Alaska's Heritage
CHAPTER 3-8: ART, CULTURE, EDUCATION, RECREATION AND RELIGION

Art falls into two categories

Russian artistic contributions to Alaska's heritage fall primarily into two forms. The first form was sketches. Artists accompanying various expeditions made these watercolors and drawings. This work documented both Alaska Native cultures and Russian settlements in Alaska. The second form was religious art. Icons and other sacramental objects were created for use in Russian Orthodox Church services.

Art documents explorations

The first known example of Russian documentary art of Alaska is a sketch of sea mammals which Corporal of Cossacks Plenisner drew for Steller on Bering's 1741 voyage. This was followed by a 1742 drawing of an Aleut in a baidarka which is shown on a 1742 map taken from Sven Waxell's journal written on that same voyage. From a slightly later period there is a 1765 map made by Nicolai Daurkin, a Chukchi explorer. His map shows an Eskimo fortress and seven warriors on the Seward Peninsula.

The first major body of Russian documentary art resulted from a 1769 Russian Navy exploration of the Aleutian Islands. This voyage led to an atlas of 56 watercolor and ink drawings of Alaska Natives, their clothes, and their tools. Many years later artist Louis Choris documented the round-the-world voyage of the Russian Navy ship Rurik, which visited Alaska between 1815 and 1818.

At about this same time Mikhail Tikhanov accompanied Vasili Golovnin, who led an 1817-1819 round-the-world voyage on the Russian Navy sloop-of-war Kamchatka. Tikhanov made studies of Aleutian, Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak, and Sitka Natives. Tikhanov also drew the only known portrait of Alexander Baranov. Illya Voznesen-skii went to Russian America and also to northeastern Siberia for the Imperial Academy of Sciences. In the course of ten years' work (1839-1849) he drew many Alaskan landscapes and scenes of Native life.

Other secular or non-religious art known to have been done by Russians in Alaska includes some watercolor views of Sitka. One of these, which has the name of Alexander Olgin on it, is dated 1837.

Non-Russian artists also visited Alaska between 1725 and 1867. John Webber, who accompanied Captain Cook to Alaska in 1778, made watercolors of Alaskan landscapes and Natives from which copper engravings were later made. LaPerouse's 1786 expedition into Alaskan waters created drawings of Alaskan plants and animals as well as of Tlingits and their material culture. The drawings of Tomas de Suria who sailed to Alaska with Malaspina in 1791 survive in the naval museum at Madrid, Spain. In the last years of the eighteenth century the artists accompanying voyages of Vancouver, Dixon, Portlock and others also recorded Alaska in drawings. Many of these were published with descriptions of the voyages. Frederick Whymper, who came to Alaska with the Western Union Telegraph Expedition of 1866, made the first graphic record of interior Alaska.

Religion inspires art

Religious art also contributed significantly to Alaska's cultural heritage. Icons and other religious objects of artistic character not only graced the Russian Orthodox churches and chapels in Alaska, but also became valued objects in the homes of Russians, Creoles, and Aleut, Eskimo, and Indian converts to the Orthodox faith. A few icons were even created in Alaska. One of the painters, named Petukhov, lived in Sitka. Aleut converts to the Orthodox faith used their carving skills to make wood icons. The finest icons were presumably returned to Russia with their owners in 1867, but a fine collection remains in Saint Michaels Cathedral at Sitka.

Russians establish cultural and scientific institutions

Alaska's first library and museum were also a part of Russian contributions to Alaska's heritage. First established at Kodiak, they were later moved to Sitka.

Nicolai Rezanov, one of the Russian-American Company's directors, sent the first books for the library to Kodiak and arranged them himself when visiting there in 1805. A Kamchatka hunter came with Rezanov's party to collect and prepare natural history objects. He trained two Kodiak assistants and began a collection ofAlaskan birds, animals, fish, and plants for the museum. An electricity machine which Rezanov had planned to take to Japan was also placed in the museum.

The library and museum were probably moved to Sitka in 1808 when the colonial capital was moved there. By 1832 there were 1,200 books in the library. Of these 600 were in Russian, 300 were in French, 130 were in German, 35 were in English, 30 were in Latin, and the rest were in Swedish, Dutch, Spanish, and Italian. They included atlases, books of fables and tales, books of classics, books on agriculture and economics, books on religion, and books on the Russian language. The library also had drawings, maps, portraits, and ship plans.

The museum at Sitka included the natural history collection begun at Kodiak, the electricity machine, and many scientific instruments. Among the instruments were an astrolabe, barometers, binoculars, magnets, a large microscope, a pendulum, and telescopes. The museum also had atlases, charts, and maps. There was also, in later years, a magnetic observatory at Sitka directed by an official from the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Education serves Russians, Creoles, and Natives

Russian contributions to education in Alaska began in 1784 when Gregorii and Natal'ia Shelikhov began to teach Russian and religion to Kodiak Native children they were holding as hostages. When the Shelikhovs returned to Russia in 1786 employees of their fur-trading company continued to teach Native children in the school the Shelikhovs had founded. At least one other Russian fur-trading company, that of Lebedev-Lastochkin had a school. It was at Fort Saint Nicholas where Kenai is now located. Its existence was noted by British explorer Vancouver in 1794.

That year also marked a significant addition to Russian educational activities in Alaska when the first Russian Orthodox Church missionaries arrived at Kodiak. The missionaries replaced fur-traders as teachers at the Kodiak school. Missionaries would later teach in Russian-American Company schools as well as church schools in Alaska. In 1805, when Rezanov visited Kodiak, he made the Kodiak school a vocational school. Boys were taught the skills necessary for them to become artisans, clerks, and sailors. Father Herman, an Orthodox monk, became head of the school.

Rezanov was at Kodiak for three weeks. Before he left, 60 to 70 Aleut and Kodiak Native boys between 12 and 16 years old were studying reading and writing in

Russian, accounting, French, geography, mathematics, navigation, and religion. The school had 100 students by 1807. It closed after that year when Rezanov died and financial support for the school stopped. While the school was open Father Gideon and Paramon Chumovitski had begun a dictionary of Alutiiq, the language of Kodiak. Rezanov had also persuaded Natal'ia Petrovna Banner, wife of the local Russian-American Company manager, to teach 14 and 15 year-old Native girls housekeeping and gardening and to dress them in European clothes.

A German naturalist, Henrich von Langsdorf, accompanied Rezanov to Kodiak. He noted that the Kodiak Native youth were being taught European subjects and not how to fish, seal-hunt, or do other traditional activities. He wondered what the Russian-American Company would do with its educated Natives and who would do the necessary fishing and hunting.

Less elaborate schooling did continue at Kodiak even after the vocational school closed. An 1822 visitor noted that the Native children were learning to speak, read, and write Russian and to do arithmetic. Also about this time the Russian-American Company opened several technical schools in Alaska to train Creoles in the special skills needed by the company to conduct its business.

At Sitka, young boys who were the sons of company island administrators, artisans, and laborers learned how to read and write in Russian. Some also learned the skills necessary to become interpreters of Tlingit, barrel-makers, carpenters, cooks, furriers, and tailors. A few trained to become apothecaries, clerks, machinists, navigators, portrait painters, and scribes. All were instructed in the Russian Orthodox faith, as were girls. A girls' school for daughters of company employees and female orphans was organized at Sitka in 1839. The company's goal was to train girls to be servants or suitable wives for company workers. Apart from religious instruction, Russian, and arithmetic, girls did not take the same subjects as boys. The girls learned how to clean, cook, do handicrafts, and sew.

A few Creole boys went to Russia to study. Most attended the naval technical school at Kronstadt on Russia's Baltic seacoast and studied navigation.

Alaska students sent to Russia sometimes had difficulty in adjusting to being so far away from home and in a strange land. Thus the Russian-American Company decided that it sometimes did not receive full value on the money it spent on their education. To remedy this the company established an "All-Colonial School" at Sitka in 1860. It was to provide the advanced technical education for which

students had previously been sent to Russia.

Boys were admitted to the All-Colonial School only if they knew how to read and write Russian and how to add, divide, multiply, and subtract. Once admitted they studied commerce, English, navigation, religion, and Russian. Each year they took examinations to determine if they could stay in school. If a student failed the annual examination more than once he was dropped from school. Successful students studied for five years. At the end of that time they went to work for the Russian-American Company for a minimum of ten years.

By 1860 when the All-Colonial School was established, Russian schools that taught simple arithmetic, religion, and Russian were also operating at Arnlia Island in the Aleutians, Kodiak, Ikogmiut Mission, New Alexandrovsk, and Unalaska. The teachers were either Russian Orthodox priests or Russian-American Company employees.

In addition to the company schools and the church schools elsewhere, there was also a Russian Orthodox school on Spruce Island near Kodiak. Father Herman established it in 1823 and it lasted until his death in 1842. An orphanage operated in connection with the school. The faculty included two Aleuts/ Sophia Vlatvov and Gerasim Zyrianov. Vlatvov, the wife of a Russian explorer, learned to read and write Russian within one year and came to speak fluent Russian. She supervised the girls at the school and orphanage. In the summer the girls gardened and caught fish. In the winter the girls sewed, wove baskets, and performed household tasks. Zyrianov was an active writer of Alutiiq who became a church official. In 1845 the seminary was re-established at Sitka and remained there until 1858 when it was transferred to Yakutsk in Russia.

Although the Russian-American Company schools closed in 1867 when Russia's interests in Alaska were sold to the United States, the Russian Orthodox Church schools continued to operate until 1917. After the tsarist government fell in that year, the support stopped. The church schools were not resumed until the 1970s during a revitalization of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska.

Recreation much the same as today

Russian recreation in Alaska consisted of many of the same activities enjoyed later by Alaskans. It included both indoor and outdoor recreation.

Russians amused themselves indoors by playing billiards, cards, checkers, and chess. They also gave concerts, danced, and performed in plays. Russian sailors were putting on plays at Kodiak as early as 1804. Russian and Kodiak Native wives of fur company employees danced cotillions and country turns with their husbands at Sitka in 1806, according to an English visitor. A traveler to Sitka in the early 1860s described a Saint Nicholas Day dance at the chief manager's residence. An orchestra of two violins, a cello, and a flute played Polish music while officials and their wives danced.

The same visitor also told of post-Christmas plays such as "The Surly Man/' "The Confused Man," "The Kharkov Fiance," "Lordly Arrogance," "Narrows," and "The Everyday Uniform." Company clerks and scribes played the male parts and a sailor's widow and a fur-trader's wife played the female parts. The plays were open to everyone at a price of one paper ruble in the morning and restricted to distinguished persons at evening performances.

A mid-January ball, to which everyone but "noted drunkards" were invited, followed the Christmas festivities. A series of masquerade balls marked the week before Lent, a religious season beginning 40 days before Easter. Russian Orthodox Church tradition, which included over 150 holidays a year, provided plenty of reasons for celebrations throughout the year.

The Russians in Alaska also played out-of-doors. At Kodiak, during the Christmas season of 1804, the Russians built two ice hills for sledding and introduced Aleuts and Kodiak Natives to that sport. The Russians in Alaska ice-skated too. Fireworks were a feature of holidays.

At Kodiak, Natives would come from outlying villages into town during Russian holidays to attend festivities and contribute their own dances. At Sitka Tlingits gathered to watch Russian men skate and push their ladies around the ice in chairs. Other Russian women amused themselves by skating or by driving horse-drawn sleds over the ice. A few dismounted to lay out carpets on the ice, make tea in samovars, and have out-of-door winter tea parties.

Alaska Natives, such as the Aleuts, who were in close contact with the Russians, adopted some Russian recreational pastimes. Aleuts became enthusiastic and skillful chess and checkers players and transferred the Russian words for the games, pieces, and moves into their language. Others adapted Russian music and

musical instruments. An American soldier who attended a dance on Spruce Island near Kodiak in 1867 left a diary entry reporting that the Creoles there used the Russian balalika, which is something like a banjo, to provide music both for traditional Russian and common dances.

Russian Orthodoxy dominates religious activity

Russian Orthodoxy was the principal Russian contribution to Alaska's heritage in the field of religion. A small Lutheran congregation did develop at Sitka under the sponsorship of a Finnish chief manager of the Russian-American Company and a Roman Catholic priest did travel along the Yukon River in 1862 and 1863. It was only after 1867, however, that churches other than the Russian Orthodox were really active in Alaska.

The Russian Orthodox religion which the Russians brought to Alaska has been an integral part of the above discussions of art, cultural institutions, education, and recreation. The Russian fur traders who came to Alaska after 1743 were of the Russian Orthodox faith. They baptized some of the Alaska Natives with whom they came into contact. Some did this out of true religious conviction. Others did it because the Aleuts they baptized then regarded them as parents and would not work for other Russians. Some of the Aleuts, in turn, accepted baptism out of true religious conviction. Others accepted baptism because it excused them from paying a tax or tribute to the Russian government. The first recorded baptism of an Aleut was done by fur trader Stephan Glotov in 1759. His convert, the son of a Fox Islands Aleut chief, later went to school in Kamchatka and returned to his home to become a village leader.

Shelikhov requests priests for Alaska

In 1787 Gregorii Shelikhov asked that Russian Orthodox priests come to Alaska and offered to pay the costs involved. In 1793 Tsarina Catherine II charged Gabriel, Metropolitan of Novogorod, with missionary work in Alaska. The first formal Christian religious mission to Alaska came in 1794. Archpriest loasaf brought 10 monks from the Valaam monastery in northeastern Russia to Kodiak.

The monks immediately began to do missionary work/not always with good results. One, who worked among the Tainana of Cook Inlet in 1796, insisted that the

Natives abandon some of their customs and forced some to marry in the Orthodox Church. Irritated, the Natives finally killed the priest and retained a dislike for Russian Orthodox clergy for some time. Also in 1796, the first Russian Orthodox church to be built in Alaska was erected at Kodiak.

Although the missionaries depended on the fur-trading company for support, they objected to the moral conduct of the fur traders and the ways in which the fur traders abused the Natives. When complaints to company officials in Alaska did not result in change, the missionaries complained to officials in Russia. One monk, Makary, even went on his own to Saint Petersburg in 1796 to complain.

In general, relations between fur-traders and missionaries were not good. Between 1796 and 1818 the missionaries had only modest success. After 1818, when Baranov left Alaska, the fur-trading company provided more support to the missionaries. In fact, the second charter of the Russian-American Company, issued in 1821, required the company to "maintain sufficient numbers of priests and church personnel" in the colonies. This second charter also came at a time when the Russian government was emphasizing the multi-national character of the empire and when the Russian Orthodox Church was experiencing a re-birth of missionary zeal.

Encouraged by the government, supported by the Russian-American Company, and wishing to fulfill its missionary responsibilities, the Orthodox Church sent new missionaries to Alaska in the 1820s. These missionaries began to train Alaska Natives for the priesthood and for lay positions in the church. The latter were very important because the small number of priests meant that some villages, particularly in interior Alaska, might be visited by a priest only once or twice a year. Between the priests' visits, lay readers could perform all church services except for the Liturgy and the Sacraments. The Russian missionaries also began to translate religious books into Native languages.

Two of the most famous of these missionaries are loann Veniaminov, later Saint Innocent, and lakov Netsvetov.

In 1823 the head of the Orthodox Church in Russia announced that there would be a mission to Unalaska and the rest of the Aleutian Islands. Father loann Popov-Veniaminov came to Unalaska in 1824. While there he wrote ethnographic and scientific studies, and started and maintained a school. His wife, Catherine, taught at the school. In addition to his mission duties, Veniaminov worked with Aleut chief Ivan Pankov to develop an alphabet for the Fox Islands Aleuts. In

1834 he transferred from Unalaska to Sitka. While there he completed the third volume of his Alaska studies. The first two volumes had been on the Aleuts and the Aleutian Islands. The third volume was on the Tlingits. Veniaminov stayed at Sitka for 18 years. When Veniaminov's wife died in 1839, he became eligible to become a bishop and was so named in 1840. Then in 1848 he moved to Yakutsk where he continued to oversee church activities in Alaska. In 1858 Veniaminov was made Metropolitan of Moscow, the highest position in the Russian Orthodox Church. He served in that capacity until his death in 1879.

Netsvetov, son of the Atka Island manager for the Russian-American Company and his Aleut wife, went to seminary at Irkutsk. After graduation he returned to Atka to work among the people there, arriving in 1828. Netsvetov's wife Anna, a 20-year old Russian he had met and married in Irkutsk while at seminary, accompanied him. His father, now retired, also received special permission to go to Atka with Netsvetov. In 1835 Anna became seriously ill with cancer. Although she went to the company hospital at Sitka, nothing could be done for her. She died in 1836. During his years on Atka, Netsvetov improved the school and it became a parish school in 1841. Students came not only from Atka, but also from other areas of the Aleutians. Netsvetov also studied Aleut language and culture while on Atka. While there he revised the Fox Islands alphabet Veniaminov and Pankov had developed so that the Atkan people could have a written language. In 1845 Netsvetov transferred to the Yukon-Kuskokwim mission of the church and remained there until 1862. He was widely recognized as a very effective missionary. In 1858 he was designated an archpriest, a mark of distinction in the Russian Orthodox Church. He was also made a hereditary member of the Russian nobility. When he died at Sitka in 1864, all of the Russian Orthodox clergy in Sitka took part in the funeral ceremony.

By 1840 there were four Russian Orthodox priests in Alaska and churches at Atka, Kodiak, Sitka, and Unalaska. There were also chapels on eight Aleutian Islands besides Atka and Unalaska. By 1867 there were over 30 Russian Orthodox clergy, including lay readers, in Alaska, 9 churches, and 35 chapels.

Russian Orthodox church activity continued in Alaska after 1867. The strong traditions established by the church between 1794 and 1867 have also continued to the present.