as did the Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kuriles, and the Aleutian Islands. However, in the Bishop's House, visitors can peer into life in Sitka at a time when the common lament was, "God is in His heaven, and the Tsar is far away."

The Russians and Alaska

Russian America is a little known period in American history. Few realize that for over 125 years, a Russian overseas empire reached from the frozen Bering Strait to sunwashed Hawaii; for 125 years, Imperial Russia was the dominant power in the North Pacific arena. The restored Russian Bishop's House serves to expand the horizon of understanding of Russia's role, and Alaska's place, in the history of the North Pacific, and in the building of the United States.

