

Around the Mission: from the Log-Journal of an Alaskan Orthodox Missionary

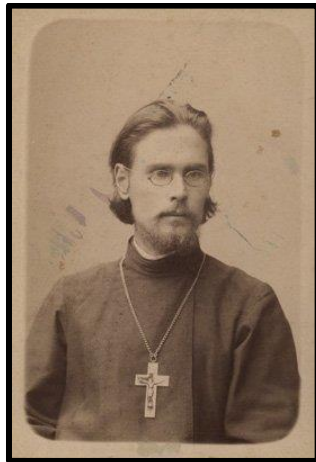
By Priest Tikhon Shalamov (Kodiak Parish)

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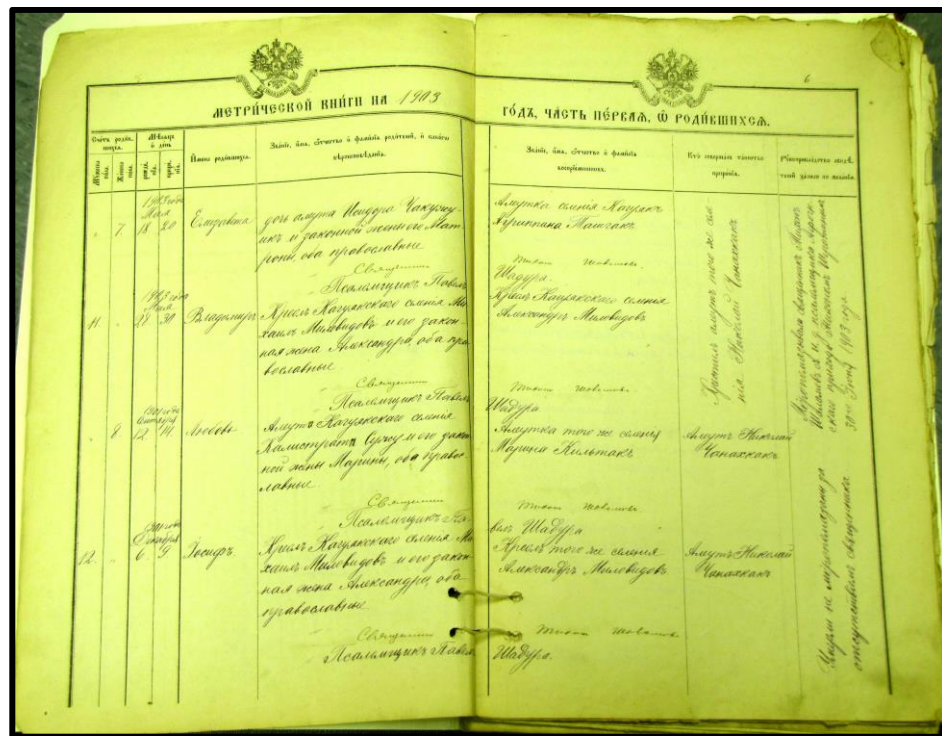
Father Tikhon Shalamov in 1905

Introduction to Part II

Not only did Father Tikhon Shalamov keep a log-journal of his pastoral trips, he also took pictures that help us readers, better visualize the described events. And even though some of his pictures were lost due to the opening of the undeveloped pictures by his hostess in Triokhsviatitel'skoe Village (see Part III of the travelogue), the remaining ones provide a unique glimpse into village life at the turn of the 20th century. Furthermore, the "1903 Vital Statistics Records of Kodiak Parish" ("Метрическая книга на 1903 годъ"), located at the Diocesan Archive of St. Herman's Seminary, disclose the gender and ethnic (Aleut, Creole, Russian,

American) identities, as well as the social statuses (Reader, *Starosta*), family connections (parents and godparents), and, finally, cause of death of the otherwise nameless baptized, wedded, and buried individuals. These additional Records, combined with Shalamov's literary talent, make this travelogue an exceptionally valuable socio-cultural and historical document, especially since the village of Kaguyak has been abandoned after the tidal wave of 1964, and most of its records were lost.

While reading «Part II» of the travelogue, one has to keep in mind that though Shalamov's critical observations of Native life are, for the most part, valid, the US Government, at that very time, was actively engaged in the process of passing more regulatory laws to reign in commercial companies and regulate international poaching in Alaska's waters



Four baptismal entries from the village of Kaguyak

1903 Kodiak Parish Metrical Records Journal, Part II: Newborns

Kodiak Parish Vital Statistics Records, Box 9, Folder 6.

(Courtesy of the Alaskan Diocesan Archive at St. Herman's Theological Seminary)

Part II

[Kaguyak to Aiaktalik]

The village of Kaguyak is not big, about twenty houses, with no more than one hundred villagers. It is located in a deep bay on the low, sandy shore by a lake – tall mountains guard and protect it from winter storms and winds.



Village of Kaguyak

Picture taken by Tikhon Shalamov during his 1903 trip.

American Orthodox Messenger, Vol. VIII, #7, (New York, NY, April-May 1904): 133.

(Courtesy of the Alaskan Diocesan Archive at St. Herman's Theological Seminary)

The villagers are Aleuts; only one family is Russian Creole but even they are on the path of degeneration. There is only one American – our friend Captain Woche.

We were recognized from the shore, and the people were joyously waiting at the *laida* for a priestly blessing. We met as old friends, even relatives, heartily exchanging brotherly kisses.

[Some of the people had] stuporous and depressive movements, intoxicated-looking, yellowish-pallid, and sunburnt faces reflective of a severe and joyless life.

The times of peace and quiet joy of Aleut life is long gone: what they have now is suffering and privation and the fear of cold and starvation. The merciless hunt for earthly happiness has pitilessly robbed the Aleuts and deprived them of the

last means of breath and life. The fur trade is depleted, fish are disappearing, but everyone simply overlooks the misfortune of the Aleuts. The robbery is horrible and indescribable. Thus, according to the 1804 witness of F. Shemelin, a Chief Salesman of the Northern Russian-American Company¹ (see page 327 of the journal of the first round-the-world voyage published in Saint-Petersburg in 1818²), 18,629 sea otter pelts were exported from Alaska to China alone. One hundred years later, in 1903, barely 50 sea otters were killed around all of Alaska. Only two pelts were received from Kodiak, formerly the main haven of sea otters.

And all of this happened in one century. The worst predatory deprivation happened during the transfer of the North American Colonies to the United States. Surely, both Russian and (since 1898) American governments, seeing the complete disappearance of the precious animal, tried, through various conservation tactics, to stop this predation, but with the abundance in Alaska of shameless and avaricious people, all their good efforts misfired. For example, even this year, the pirate schooner “Unalaska”³ from the village of Naumnak on Unga came to Akhiok to hunt for sea otter, even though it is strictly prohibited to hunt sea otter from schooners. According to another witness statement from Shemelin regarding the Russian American Company, in 1804, out of 18,629 sea otters only 4,628 (less than one quarter) were sold to China by Russians. The rest were exported from Alaska on English and American ships by various “rogue entrepreneurs,”⁴ as Shemelin describes them (page 330 of the same journal).

¹ Here, Shalamov misnames the Russian American Company because the North American Company no longer existed after 1799 (for more details, see Richard A. Pierce, ed., *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*, “Shelikhov, Natalia Alekseevna,” Kingston, Ontario and Fairbanks, AK: Limestone Press, 1990), s.v.

² Shemelin’s round-the-world expedition took place in 1803-1806. The journal, *Zhurnal pervogo puteshestviia Rossiian vokrug zemnogo shara* was published in St. Petersburg in 1816 (for more details, see Richard A. Pierce, ed., *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*, Kingston, Ontario and Fairbanks, AK: Limestone Press, 1990), s.v. “Shemelin, Fedor.”

³ There was an Alaskan schooner “Ounalaska” during this period.

⁴ These traders were, in fact, legal entrepreneurs who were authorized by the Chinese to sell sea otter pelts and other fur along the Chinese Pacific coast. The primary place where Russians were authorized (by various treaties) to sell their pelts was in Kyakhta, a town on the Russian-Mongolian border.

The same happened to other trades and animals. The seal fur trade that formerly procured hundreds of thousands of pelts has been depleted to the extent that the concerned governments should organize special international committees to protect the valuable disappearing animal.⁵

According to governmental reports, Alaska is progressing but upon closer examination by Alaskans themselves, Alaska is being robbed and getting impoverished. It is not surprising, though, for all of her great wealth is sent to the center – to the states, leaving her with just some *iukola*,⁶ dry, like an old sole of a shoe. The life of the indigenous population of Alaska is literally wilting – at this point neither gold mining, nor fish trading (and these are the last remaining resources)⁷ can help: it's mostly newcomers, the imported element who work in these mines and canneries and who care as much about Alaska as a Martian cares about Earth. We testify here with full conviction and confidence that with the disappearance of fish in Alaska, the already starving and emaciated indigenous inhabitants of Alaska, the Aleuts, will simply disappear.

The attitude toward the lives of Aleuts, from the side of the government and the abusive Alaskan officials is that of blatant indifference: they are not willing to provide them with a sack of seed potatoes to support and add to their poor rations or a couple of cattle to start breeding. Instead, they follow the recommendation of the honorable Professor of Agriculture, Mr. Gorgerson and provide [Natives] with radishes, asparagus, salad, parsnips, and parsley. In this respect, the attitude of American people toward their native land is incomprehensible: they are willing to

⁵ After the sale of Alaska in 1867, Pacific Coast companies literally “...plundered the seal rookeries. Rival traders took an estimated 240,000 seals in 1868 alone.” For more details, see Dorothy Knee Jones, *A Century of Servitude: Pribilof Aleuts Under US Rule* (Washington, DC, University Press of America, 1980), 3.

⁶ *Iukula* (Siberian Far East) is dried fish, with or without bones in it.

⁷ A good example of fish as a diminishing resource for the Native population would be in the village of Karluk that, at the height of its commercial fishing period (turn of 20th century) had five fish-processing canneries. These canneries competed among themselves and with the Natives for salmon: canneries' seine nets at the mouth of the river almost completely blocked the upstream nets placed by the Natives. For more details, see Sonja Luehrmann *Alutiiq Villages Under Russian and U.S. Rule* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2008), 109. See also Patricia Roppel, *Salmon From Kodiak: An History of Salmon Fishing in Kodiak Island, Alaska*, Alaska Historical Commission Studies in History, (Anchorage, 1986).

perceive the suffering of the hungry in a foreign land across the oceans or to feel badly for poor Israel, but they will pass by fellow compatriot Aleuts with cold scorn, leaving them with their powerlessness and unenlightenment to deal alone with their grief and poverty. And here is a pauper, robbed, beaten, and wounded, lying by the roadside with his life ebbing away, and there is no one to pour wine and oil on his wounds and no one to put him on top of a life-saving donkey. They saw and see his suffering, yet pass by;⁸ a cold indifference is the answer to his sorrow and pain. A cruel heart will say that the Aleuts, as a lower race⁹, are doomed to extinction. But who was instrumental in this, if not their predatory fellow humans? Give an opportunity to Aleuts to show their natural strength, if it is not too late, and only then judge them, still not forgetting, at the same time, about the proverbial log in your own eye.¹⁰

It is a Patronal Feastday in Kaguyak and so we hurried with all the people to the chapel to offer a thanksgiving service to the Great Apostles and to commemorate their glorious and long-suffering life in Christ.



People from Kaguyak.

Picture taken by Tikhon Shalamov during his 1903 trip.

**American Orthodox Messenger, Vol. VIII, #8, (New York, NY, 15-28 April 1904), 151
(Courtesy of the Alaskan Diocesan Archive at St. Herman's Theological Seminary)**

⁸ An allusion to the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37.

⁹ Shalamov here refers to a pseudo-evolutionary theory popular at the turn of the 20th century. This theory promoted the superiority of certain races and, subsequently, their phenotypic features, such as skull-shapes, eye-colors, etc.

¹⁰ An allusion to Luke 6:42.

After the service, Aleut interim Reader, Nikolai Chapakhkak, brought the Parish Metrical Record Journal¹¹ for me to check and make an entry. The writings in this book brought me even more grief, drowning my heart in sadness: the quite voluminous section about the deceased had a column for the cause of death that was almost incomprehensible. I felt like both laughing and crying for a long, long time, without stopping, till I collapsed. Literally, the entries contained: “zhivoteris’, prokhopalit’, nooki palit’, ot bolezni kul’iari, espokalis’, ot bolezni v arvota,” and other crazy phrases.¹² And it is this unfortunate author of these dreadful notes who is called to lead the village [in spiritual matters] during the absence of a priest for exactly 362 days. – It is true that after reading such notes one can literally die from one of those crazy diseases. This also shows how great and pressing is the need for [church] readers and catechizers in Alaska. Aren’t there any orphanages and schools [in Alaska]? Cannot they prepare satisfactory readers and village teachers? Not only are they doing it now, but they have already prepared quite a few. However, the graduates of these schools and orphanages, having partaken of the blessings of civilized life, are not willing to go back to a primitive life and live without any means among the impoverished Aleuts, knowing that their fellow villagers do not have even ten potatoes to help them out. With their consciousness enlightened, their souls will be grieved by the woes of the Aleuts, but in order to attract them to the villages to serve their unenlightened, disadvantaged brothers, we need to provide them with a stipend, even if a small one. But where can we procure it, considering the fact that Alaska, with its sparsely populated and scattered villages, needs hundreds of such readers?

On this first day of our mission, my tired body demanded rest, but my overly taxed and exhausted brain kept me awake for a long time, despite a soft bed in the house of the Creole, Ivan Milovidov.

¹¹ Not only a priest was to keep a metrical record journal, each parish had their own journal preserved at the church. Usually, it was the tonsured Reader of the parish (or his interim) who registered births and deaths in this journal.

¹² These words are the various roots of Russian words for various diseases (“prokhopalit” from Russian “брюхо болитъ” – “belly ache”), scrambled to the state of almost complete incomprehensibility. An English equivalent would be something like “fevaria,” etc.

June 30th. Still, quiet, and caressing air of a bright, blue-skied morning. We ceremoniously *chrismated*¹³ and *churched*¹⁴ children¹⁵, with the royal doors¹⁶ open and the whole village assisting by offering prayers. Then we performed the service for the departed who passed to life eternal during the last summer.¹⁷ Funeral hymns sounded robust in the small church – brothers and friends, kneeling and with their hearts softened, asked the Lord of life and death to forgive the sins of the departed and let them rest in eternal joy and bliss. Instinctively, my soul thanked the Lord of the world because he preserved us in one true faith – Holy Orthodoxy that provides so much spiritual consolation to the believers, while keeping unchanged from times immemorial the Prayer for the Departed. After dinner we went to visit the sick Aleut, Pavel. Emaciated face, body consumed by the syphilitic poison... A horrible disease, brought to Alaska by newcomers as a certain stamp of God's curse.¹⁸

Even though Aleuts had their own, so to say, folk medicine, in many respects quite original – they cure by hypnosis and by surgical knife¹⁹ – it proved helpless against the new festering and malodorous disease. Thus Pavel, like the Biblical

¹³ In Orthodox tradition, immediately after the ceremony of Baptism, traditionally performed on the 40th day after birth, children are chrismated, that is they receive the gift of the seal of the Holy Spirit through the application of the special oil called holy *chrism* (also called myrrh) onto all parts of their body. After that, the person is tonsured (a lock of hair, representing strength, is cut off) and then churched in imitation of Old Testament practice (for more details, see Father Thomas Hopko, *Worship*, Vol. II, The Orthodox Faith Series, Syosset, New York: The Orthodox Church in America, Fifth Printing, 1997, s.v. "Baptism" and "Chrismation."

¹⁴ These children were *baptized* by the church Reader's *locum tenens* (interim) Nikolai Chapakhkak. However, they were not *chrismated* because that can only be done by a priest.

¹⁵ The Metrical Record identifies the two *chrismated* children as Elizaveta, daughter of the Aleut, Iosif Chakuzhuik and his wife Matrona; and Vladimir, son of the Creole, Mikhail Milovidov and his wife Alexandra (Kodiak Parish Vital Statistics Records, Box 9, p. 6).

¹⁶ Royal doors are the central doors in the iconostasis – a wall with inset icons that separates the altar from the rest of the church.

¹⁷ The Metrical Record identifies the deceased as the Aleut, Porfirii Aliugli (age 53, died of TB); baby Liubov', daughter of Kalistrat Suzhu (age 3 months, died of "babies weakness"); the Aleut, Ioakim, foster child of Nikita Sidulia (age 24, died of TB); Anastasia, widow of Peter Il'ga (age 64, died of old age); Elizaveta, the wife of the Aiaktalik Aleut, Simeon Nauia (age 19, died of sharp pain in her chest). All the deceased were buried in the Chapel's graveyard (Kodiak Parish Vital Statistics, Box 9, p. 29).

¹⁸ Syphilis (known to Russians as "French disease" was brought to Alaska and to Kodiak, specifically, by the crewmember of Shelikoff and other ships. For more details, see Richard A. Pierce, ed., trans. Marina Ramsay, *A Voyage to America*, Alaska History, no. 19, (Kingston, Ontario, Canada: The Limestone Press, 1981), 117.

¹⁹ Alutiiq traditional healing included, besides hypnosis and surgical knife, healing with herbs. For more details, see Joanne B. Mulcahy, *Birth and Rebirth On An Alaskan Island: The Life of an Alutiiq Healer* (University of Georgia: Athens & London, 2001).

sufferer Job, abandoned by friends and relatives, laid himself down on a puss-covered bed, in a stupor of despair, having let go of all hope. And there he lies, in his *barabara*-like shed, on a bare floor, amidst the leftovers of rotting fish – and there he will lie until the rotten body refuses to carry his [still] healthy soul.

One is filled with indignation at the thought of all those scoundrels who spread this disease around the world. [However], there is good news from Paris about [our] famous compatriot, Professor Mechnikov²⁰ [who is] finding the methods to track down the horrible enemy. – Let God enlighten him with the Light of His wisdom in his scholarly pursuits for the benefit of humanity.

From three o'clock [P.M.] on, prayed before the confessional, and then confession itself – a hospital for grieving and defiled souls.



People from Kaguyak 2

Picture taken by Tikhon Shalamov during his 1903 trip.

**American Orthodox Messenger, Vol. VIII, #9, (New York, NY, 1-14 May 1904), 169
(Courtesy of the Alaskan Diocesan Archive at St. Herman's Theological Seminary)**

I always take confession from Aleuts with an interpreter. Without the knowledge of the language, there is no other way. [An alternative] usually recommended method of prescribed questions and answers, I find quite strange, for under such circumstances a spiritual father cannot provide any guidance to the repenting soul and cannot listen to and understand the degree and strength of his

²⁰ Professor Ilya Mechnikov (1845-1916), a 1908 Nobel Prize Winner, for his work in immunology, discovered that syphilis was a transmissible disease.

repentance. This [latter] method of confession is similar to an infamous, blasphemous interpretation [of confessional practice] by Old Believer²¹ Kir Ambrosius²² in Belaia Krinitsa.²³ There is a clear precedent for allowing an interpreter into confession: the Early Church allowed public confessions amidst the whole congregation of the faithful. [And here], under dire circumstances, we have only one extra person.

July 1st. Sunny summer day. The blessed intermingling of the airstreams. Peace and quiet in nature. Agitated and disturbed by sin, the souls of the Aleuts also became pacified. Since seven o'clock [P.M.], [we] served an "all-night vigil" and after it, sanctified the waters.²⁴ People filled a small, clean chapel which had shining *lampadas*²⁵ and a *panikadilo*.²⁶ Together with the *panikadilo* smoke, the prayers about "all those who labor, all those who are to suffer..."²⁷ rose to the Lord's throne. The choir sang quite robustly along with the resounding, high-pitched tenor voice of "Tikhon."²⁸ The Aleuts attend church quite eagerly, have a heart-felt piousness, and happily welcome priests and their exhortations. However, their lack of spiritual sophistication and natural dissimulation, that were so deceptive to the first missionaries, significantly decrease the value of their piety.²⁹

²¹ The term "Old Believers" is applied to Russian Orthodox Christians who did not accept liturgical reforms initiated by Patriarch Nikon in the mid-seventeenth century and split from the official church in 1666.

²² Kir Amvrosii (Amvrosii Popovich, 1791-1863) was the first Old Believer Metropolitan of the Belokrinitskoe Soglasie [Agreement], the largest group of the Popovtsy denomination.

²³ Belaia Krinitsa is an Old Believer monastery in western Ukraine that formerly was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Since the eighteenth century this monastery has been the holiest site for this Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church.

²⁴ Here Shalamov refers to the "Service of the Great Sanctification of Waters of Holy Theothany" (for more details, see *The Great Book of Needs*, Vol. I, (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2000), 314.

²⁵ *Lampada* (from Latin *lampas* – light) is an oil lamp hung in front of an icon.

²⁶ *Panikadilo* (from Greek *polykandilion* – many candles) is a chandelier with multiple candles.

²⁷ A quote from the poem *Wanderer* written by a Russian poet Ivan Aksakov (1823-1886), a notable Slavophile (an intelligentsia representative who promotes traditional Russian cultural values).

²⁸ Tikhon's name is used in quotation marks in an ironic way, to emphasize the *double entendre* of the homophonic word "tikho" (Russian for "quiet"), as opposed to the loud volume of his singing.

²⁹ Here, Shalamov demonstrates his ethnocentricity by negatively characterizing a natural reticence of Native (and Oriental) people to say, "No", as opposed to Russian straightforwardness and assertiveness.

The moral condition of the village is not excellent: in many, the vices of drunkenness and lewdness³⁰ stay deeply rooted for years and require radical measures.

July 2nd: The sun has just appeared in the heavenly azure. Life was waking up from the quietude of night. Aleuts, with somber, focused, and somewhat sad faces, in their best clothes and in single file proceeded slowly to the church. The muffled tone of the church bell called [the faithful] to the holy service, in remembrance of God's life and death, [and] to the preparation and expiatory reception of the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ.³¹ Piously, bowing to the earth and with their hands crisscrossed on their chests, the Aleuts approached the precious cup of salvation. – After the liturgy, I explained the Parable of the Prodigal Son, trying to discourage drunkenness and lewdness, these horrible snakes of the human race.

With grateful and pacified hearts, the Aleuts left for their home-cooked repasts³² that turned out to be quite meager: pieces of bread, fish, and only sporadic glasses of tea. "Tikhon" has shared our supplies with those who were lacking.

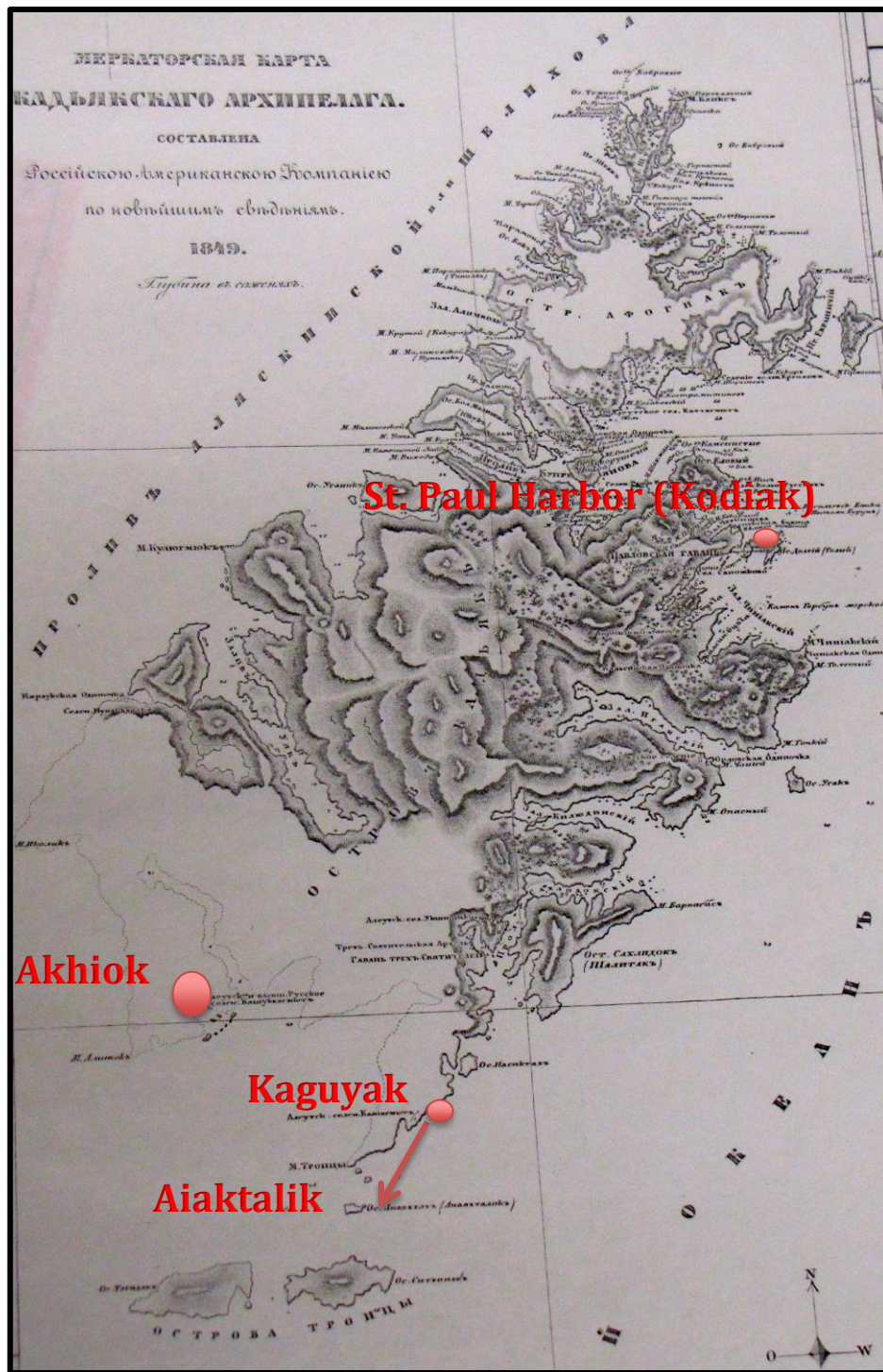
Having rested a little, we checked the church accounts and a collection box. In total, it contained \$38.15. From that sum, they gave us \$15 for the candles and \$5 for travel expenses: a complete impoverishment; eight or nine years ago there was up to \$300 in this chapel. The people again gathered inside the church, and I started to talk about the perils of drunkenness. Eight women vowed to stay sober.

The weather was calm... The route to other villages was to proceed through dangerous and stormy areas, and for this reason, we relished this calm moment to continue our journey. The Aleuts quickly prepared *baidarkas*, and we set off [from Kaguyak] to the accompaniment of villagers' heartfelt good wishes and a gun salute. This year the farewell was especially soulful, for we had to part not only for a year,

³⁰ Both "vices" can be attributed to the colonial influences of both Russian and American cultures: alcohol was introduced (and, later, supplied) by Russians and Americans, and lewdness can be easily encouraged by alcohol due to decreased inhibitions.

³¹ A reference to the Mystery of the Holy Communion that takes place at the end of the Divine Liturgy. The whole service is a symbolic reenactment of the death and resurrection of Christ.

³² For some reason, Shalamov omits the fact that he performed the wedding of the Kaguyak Aleut, Nikita Sidulia (second marriage) and the Aiaktalik Aleut, Anna Anakalak (second marriage). (Kodiak Parish Vital Statistics Records, Box 9, Folder 6). Traditionally, the wedding is performed right after the Divine Liturgy.



Shalamov's *baidarkas'* route "Kaguyak to Aiaktalik"

On the 1849 Map of Kodiak Island by the Russian American Company

(Courtesy of the Baranov Museum, Kodiak, AK)

but for forever, till the Second Coming, till the afterlife [because] next summer I intend to leave Kodiak and return to my dear, beloved Russia after ten years of wandering in far-away foreign lands, among alien and hostile people. I am awaiting this moment with great anticipation and ardent love. I pray that the Motherland will embrace her devoted and loving son into the bosom of his native land and native people. Let God's *pokrov*³³ extend over you, my dear and holy land! The Aleuts thanked me wholeheartedly for all the care and labor throughout all the many years.

A light wind was blowing, but it was relatively calm, and we thus successfully made it to the village of Aiaktalik.³⁴ The village is located on a low-lying, treeless island at the southernmost tip of Kodiak. All around it is harsh wilderness. Only the beautiful Chapel³⁵ gives joy to the eye and softens the gloomy landscape. The constant surf, the underwater rocks, reefs, and unusual currents cause lots of anxiety and inconvenience to the Aleuts who were brought here because of the profitable sea otter trade and now have to stay because of the expensive houses that trade companies built for them.³⁶

The greeting thunder of gunshots and the ringing of bells announced our arrival, and all the people, from the youngest to the oldest, left all their household chores behind and rushed to the *laida* to welcome us.

The sadly reflective appearance of the Aleuts and the reproachful expression of their Native faces disturbed, even here, the peaceful tranquility of one's soul. It seemed that these dark, sad eyes silently and hopelessly complained about all the abuse and oppression that the newcomers had caused them.

³³ Here Shalamov refers to the image familiar to any Orthodox Christian – the Mother of God, in which she is holding her *omophorion* (a wide band of cloth worn as a symbol of authority, usually by bishops) over the holy city of Constantinople, thus preserving it from destruction by the enemy. This event of deliverance is commemorated as one of the Orthodox Feasts. Coincidentally, the Church in the village of Akhiok is dedicated to this feast and thus bears its name.

³⁴ The Russian spelling of the name of this village is “Аехталик.”

³⁵ St. Andrew Chapel.

³⁶ The original Alutiiq settlements began to be consolidated into larger villages under Russian rule. For more details, see Luehrmann, *Villages*.