

**Agency: Commerce, Community and Economic Development**

**Grants to Named Recipients (AS 37.05.316)**

**Grant Recipient: Holy Assumption Orthodox Church**

**Federal Tax ID: 710879791**

**Project Title:**

**Project Type: Maintenance and Repairs**

# Holy Assumption Orthodox Church - Stabilization of Holy Assumption Orthodox Church, National Historic Landmark

**State Funding Requested: \$76,895**

**House District: 33 / Q**

One-Time Need

**Brief Project Description:**

Stabilization of Holy Assumption Orthodox Church

**Funding Plan:**

**Total Cost of Project: \$255,387**

	<u>Funding Secured</u>		<u>Other Pending Requests</u>		<u>Anticipated Future Need</u>	
	<i>Amount</i>	<i>FY</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>FY</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>FY</i>
Federal Funds	\$125,492	09				
Rasmuson Foundation			\$25,000	11		
Local Funds			\$5,000	11		
Other Funds			\$23,000	11		
<b>Total</b>	<u>\$125,492</u>		<u>\$53,000</u>			

*Explanation of Other Funds:*

*Other Funds are: \$5,000 National Trust for Historic Preservation Grant, \$5,000 donation from ROSSIA, Inc., \$13,000 in church funds*

**Detailed Project Description and Justification:**

The Holy Assumption Orthodox Church and Saint Nicholas Chapel have been the principal and most enduring representatives of Russian culture in south central Alaska from 1841 to the present. The church was constructed of hand hewn white spruce logs in 1896. Before 1910, a bell tower was added and the church was clad with horizontal wood siding. Over the last two decades, a noticeable bow has been observed on north and south walls church nave. In March 2008, siding was removed revealing previous attempts to arrest the outward bow and patches of dimensional lumber to replace rotted wood. Widespread rot and the lack of structural connections contribute to the bowed walls. In addition, the church foundation requires a seismic retrofit and an accessibility ramp. The proposed stabilization and restoration efforts will be compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

**National Significance**

The Holy Assumption Orthodox Church has been the principal and most enduring representative of Russian culture in south central Alaska from 1841 to the present. For the Kenaitze Indians, who are still a significant portion of the population, it was the major institution for the assimilation of western culture when the Russian fur traders first came to the area. In addition to serving as a religious center, the church began the first school on the Kenai Peninsula educating the local Kenaitze children

*For use by Co-chair Staff Only:*

**\$76,900  
Approved**

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and young adults to read, write, grow vegetables, and learn basic building methods. It served as a judicial center acting as an arbiter between the officials of the Russian American Fur Trading Company and the natives. The church served as a social center, bringing the community together to share ideas and promote the welfare of all. The church also provided the region's first access to public health with the introduction of smallpox vaccine after the first epidemic decimated the local population.

All three structures which contribute to the National Historic Landmark (NHL) site represent classic Russian-style architecture on the far-western frontier. The church is a fine example of a Russian village church, designed in the classic Pskov, vessel or ship pattern. It is perhaps the most colorful of all Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska with its broad pallet of colors from pure white to blue, green, and gold on the exterior. The chapel is an excellent model of Russian techniques of log construction with its uncovered log walls that illustrate of the precise craftsmanship and engineering of the Russian-trained builders of the Kenai Peninsula. The rectory is typical of the homes of the Russian village gentry and at the time of its construction was clearly a substantial landmark, being the only two-story structure in the community.

The icon and artifact collections date from the early 1700's when the first group of Russian missionaries came to Alaska. With the exception of three icons, all were written in Russia and transported to Kenai. The oldest icon, "Our Lady of Kazan," is believed to have been written in the early 1700's and brought to Alaska by the first missionaries in Kodiak Island. It is one of the oldest pieces of non-native art in the state of Alaska. The three icons that are not of Russian origin are rare examples by the native Aleut iconographer Gregori Petukhov who studied under Bishop Veniaminov, Enlightener of the Aleuts and Bishop of Sitka, who later was consecrated St. Innocent.

The church attic contains primary resource documents dating from the first resident priest, Igumen Nikolai as well as from subsequent priests who served the community, including educational materials from the first school in Kenai. The priests' journals and notes represent invaluable historical data that document the Kenaitze way of life beginning in 1844 when Igumen Nikolai became the first resident priest.

This property represents a complete historical resource because it has maintained its original, continued use by the community for over 150 years.

#### Severity of Threat

The Holy Assumption Orthodox Church contributes to the history of the Russian American occupation of Alaska. Unfortunately, the church is showing clear signs of structural deterioration that threaten its preservation. The north and south walls of the church nave have bowed outward considerably and suggest that the original log members have rotted. Many irreplaceable relics dating from the early Russian settlement are threatened not only by decaying wall logs within the church, but from the risk of fire or theft.

There are four primary threats to the Holy Assumption Orthodox Church which are the focus of this project: 1) deteriorated structural wall logs lacking lateral stability, 2) lack of adequate foundation and seismic reinforcing, 3) lack of an accessible ramp at the entry and, 4) absence of fire and theft alarm system.

#### Log Walls

On March 27, 2008, a contractor removed exterior siding from the north wall of the church to reveal what lay beneath. Once exposed, it became clear that the original wall logs had deteriorated over time due to moisture infiltration from roof runoff and wind driven rain. Previous attempts to arrest the outward bow were uncovered as were dimensional lumber patches replacing deteriorated wood.

Not only are the original wall logs deteriorating, they lack lateral stability. The interlocking nature of log construction corner timbering provides much needed lateral support to resist roof thrust and wind and shear forces. When the bell tower was added sometime before 1910, the original interior log wall, now defining the narthex, was removed; its members cut flush against the north and south walls. Two round columns were installed to carry the load of the missing wall. However, as the exterior walls deteriorated and their structural integrity diminished, the walls began to bow outward. If the wall logs are not stabilized, other components of the structure, including the roof will be severely compromised.

#### Foundation

The existing foundation was constructed during a centennial project in the 1970s. An inspection of the foundation on March 27, 2008, revealed that the concrete block stem wall was settling, cracking and lacked any structural connection to the building. Differential settlement of the perimeter wall and intermittent piers is revealed through sloping floors and cracking sheetrock. Kenai, Alaska, is a Zone 4 seismic area and this church serves an assembly occupancy. The combination of failing wall logs and a discontinuous, unattached foundation pose a serious threat to the inhabitants and the preservation of the building.

#### Accessible Ramp

Disabled and elderly members of the Holy Assumption parish have specifically requested an accessible ramp to access the church which is currently entered by way of a covered porch with two steps. The steps do not meet the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and limit safe and appropriate access to the church by regular users and visitors alike.

#### Fire and Theft Alarm

The Holy Assumption Orthodox Church is the most intact representative of the Russian Orthodox churches in the State of Alaska. The building and related historic icons dating to 1700 are irreplaceable and are at risk to fire and/ or theft. Currently, the church does not have a fire or theft detection or alarm system which poses a serious threat to this National Historic Landmark.

### Project Timeline:

Fundraising 2008- present; maintenance and repair work during 2010 construction season

### Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:

Holy Assumption Orthodox Church

### Grant Recipient Contact Information:

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Has this project been through a public review process at the local level and is it a community priority?  Yes  No