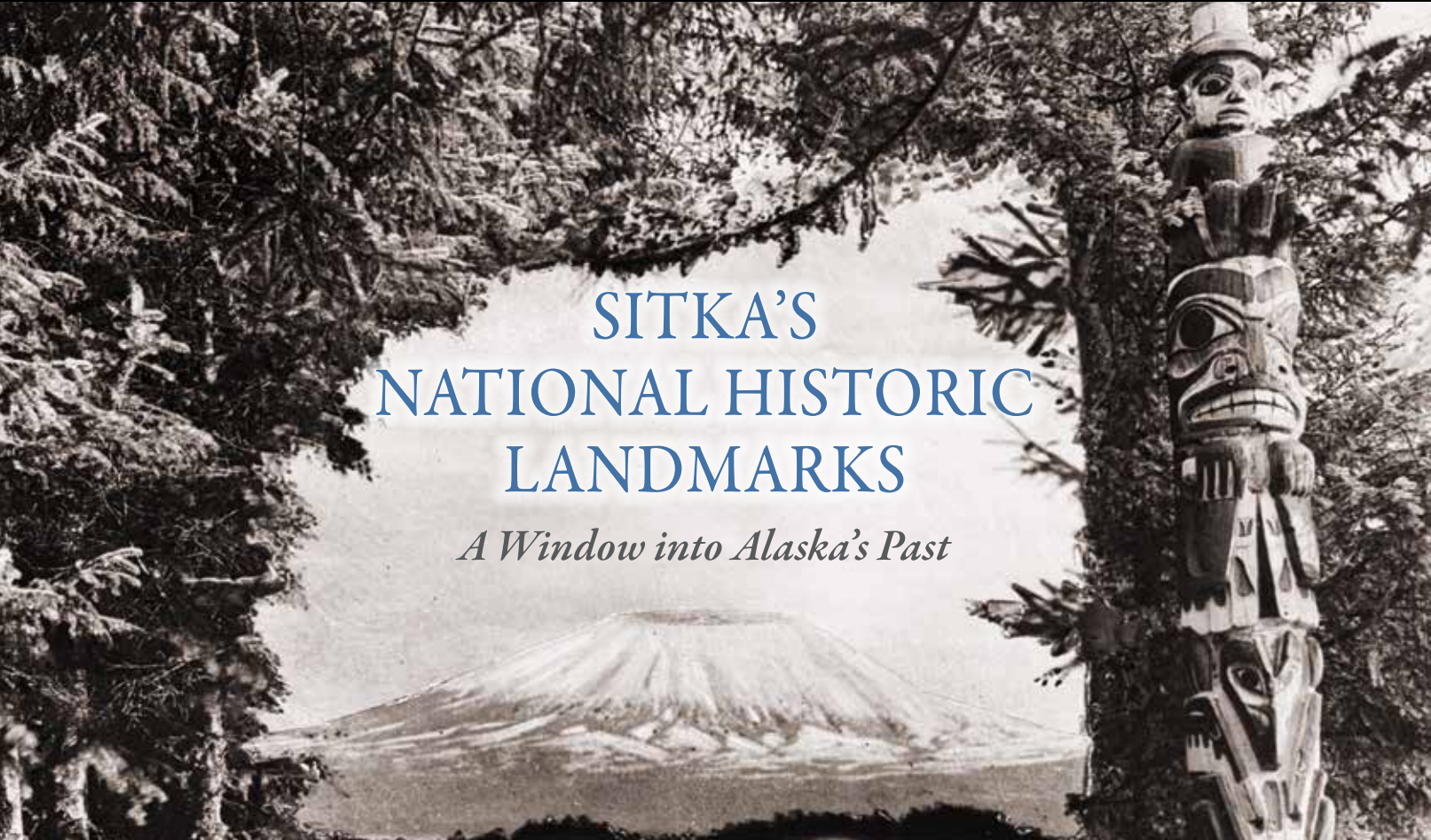




U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Alaska Regional Office

The background of the slide is a sepia-toned photograph. It shows a dense forest of evergreen trees in the foreground. In the distance, a large, snow-capped mountain, likely Mount Denali, rises above the treeline. On the right side of the image, a tall, intricately carved wooden totem pole stands vertically, featuring several distinct faces and figures. The text "SITKA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS" is overlaid in the center in a blue, serif font.

SITKA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

A Window into Alaska's Past



National Historic Landmarks

SITKA IS AMONG the most historical and picturesque communities in Alaska, and its residents take pride in the preservation of this rich heritage. Recognition for Sitka's historic places includes the listing of more than 20 properties on the National Register of Historic Places.* Eight of these properties which includes individual buildings, sites, and districts are of national significance and are designated National Historic Landmarks (NHLs). NHLs comprise some of our nation's most important prehistoric and historic cultural resources.

The National Park Service administers the NHL Program for the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. The NHL Program focuses attention on historic and archeological resources of exceptional value to the nation by recognizing and promoting the preservation efforts of private organizations, individuals, as well as local, state, and federal agencies. Designation of NHLs also furthers the educational objective of the Historic Sites Act of 1935 by increasing public awareness and interest in historic properties. Of the 2,500 NHLs nationwide, 49 are in Alaska. They are an irreplaceable legacy.

Artifacts and historic archeological sites are an important part of our national heritage and are protected by federal and state laws. It is illegal to excavate, damage, remove, sell, or transport archeological and historic resources located on federal or state land without proper permits.

For more information on the National Historic Landmarks Program please visit <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/>

*The Sitka Historical Society and Museum provides an "Historic Sites of Sitka" map that identifies the National Register listed properties in Sitka and is available at: <http://sitkahistory.org/index.shtml>

Credits: The National Park Service-Alaska Regional Office, National Historic Landmarks Program prepared this booklet with contributions by Chris Allan and edited by Janet Clemens. Design/layout by Archgraphics. Booklet photographs are courtesy of NPS except as noted. Historical source information is from the Sitka National Historical Park brochure and the National Historic Landmark nominations. Copies of the NHL nominations, as well as Alaska NHL related publications, are available at: <http://www.nps.gov/akso/history/nhl-main.cfm>.

Printed 2013



‡ Russian Bishop's House NHL window detail. Photograph Historic American Buildings Survey.

‡ Facing Page: Detail, *Looking Southeast from Sitka, Alaska, 1891*. Oil painting by James Everett Stuart. Image courtesy University of Alaska Museum of the North, Fairbanks, Alaska.



DESIGNATED NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS:

- ① Russian Bishop's House
- ② Sheldon Jackson School
- ③ St. Michael's Cathedral
- ④ Building No. 29
- ⑤ American Flag Raising Site (Castle Hill)
- ⑥ Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall
- ⑦ Sitka U.S. Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses
- ⑧ Old Sitka

Sitka's National Historic Landmarks: A Window into Alaska's Past

SITKA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS (NHLs) provide a truly unique look into Alaska's past. Collectively, Sitka's eight NHLs illustrate significant stories and events that occurred over a 200-year time span. Sitka is also remarkable for its geographic concentration of NHLs. The authenticity of these places is further enhanced by Sitka's natural coastal splendor and lack of major modern developments which provides a continuity of setting, inviting the Sitka visitor to slip back into its history.

The Tlingit Indians were well established in the region when representatives of the Russian-American Company arrived in 1799. The Tlingits were at once welcoming and wary of the strangers who brought desirable trade items, like iron tools and cotton clothing, but who also violated Tlingit territorial claims. *Old Sitka NHL*, seven miles north of town, serves as a dramatic reminder of the clash between Alaska Natives and the Russians. The Tlingit initially prevailed. Two years later, the Tlingit fought the Russians in the Battle of Sitka, commemorated by today's Sitka National Historical Park. This was the last major act of resistance by the Tlingits.

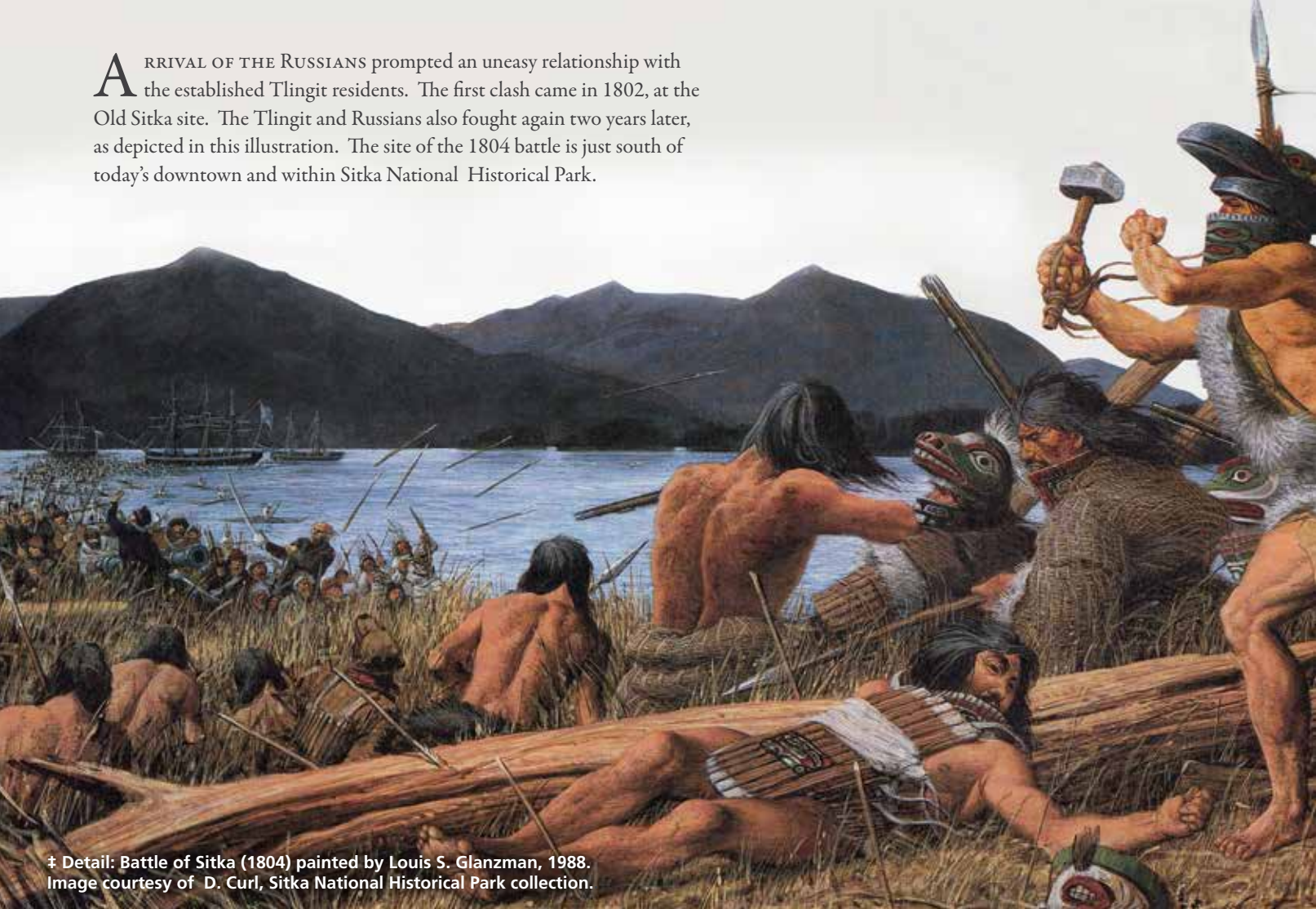
Once the Russians gained a foothold in Sitka (known by the Tlingit as *Shee At'iká*) they opened the door to additional colonizing forces. The *Russian Bishop's House NHL* and *St. Michael's Cathedral NHL* represent the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on Alaska's Native peoples. *Building Number 29 NHL*, a structure that served as kitchen, bakery, laundry, and residence to dozens of Russian-American Company employees, is a reminder that Sitka was the Russian-American capital and a major Pacific Rim trading center.

Castle Hill, once a Tlingit village site and subsequently a Russian fortress, played a pivotal role in Sitka's history as the *American Flag Raising Site NHL*. It is where, in 1867, Russian officials officially transferred ownership of Alaska to the U. S. The *Sheldon Jackson School NHL* reflects the missionary educational philosophy of the early 20th century, when children were compelled to leave their Native villages and abandon their cultural traditions. The school's emphasis on self-improvement, however, also helped to foster a new political movement. Many Alaska Native leaders were graduates of the Sheldon Jackson School such as the founders of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB). The *Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall NHL* is the physical legacy of ANB's instrumental role in fighting discrimination and securing rights for Alaska's Native people. And, across Sitka Channel from the ANB Hall is Japonski Island and the former *Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL* which remains a prominent reminder of Alaska's role in defending the North Pacific against enemy attack during World War II.

Ownership of Sitka's NHLs is diverse and includes private individuals, non-profit organizations, and state and federal agencies.



ARRIVAL OF THE RUSSIANS prompted an uneasy relationship with the established Tlingit residents. The first clash came in 1802, at the Old Sitka site. The Tlingit and Russians also fought again two years later, as depicted in this illustration. The site of the 1804 battle is just south of today's downtown and within Sitka National Historical Park.



‡ Detail: Battle of Sitka (1804) painted by Louis S. Glanzman, 1988.
Image courtesy of D. Curl, Sitka National Historical Park collection.

Old Sitka National Historic Landmark

THEN: Old Sitka NHL is the former site of a fortified fur trading post called New Archangel Saint Michael, established by the Russians in 1799 under the direction of Russian-American Company manager Alexander Baranov. Baranov who came to Southeast Alaska from Kodiak with a contingent of Russian traders and Aleut and Alutiiq hunters, negotiated with the local Tlingits for land on which to build a fort. Though Baranov initially favored the Castle Hill site within present-day Sitka, he agreed to settle at the Old Sitka site in the hope of preserving amicable relations with the Tlingit. The Russians hoped that by establishing the post they would be able to sustain their profits from sea otter fur and gain an enduring foothold in this region. The physical layout of the post included several log structures clustered tightly around a stockade and surrounded by a fort wall.

Though at first the trading post seemed to benefit both parties, relations between the Russians and the Tlingits quickly deteriorated. Historians have identified several of the causes of increasing Tlingit animosity toward the Russians which included incidents of grave-robbing, desecration of graves, arresting and holding Tlingits in iron, as well as the Russian and Aleut exploitation of Tlingit hunting grounds. A final incident sparked the coming together of several Tlingit groups who joined forces, estimated at 600 warriors, to attack Fort St. Michael in 1802. The Russians and Aleuts at the fort were unprepared for the assault and many were killed as their settlement was ransacked. Survivors fled to the Russian outpost on Kodiak Island.

A larger force of Russians returned to the island in 1804 to avenge the Tlingit attack and to establish a new community at the present-day townsite of Sitka. Old Sitka was never again home to a major settlement. In the years that followed, the site was used periodically as a Native camping area. An American salmon cannery operated at the site from 1878 to 1883.

Old Sitka was designated an NHL in 1962; this status was reaffirmed in 2009, based on new documentation as a battlefield.

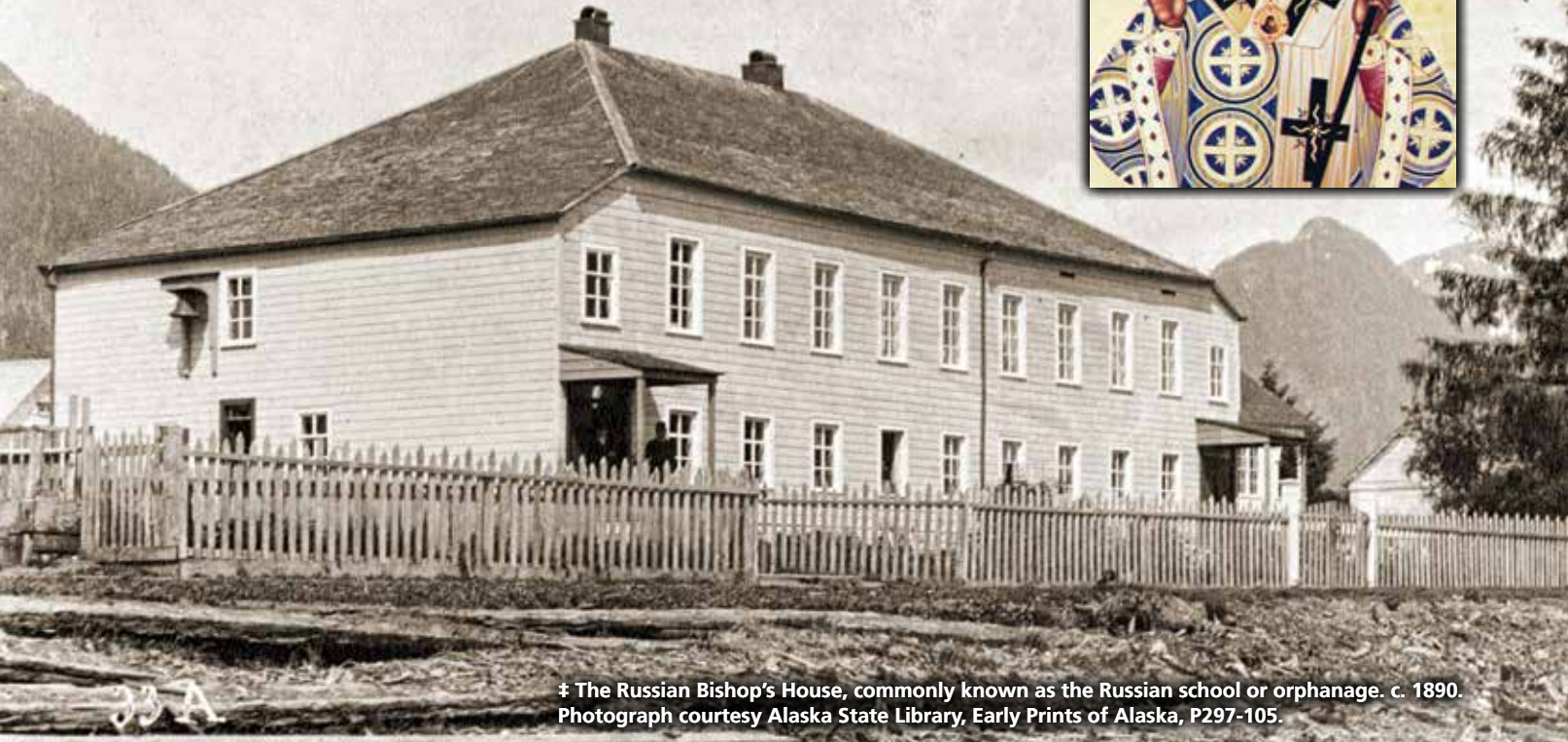


‡ As Russian fur traders advanced eastward along Alaska's southern coast, they buried metal plates to consolidate their claims. The plate above, which reads "Land of Russian Possession," was excavated near the site of Old Sitka.

Now: Old Sitka is managed as an Alaska State Historical Park located at Starigavan Bay. Visitors can learn about the history of Old Sitka from the interpretive panels located at the site of New Archangel Saint Michael (Fort St. Michael). The historical park is located seven miles north of downtown Sitka, via Halibut Point Road.

For more information about the Old Sitka State Historical Park visit: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/aspunits/southeast/oldsitkaahp.htm>

‡ Right: Painting of Saint Innocent (Veniaminov) who spent 15 years in Alaska (in Unalaska and Sitka) as a Russian Orthodox Church missionary and leader. His work included learning and translating several Alaska Native languages, designing cathedrals, and providing oversight of the Russian school (Russian Bishop's House). Image courtesy of the Alaska State Library, ASL Portrait Files, Veniaminov-Ivan-3.



‡ The Russian Bishop's House, commonly known as the Russian school or orphanage. c. 1890. Photograph courtesy Alaska State Library, Early Prints of Alaska, P297-105.

Russian Bishop's House National Historic Landmark

THEN: The two-story log Russian Bishop's House served as the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Sitka and the residence of the bishop, as well as office, mission school, and the bishop's personal chapel.

The first officials of the Russian Orthodox Church arrived in Sitka in 1834 with Father Veniaminov, a priest who had spent 10 years at Unalaska studying the language and customs of the Aleut people. In 1838, while raising funds for the Alaska missions, Veniaminov so impressed Nicholas I with stories of the American Colony that the tsar ordered the creation of a new diocese encompassing Kamchatka and Alaska. He then named Veniaminov the first bishop of the diocese. During the same trip, Veniaminov took monastic vows and, before returning to Alaska, adopted the name Innocent.

The chief manager of the Russian-American Company at the time, Adolf Etolin, directed the construction of the Russian Bishop's new home in 1843. Finnish shipwrights used local spruce and Yellow Cedar in addition to energy saving elements such as sand-insulated subfloors and ceilings. Bishop Innocent was pleased with the result, stating that, "[The house] is in its architecture one of the best, most solid and most beautiful structures in New Archangel." The building included priests' quarters, seminary classrooms, a kitchen, and the office of the consistory of the North American Bishopric. The upper floor of the building, reserved for Bishop Innocent, included a private chapel in addition to living, and eating quarters.

The Bishop's House was owned by the Russian-American Company until the U.S. purchased Alaska, at which time the building was transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church in North America. Though Russian governance and commercial interests in Alaska ceased in 1867, Russian Orthodoxy continued to have a lasting impact in Alaska, especially among the Native people.

The Russian Bishop's House was designated an NHL in 1962.



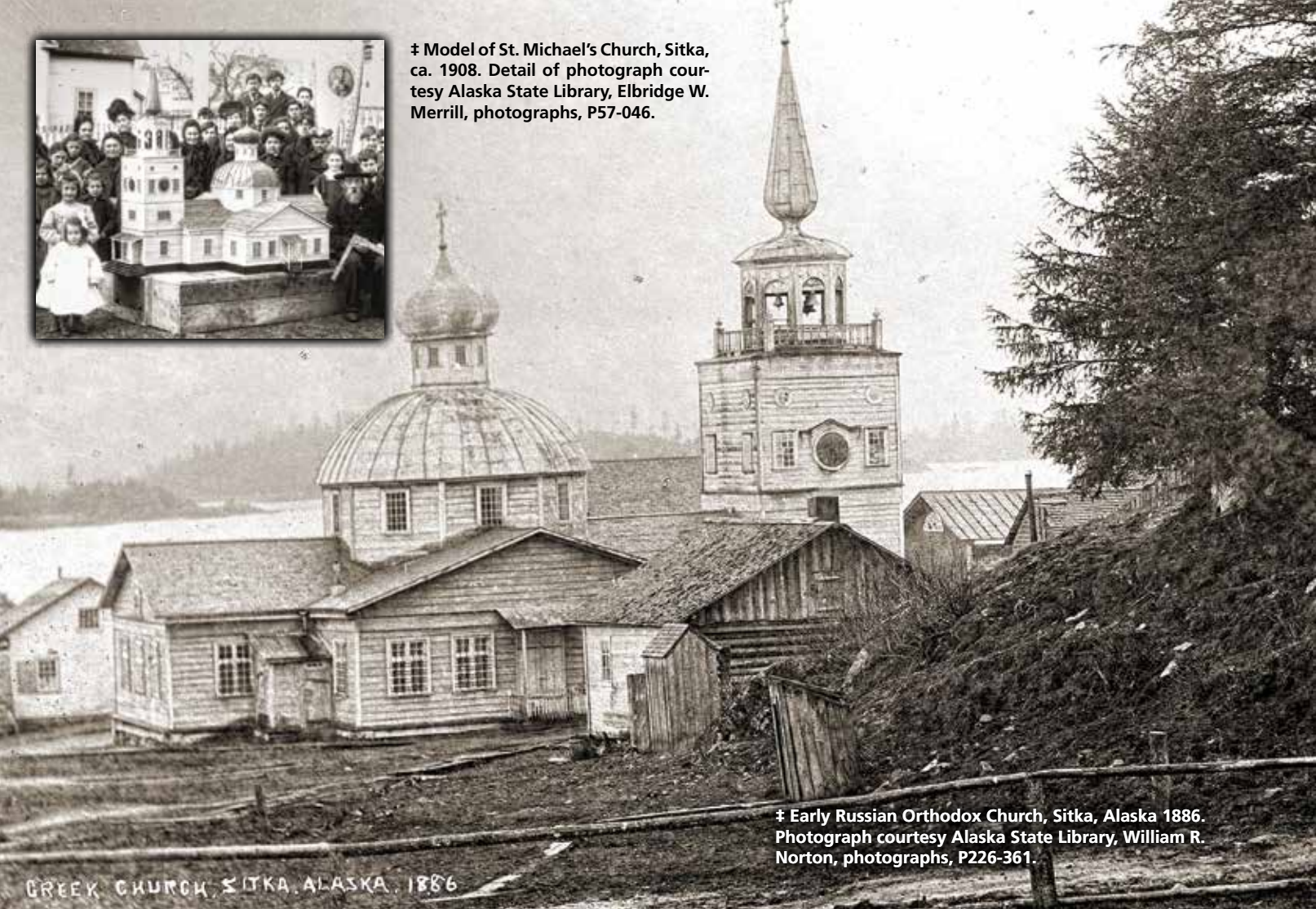
NOW: In 1972, the Russian Bishop's House was purchased by the National Park Service and restoration work began. There have been no major changes in the basic plan of the building since its construction, though the side galleries were demolished and rebuilt in 1887.

TODAY the Russian Bishop's House is part of Sitka National Historical Park. After 15 years of work, much of the building has been restored to its 1853 appearance. It is among the best surviving examples of a 19th-Century Russian residence in the U.S. Visitors are encouraged to tour the bishop's quarters and chapel and to view exhibits on Russian-America.

For information on Sitka National Historical Park, please visit: <http://www.nps.gov/sitk/index.htm>.



‡ Model of St. Michael's Church, Sitka, ca. 1908. Detail of photograph courtesy Alaska State Library, Elbridge W. Merrill, photographs, P57-046.



‡ Early Russian Orthodox Church, Sitka, Alaska 1886. Photograph courtesy Alaska State Library, William R. Norton, photographs, P226-361.

GREEK CHURCH, SITKA, ALASKA, 1886

St. Michael's Cathedral National Historic Landmark

THEN: The original St. Michael's Cathedral was designed by Bishop Innocent and constructed between 1844 and 1848, with funding from the Russian-American Company. The bishop designed and built a wrought-iron clock for the cathedral's tower, where bells, cast in a local foundry, were rung.

From 1840 to 1872, Sitka was the seat of the Russian Orthodox Diocese, which governed all of North America and, thereafter, it continued as the Seat of the Diocese of Alaska.

In 1966 a fire swept through downtown Sitka. Residents managed to save most of the cathedral's icons, furniture, and other valuables before the inferno claimed the building. Regrettably, Innocent's clock and the church bells were lost. Soon after the fire, workers meticulously reconstructed the cathedral using drawings that had been prepared as part of an Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS).

This outstanding example of Russian church architecture was by far the largest and most imposing religious edifice in Alaska until well into the 20th century.

St. Michael's Cathedral is significant for its association with Bishop Innocent, its role in the expansion of Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska, its icons and artifacts, and its importance as a centerpiece to the community of Sitka. The plan of the single-story church takes the shape of a cruciform, with the main altar at the center and wings at either side accommodating secondary altars. A steeple with a gilded cross tops the cathedral. The building's design incorporates elements of Italian Rococo, a style popular in Russia during the early 19th century.

The chapel on the left side of St. Michael's Cathedral was dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan, and the chapel on the right was dedicated to St. John until 1978, when it was rededicated to the canonized Bishop Innocent. Between the main chapel and the back of the cathedral is a screen called an iconostasis, adorned with silver, icons, and religious objects.

St. Michael's Cathedral was designated an NHL in 1962.



NOW: Located in the heart of downtown Sitka, St. Michael's Cathedral continues to attract a loyal congregation. It is frequently the first stop for visitors eager for a chance to glimpse the icons and liturgical finery that reflects its Russian past.

MANY of the icons in St. Michael's were donated by wealthy Russians and Imperial officials when Innocent travelled to Moscow in 1838-1840. Perhaps the most notable icon portrays Our Lady of Kazan, also known as the Sitka Madonna. Visitors are asked to respect the sanctity of the altar.

‡ Right: An iconic image during the Russian America time period was this symbol for the Russian coat of arms - a double-headed eagle with imperial crowns, and a depiction of St. George slaying a dragon. Photograph courtesy of the Alaska State Museum, Juneau [ASM-III-R-150].



‡ Background: View of Sitka before 1884. Main street view photographed from the Russian Orthodox Church. Building 29 (#1), with its four gable dormers, is circled. Original photograph taken by Will Lockwood, The Photo Shop Studio, Juneau. Photograph from Sitka National Historical Park Collection, Negative number 1662.



Russian-American Building No. 29 National Historic Landmark

THEN: The Russian-American Company constructed Building Number 29 (locally known as the Tilson Building and the Log Cache) to house company employees in the early 1850s. The stout, two-story log structure is one of only four surviving buildings constructed during the Russian-American colonial period in North America. Three are in Alaska, including the Russian Bishop's House in Sitka and the Russian-American Company Magazin (Baranov Museum) in Kodiak, and the fourth is the Rotchev House at Fort Ross, California. Building No. 29 is also a rare example of Russian-American colonial architecture. At the time of its construction, the Russian capital at Sitka was the center of civil administration, trade, and manufacturing for Russia's American colonies, stretching from the Aleutian Islands and Interior Alaska to Fort Ross in California with fortifications in Hawaii. During the 1850s, the Russian-American Company sold ice to gold seekers in San Francisco, fish and lumber to Hawaii and California, and engaged in whaling and coal mining enterprises.

Life for the employees of the Russian-American Company was largely communal. Building No. 29 accommodated multiple living quarters, as well as a corporate kitchen, bakery, laundry, and storage facilities. The building was constructed of massive spruce logs, harvested, hewn, and assembled by company craftsmen. Sawdust and gravel behind sailcloth served as insulation, and mosses from local muskeg were used as chinking. The craftsmen were likely Finnish shipbuilders brought to Sitka in the early 1840s by Adolf Etolin, a Russian-American Company manager originally from Finland.

When the U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia, Building No. 29 became home to several important government officials. In the 1880s, the building underwent extensive renovations in a Colonial Revival style. Early in the 20th century the building was used (as it is now) with commercial retail space on the lower level and living quarters above.

Building No. 29 was designated an NHL in 1987.



Now: The building on Lincoln Street is privately owned and continues to serve as a commercial building in downtown Sitka.



It is still possible to view the original log construction on the left side of the building, where the siding has been cut away and see-through plexiglass put in place.

‡ Photograph courtesy of Dirk HR Spennemann, 2010.

‡ New Archangel (Sitka) drawing by Aleksandr Postels, 1827, from Fedor Petrovich Litke's voyage of the *Senyavin*. Image courtesy of the Alaska State Library, Alaska and Arctic-Related Illustrations, P62-278.



American Flag Raising Site National Historic Landmark

THEN: On October 18, 1867, Russian and American dignitaries gathered at Castle Hill. Amidst cannonades and official proclamations, the Russian flag was lowered and the American flag raised, signaling the transfer of Alaska to the United States (officially known as the American Flag Raising Site). This event also marked the U.S. government's first expansion into non-contiguous territory.

Castle Hill has long been recognized as an important historic place. When Russian ships arrived in 1799, the Kiks.ádi Tlingits were living in a village near the base of Castle Hill and had built defensive structures atop the promontory they called *Noow Tlein* or "Big Fort." Alexander Baranov, the chief manager of the Russian-American Company, saw the strategic advantage of the site but appeased the Tlingits by establishing the Russian fur trading fort several miles to the north instead. In 1804, after Tlingit warriors attacked and destroyed the Russian redoubt at Old Sitka, Baranov returned from Kodiak to retaliate against the Tlingits at Castle Hill, only to find the Sitka village had been evacuated. The Tlingits had retreated to a newly constructed fort at the mouth of the Indian River (located within today's Sitka National Historical Park). After claiming the Sitka village and Castle Hill, the Russians managed to drive the Tlingits from Indian River, and they withdrew from the area, at least temporarily.

Between 1806 and 1867, the Russians made Sitka the seat of government for Russian America, constructing administrative and residential buildings on Castle Hill. In 1837, a two-story timber residence was constructed atop the hill and became known as Baranov's Castle, though Baranov had died almost two decades earlier. In the decades that followed the U.S. purchase of Alaska, Castle Hill served as the U.S. military headquarters and as an administrative center. An U.S. Department of Agriculture headquarters building, constructed in 1900, served many uses in the growing community before its demolition in 1955.

After Alaska was admitted to statehood in 1959, a flag with 49 stars was raised for the first time on Castle Hill. In commemoration of Alaska's centennial, a flag pole, six Russian cannons, and a stone parapet were installed on Castle Hill in 1967.

The American Flag Raising Site was designated an NHL in 1962.



† Photograph courtesy Alaska State Parks.

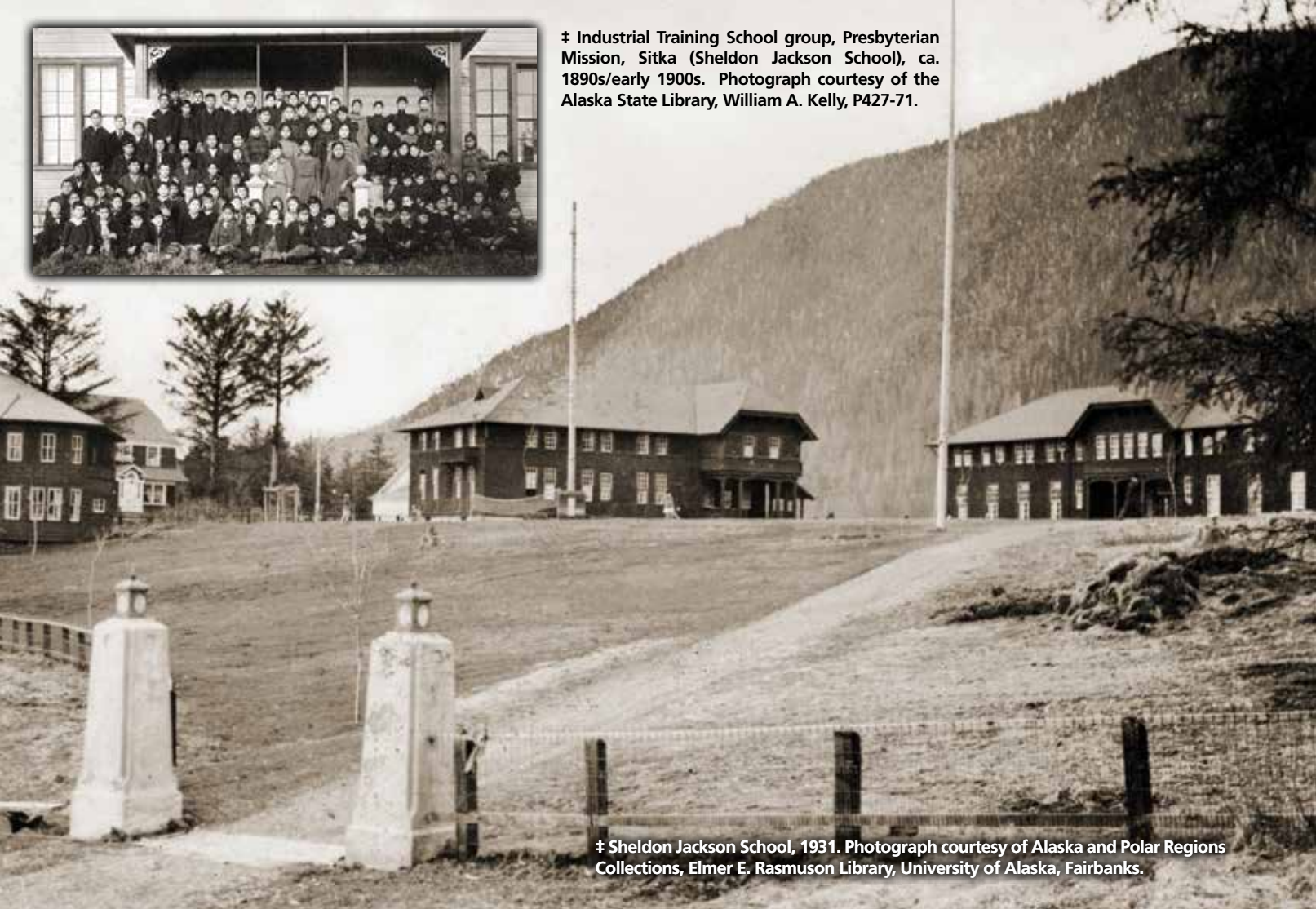
Now: Castle Hill is managed as an Alaska State Historic Site and continues to be a popular viewing site.

IN 1997, while preparing to build a ramp to the top of Castle Hill, investigators uncovered a treasure trove of artifacts from Tlingit, Russian, and American occupation of the site, including lead seals bearing the Russian-American Company logo, spruce root baskets, timbers and bricks, shoes, ceramic shards, blown glassware, cannon balls, gunflints, trade beads, and tools.

In 2011, the State prepared the Baranof Castle Hill State Historic Site Preservation Plan available at: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/plans/finalcastlehillplan.pdf>



‡ Industrial Training School group, Presbyterian Mission, Sitka (Sheldon Jackson School), ca. 1890s/early 1900s. Photograph courtesy of the Alaska State Library, William A. Kelly, P427-71.



‡ Sheldon Jackson School, 1931. Photograph courtesy of Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Sheldon Jackson School National Historic Landmark

THEN: The history of Sheldon Jackson School begins with the arrival of Presbyterian missionaries after the 1867 U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia. Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary and theology graduate from Princeton University, was one of the first to recruit fellow missionaries for work in Alaska. Jackson's belief in the need to assimilate American Natives made him a tireless advocate of Alaska Native education. Before the construction of the existing campus, Sheldon Jackson's school was known as the Sitka Mission, Sheldon Jackson Institute, the Industrial Home for Boys, and the Sitka Industrial Training School. The school operated under Jackson's direction with the support of the Presbyterian Women's Board of Home Missions, providing academic education and industrial training for Native students throughout Alaska, though primarily for Southeast Alaska Tlingit and Haida. As was the case elsewhere in the U.S., the cultural ramifications of missionary education were profound for both the Native students and their communities. Christian dogma, a prohibition on Native languages, and the school's Western curriculum required students to adopt the newly dominant Euro-American culture and economic system at the expense of their traditional cultures. At the same time, the school's emphasis on self-improvement helped to foster a new political movement among the Tlingit and Haida of Southeast Alaska. Many of Alaska's Native leaders were graduates of Sheldon Jackson School, including the founders of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and members of the territorial legislature.

Built in 1910-11, Sheldon Jackson School remains the only formal campus plan in Alaska. The architectural firm of Ludlow and Peabody designed the campus, overlooking the harbor, by incorporating Craftsman and Western Stick architectural elements and arranging the buildings around a central quadrangle.

Over time the school amended its original charter to become a junior college, began admitting non-Native students, and changed its name to Sheldon Jackson College. The college closed in 2007 and subsequently transferred the historic core campus buildings to Alaska Arts Southeast Inc. The community maintains a strong interest in preserving the historic campus, with support by the Sitka Historic Preservation Commission.

Sheldon Jackson School was designated an NHL in 2001.



‡ Allen Auditorium on the former Sheldon Jackson College campus. Photograph courtesy of Katherine Ringsmuth, October 2012.

Now: Located off Lincoln Drive and adjacent to Sitka National Historical Park, several of the largest historic buildings are used by the Sitka Fine Arts Camp, with activities that include a program to rehabilitate the buildings. Also contributing to the historic district is the Sage building, owned by the Sitka Sound Science Center, several privately owned cottages, and the octagonal-shaped Sheldon Jackson Museum. Built in 1895, it is the oldest museum in Alaska and is renowned for its Alaska ethnographic collection.



‡ Pictured are most of the founders of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, 1912. Left to Right: Paul Liberty, James Watson, Ralph Young, Eli Kalanvok (Katinook), Peter Simpson, Frank Mercer, James C. Jackson, Chester Worthington, George Fields, William Hobson, and Frank Price. Photograph courtesy Alaska State Library, Alaska Native Organizations, P33-01.

Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall National Historic Landmark

THEN: The Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall, Sitka Camp No. 1, is the original local chapter of this Alaska-wide Native organization that, for most of the first half of the 20th-century, was the only such group representing Alaska Natives.

The Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) organization was founded in 1912 by a group of predominantly Tlingit and one Tshimshian who were determined to battle discrimination against Alaska's Native people. The ANB encouraged Natives to educate themselves, to adopt Christian ways, and to use the political system to push for citizenship and land rights. In the ANB constitution they stated their desire "to oppose, discourage, and overcome the narrow injustice of race prejudice, and to aid in the development of the Territory of Alaska, making it worthy of a place among the States of North America." The Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) was established a few years later.

In 1914 the Sitka ANB meeting hall was built on land donated by the prominent Sitka Tlingit Katlian (K'alyaan), the grand-nephew of Chief Katlian, a leader of the Tlingits at the time of the Russian invasion. Most of the length of this 40 x 60 foot, two-story frame building projects over the waters of Sitka Channel and is supported by rows of pilings. The hall provided a venue for conventions and fundraising, as well as for social events and ceremonies such as weddings and funerals.

Initially the ANB had local camps in Sitka, Juneau, and Douglas. By 1925 there were chapters in nearly every Southeast Alaska village.

During its first years, the ANB along with its counterpart the ANS achieved many victories in extension of rights to Alaska's Natives that should have been common to all citizens of the U.S. This included the right to Workmen's Compensation and the right of Native children to attend public school. In 1929, ANB/ANS initiated what became the first Alaska Native land claims court suit. The ANB/ANS were also successful in pushing the Alaska legislature to pass the first antidiscrimination law in the nation in 1946, twenty years before the national Civil Rights movement.

The Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall was designated an NHL in 1978.



Now: The Alaska Native Brotherhood on Katlian Street continues to serve as a community hall. It is a gathering place for Sitkans and hosts numerous programs and events including the Sitka Native Education Program and the annual Elizabeth Peratrovich Day celebration. A 2010 appropriation by the Alaska State Legislature for \$150,000 is supporting some much needed building repairs including structural work on the piling foundation.



‡ Sitka Naval Operating Base, World War II era. Photograph courtesy of Isabel Miller Museum, Sitka, Alaska.

Sitka Naval Operating Base National Historic Landmark

THEN: The Sitka Naval Operating Base was the site of the U.S. Navy's first air station in Alaska, built to defend the U.S. during World War II against the threat of Japanese attack. In the 1930s, when military strategists began to recognize the need to defend the Pacific coast of the United States, Alaska was made the apex of a defense triangle that included Panama and Hawaii.

Japonski Island, located a short distance from downtown, over the O'Connell Bridge that spans Sitka Channel, was initially set aside as a U.S. Naval reservation in the 19th century. In 1939 the Navy formally commissioned Sitka Naval Air Station. Designed primarily for seaplanes, construction included a radio station, a naval section base, Marine barracks, and naval shore facilities. The Army Coast Artillery Corps protected the Navy Air Station. In 1942 the Air Station was redesignated a Naval Operating Base (NOB).

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Sitka NOB was placed on alert. Planes from the Sitka base patrolled Southeast Alaska waters looking for the enemy. Following the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor and subsequent occupation of Kiska and Attu islands in June 1942, the U.S. military focused on reclaiming these islands by establishing a series of airfields progressively west. As the Aleutian Campaign unfolded, Sitka NOB declined in strategic importance. U.S. forces retook Attu in May 1943, and the Japanese evacuated Kiska on July 28, 1943. By 1944 the Sitka NOB was decommissioned.

In 1946, the property was transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which opened Mt. Edgecumbe School for Alaska Native children the following year.

Several key features of the base remain today, including a concrete aircraft parking area and runway located near the water's edge; inland are two large metal aircraft hangars. Other features include piers, industrial buildings, administrative buildings, a recreation center, barracks, a mess hall, bachelor officer's quarters, and family housing units.

The Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses (includes Fort Rousseau and the Causeway) was designated an NHL in 1986.



‡ World War II boat house with railway. Photograph courtesy of Dirk HR Spennemann, 2010.

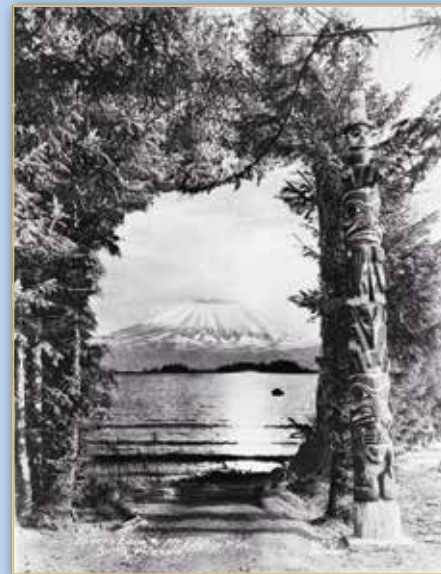
Now: The former WWII base buildings, located on Japonski Island, consists of multiple owners, most of who are involved with preservation efforts including: the Alaska Department of Education (maintaining the public boarding high school); U.S. Coast Guard (construction of the Cutter Support building); Sitka Maritime Heritage Society (rehabilitating the boat house); and Sitka Trail Works, Inc. (instrumental in seeing the establishment of the Fort Rousseau Causeway State Historic Site and overseeing its restoration).

‡ Sitka - View of the town from the South-West, Mt. Edgecumb bearing East, ca. 1860. Watercolor on paper by Lt. Schreiber. Gift of William Hulbert, 1987— one of four paintings of Sitka from several directions given as a wedding gift to Eugenia Klinkovstrem, youngest daughter of Martin Fedorovich Klinkovstrem, a navigator and agent for the Russian American Company from 1838 to 1867. Image courtesy of the Alaska State Museum, Juneau, V-A-50-4.



More about Sitka's National Historic Landmarks

Drawings and photographs for many of the Sitka NHL Buildings can be found on-line at the Library of Congress website that houses the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)/Historic American Engineering Survey (HAER) collection at: www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/



‡ Above: *Lovers Lane and Mt. Edgecumbe, Sitka, Alaska* courtesy of Alaska State Library, George Family collection, PCA-344-342. (Detail of this photograph serves as front cover image.)



‡ At left: examples of Sitka HABS documentation (clockwise from top): drawing of Building No. 29; photograph of Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall from the waterfront; and photograph of Sitka Naval Operating Base.



CHRONOLOGY OF SITKA'S NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

- 1799 Tlingits already established on Shee (Baranof Island) when Russians arrive to build a fur trading fort New Archangel Saint Michael at *Old Sitka*
- 1802 Tlingits attack and destroy Russian fort at *Old Sitka*
- 1804 Russians defeat Tlingits at Battle of Sitka; New Archangel founded at present-day Sitka
- 1834 Father Ivan Veniaminov arrives in New Archangel
- 1843 *Russian Bishop's House* erected as center of new diocese under Veniaminov
- 1848 *St. Michael's Cathedral* is built in the city center
- 1850s *Building Number 29* is constructed for Russian-American Company workers
- 1867 Transfer of Alaska to the U.S. with *American Flag Raising* at Castle Hill
- 1911 *Sheldon Jackson School* formal campus is constructed
- 1910 Sitka National Monument is designated
- 1914 *Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall* is constructed
- 1939 Navy begins construction of the *Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses* (decommissioned 1944)
- 1966 *St. Michael's Cathedral* destroyed by fire and rebuilt
- 1972 Sitka National Historical Park is designated
- 2005 Sitka is designated a *Preserve America Community*—providing national recognition of the community's work in protecting and celebrating Sitka's heritage