

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 IV

[Pavlovskaja Gavan'—Monk's Lagoon – Pavlovskaja Gavan']

The tradition of pilgrimages to Monk's Lagoon can be traced all the way to the times of Father Herman settling there. Passing Russian officials (Simeon Yanovsky, Kyrill Khlebnikov, Governor von Wrangel and his wife) and local Native and Creole people made a trip (by boat or on foot across Spruce Island) to visit the Elder in his humble abode. Upon the Elder's repose in 1837, the flood of pilgrims intensified: almost every Russian missionary serving in Alaska, as well as the pious locals, wanted to visit the grave of the Blessed Elder.



**2015 Aerial View of the City of Kodiak
With Mount St. Herman and Monk's Lagoon in the Background to the Left
(Courtesy of Daria Safronova-Simeonoff)**

One of the missionary priests, Nikita Marchenko, a monk from Valaam Monastery even wanted to become the *ktitor* (permanent guardian) of the place: he moved to Spruce Island in 1886, built two cells and erected a grave mark over the grave of Father Herman. Finally, the chapel over the grave was built during a five-year period under the direction of Father Tikhon Shalamov: it was dedicated in 1898 by Father Anatoly Kamensky, himself once a pilgrim to Spruce Island. After this, almost every major Orthodox hierarch visited Spruce Island to venerate Father Herman's memory and many of them left accounts of their pilgrimages.

In 1935, the last Russian missionary on Kodiak Island, Father Gerasim Schmaltz, moved to Spruce Island and spent the next thirty years of his life taking care of the holy place. Local people from the village of Ouzinkie helped him to build a cell and a small Kaluga Mother of God Chapel. They would visit him often (either by boat or by trail connecting the south and the north ends of Spruce Island) and bring back earth from the grave of Father Herman.

In 1990s, monks from St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood moved to Monk's Lagoon, built themselves *barabara* cells (Native style sod-houses), rebuilt the Meeting of the Lord Chapel and, later, started building a larger building of New Valaam monastery – it still stands twenty feet from the shore, unfinished.

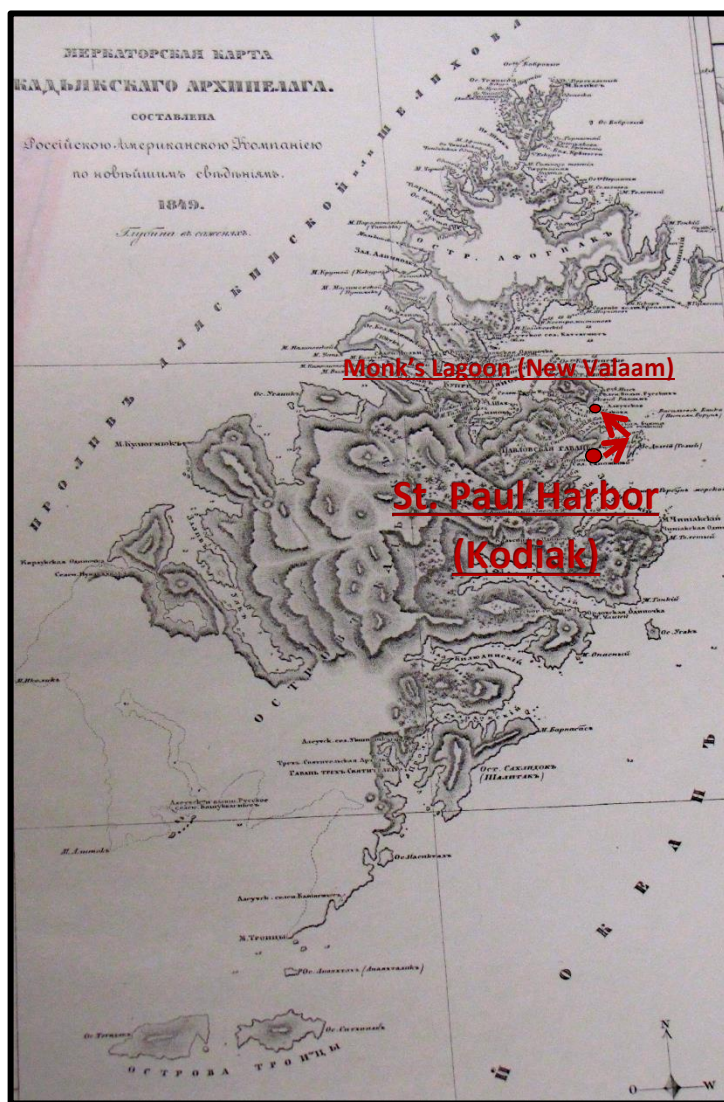
The pilgrimage as a yearly event took shape in 1970, after the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) canonization of Father Herman as Saint Herman of Alaska. Every year, pilgrims from all over the world come to Kodiak between the 7th and the 10th of August to participate in the pilgrimage: Kodiak hotels are usually overbooked during this time, and many pilgrims settle at St. Herman Seminary or are even taken into the homes of local people. The pilgrimage starts with the Akathist Service to St. Herman of Alaska at Holy Resurrection Cathedral. The next day, pilgrims, led by OCA hierarchs, the Bishop of Alaska, Kodiak priests, and visiting clergy, journey (sometimes in inclement weather conditions) to Monk's lagoon by boats captained by local people. After the Divine Liturgy is served at St. Sergius and Herman of Valaam Chapel, the pilgrims partake of the Native food lunch prepared by the Ouzinkie people and delivered by boat to the pilgrims' picnic site on the beach. The pilgrimage sometimes can take a route to the top of St. Herman Mountain where a large cross was erected through the collaborative efforts of the local people and the US Coast Guard Base Kodiak. Also, some pilgrims extend their stays by boating to St. Michael's Skete (Sunny Cove) and St. Nilus' Skete (Nelson/St. Nilus Island).

After their return to Kodiak, exhausted pilgrims are welcomed by St. Herman Sisterhood to their soup kitchen in the basement of Holy Resurrection Cathedral. The pilgrimage ends with the Divine Liturgy at Holy Resurrection Cathedral followed by the Banquet, where the pilgrims share their experiences and, sometimes, accounts of miracles, with their fellow pilgrims.



Boats Delivering Pilgrims to Monk's Lagoon (2013).

(Courtesy of Daria Safronova-Simeonoff).

Part IV¹[Pavlovskaiа Gavan'²—Monk's Lagoon – Pavlovskaiа Gavan']

Shalamov's route to Monk's Lagoon (New Valaam) on the
1849 Map of Kodiak Island by the Russian American Company
(Courtesy of the Baranov Museum, Kodiak, AK)

¹ There is no exact date of the journey mentioned in Shalamov's book "Around the Mission." However, his trip notes "Around the Mission" were previously published in No. 10, Vol. VIII of the *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, 15-28 of May, 1904 (pp. 192-196), which makes July 1903 the most likely date of the trip.

² Svyato-Pavlovskaya Gavan' (St. Paul's Harbor) was founded on the Island of Kodiak in 1892, when the chief manager of Shelikhov-Golikov company, Alexander Baranov, decided to move company's post from the Three Saints Bay settlement to a safer location.

The longest expedition was complete; we only had to visit the chapel of Blessed Elder Herman³ on Spruce Island.⁴ That would not be difficult. We had the boat and the sailors – the children of the orphanage.⁵ We did not have to hire a helmsman, either – our ten years of meandering in Alaska have taught us something: we saw the howling storms and raging sea; we knew what it meant to lower the sails, let the sail out, put out more sail, add some *kleevers*⁶, and other sailing “lingo.”

The 8th day of August was calm and quiet. The sea was napping peacefully along its shores. Nature was lolling and fawning upon us with the radiant rays of the beatific sun. The air was clean and exuded oxygen: we breathed easily and freely.

The children from the orphanage quickly prepared our skiff. I took my whole family to venerate the holy grave of the Blessed Elder. They have heard a lot about him and now were burning with desire to see the place of his holy life and feats. One more family from Kodiak joined us, so that the total number of pilgrims was 20 people.



St. Herman Orphanage in Kodiak.

Picture taken by Tikhon Shalamov, date unknown.

**American Orthodox Messenger, Vol. VIII, #8, (New York, NY, 15-28 April 1904), 153
(Courtesy of the Alaskan Diocesan Archive at St. Herman's Theological Seminary)**

³ Tikhon Shalamov refers to Saint Herman of Alaska as “Elder Herman” or, simply, “Herman” because Elder Herman was not canonized by the Orthodox Church of America as Saint Herman of Alaska until 1970.

⁴ Spruce Island is a small island (part of Kodiak Archipelago) five miles away from the city of Kodiak. Saint Herman of Alaska chose to build his hermitage in the forest near a lagoon there (now known as Monk's Lagoon). He named the place “New Valaam” after his monastery back in Russia.

⁵ St. Herman Orphanage was founded by Father Tikhon Shalamov in Kodiak in 1892 and functioned till 1917. Later, in 1901, an orphanage for girls was opened as well.

⁶ “Kleevers” (from Dutch “kluiver”) is a slanted triangular sail.

There were no waves in the ocean and all passengers felt good and happy. The skiff quickly moved [ahead] propelled by the well-coordinated rowing of the oarsmen. We passed Mill Bay Cape,⁷ the *kekurs*,⁸ and Monk's Rock.⁹



Monk's Rock off Spruce Island.

(Courtesy of Daria Safronova-Simeonoff).

And here is the “New Valaam”¹⁰ – Spruce Island. What we saw was not the anomalous-looking, floating rocky islet, as it was depicted in the drawing of the famous Yanovsky¹¹ in the publication of Valaam Monastery of 1894, but an enormous and majestic island 50 miles in perimeter.

Dense forest, a tall green mountain and the endless ocean guarded the noble relics of the Blessed Elder, the preeminent Apostle of Alaska. Years ago his light was kindled by the pure heavenly fire and shone peacefully, enlightening the Aleuts. The achievements of his righteous

⁷ Now it is either Spruce Cape, or Miller Point.

⁸ *Kekur* (from Siberian Russian “kekoor”) is a rocky islet usually located along the shore of the mainland.

⁹ Monk's Rock is a *kekur* (see above) off Spruce Island, where St. Herman, presumably, anchored his boat and prayed on his way to and from Kodiak.

¹⁰ Saint Herman named his hermitage on Spruce Island New Valaam in remembrance of his monastery in the north of Russia. In 1831, the whole eastern part of Spruce Island was officially named New Valaam by the then governor Baron von Wrangel.

¹¹ Simeon Yanovsky was Baranov's son-in-law and later became the governor of Alaska for about two years. Coming from a secular background, he was “converted” by monk Herman to heartfelt Orthodoxy. Later, in Russia, after the death of his wife Irina, he was tonsured a monk.

life were not blatant, but they penetrated deeply into the [collective] soul of the people, inspiring a sincere reverence for God.

One hundred years have passed since the Elder illumined Kodiak, but his holy memory is still glowing and is becoming an expansive holy fire burning in the hearts of the people.

Soon we anchored at the *laida*¹² by maneuvering amidst the numerous underwater rocks that dot the small Spruce Island Lagoon.¹³ During the time of Herman, there was a populous village here and a chapel.¹⁴ Now, there are only two or three *barabaras*¹⁵ and crosses on the graves of the Elder's flock that are reposing in eternal rest.¹⁶

The old Z. Riuppe¹⁷, the volunteer guardian of Herman's grave and the Chapel, greeted us at the mouth of a creek, where blessed Elder once fished for his humble repast.

Having gathered all the church necessities, we hurried to the Elder's grave. A narrow path led us there. Century-old spruce trees, the silent witnesses of the ascetic's righteous life, encompassed us. It was quiet in the forest, no sound could be heard. Only birds, these creatures of God, broke the holy silence.

We were not following the path for long – soon we saw a small glade densely covered by the tall grass. By the edge of the forest stood a small house – the prayer cell of the sadly-remembered Father Nikita Marchenko, who died tragically in his house-fire on Christmas Day in 1829.¹⁸ Father Nikita had a beneficent goal: he wanted to continue the monastic labors of

¹² *Laida* is a Siberian word for a salt marsh.

¹³ Now Monk's Lagoon.

¹⁴ The Chapel of the Meeting of the Lord was built in 1835 by the local Native people, with the lumber provided by the Governor of Alaska, Ferdinand von Wrangell, who, with his wife, visited Monk Herman in Monk's Lagoon.

¹⁵ *Barabaras* are Native, partially subterranean houses.

¹⁶ Nowadays, no traces of the cemetery or the village remain.

¹⁷ The Riuppes were the descendants of a former *promyshlennik* of German origin, Riuppe, who was assigned as a teacher to the orphanage's school at New Valaam by the Governor Kupreianov. In the late 19th century either his son (or his grandson), Zakharii Riuppe continued living in the settlement on Spruce Island as a volunteer guard of the grave and of the Chapel (Black, Lydia in *Herman, Wilderness Saint*, 166-167). In the Russian edition of Sergei Korsun's book *Venerable Herman of Alaska*, the name is spelled "Pynne" (Roope) (p. 108), while in a very similar English edition of his book *Herman: Wilderness Saint*, the name is spelled as Riuppe (p. 166). However, in the *Afognak Parish: Church of the Nativity of All Holy Theotokos. Vital Statistics and Confessional Records, "1896-1965"* (Native Village of Afognak, 2000), the name is listed as "Zakharii Rupii [Ruppe?], margin note: from Kodiak," ("Confession Records for Theotokos Church at Afognak for 1902, Uzkoe Settlement," p. 10 of 19).

¹⁸ This date in the published text is erroneous – the actual death of Hieromonk Nikita occurred on Christmas Day of 1887.

Herman, but the rampant lion, the immemorial enemy of the people, Satan in the form of a green snake¹⁹ seduced him and caused his demise.

May his ashes and his rebellious soul²⁰ rest in peace! Let all-merciful God forgive him his flaws and mistakes. To the left of the path there is a small memorial stone with a burning lampada in front of the holy image of our Savior. It reverentially points to the location of the cell of the ascetic Herman, where he labored and prayerfully accomplished various deeds. Here, in the quietness of the forest, far away from the world and its temptations, in communion with heavenly angels and saintly spirits, he prepared his righteous soul for the heavenly motherland. According to the memories of his contemporaries, his cell was spare and humble: no table,²¹ no chair, only holy books decorated it – the Prologue²², works of St. Dimitrii, St. Tikhon, St. John Chrysostom, Menaion²³, and the life-giving cross with the Lord's crucifixion (now preserved in Kodiak Church).

Great were the temptations of the Elder: the desires of his flesh troubled him even here, at the edge of the world, on this unpopulated island. However, the *klobuk*²⁴ that the elder wore on his head and the iron chains which are piously preserved in Kodiak Cathedral, the hard wooden bed, the famous board-blanket, and the exhausting physical labor amid the centuries-old spruce trees did subdue his flesh. – Having prayed by the memorial²⁵ and having commemorated the soul of the ascetic in front of the Holy Image of our Savior, we continued

¹⁹ The Green Snake [Зелёный змий] is a metaphor for alcoholism in Russian culture.

²⁰ Father Nikita Marchenko was assigned as a missionary priest to Kenai parish. However, being from Valaam Monastery himself and inspired to come to Alaska by the life of Father Herman, he wanted to live closer to Herman's hermitage. Having spent several years in Kenai, he disobeyed instructions from the Consistory and moved to Monk's Lagoon, where he built a small cell for himself and took care of the graves of Father Herman and others.

²¹ The wife of Governor von Wrangel, Elizabeth, wrote a letter in which she described the interior of the Elder's cell: he had a long bench along the walls, in the Russian manner, he had a big Russian oven, he had a big leather cushion that he used as a bed, he used the window sill as a dining table, and he also had a small table (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, *Little Russian Philokalia*, Vol. III: *St. Herman* (New Valaam Monastery, AK: St. Herman Press, 1989), 64).

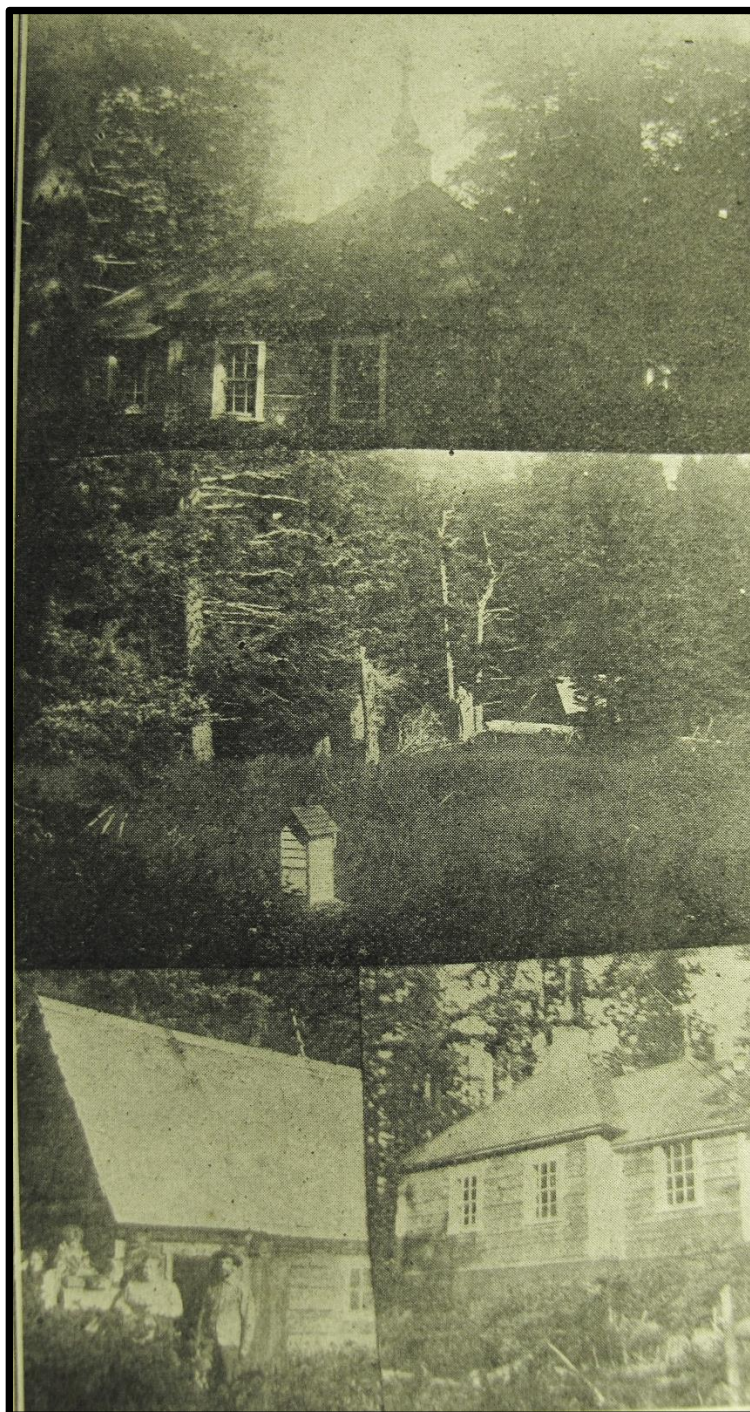
²² The *Prologue* [Пролог] is a compilation of lives of Saints, church hymns, poems, homilies, and the teachings of Church Fathers.

²³ *Menaion* is a monthly (twelve volumes, one for each month) compilation of church hymns for each day of each month, when certain Saints, icons, or events are commemorated.

²⁴ *Klobuk* is a monastic hat, especially in the Russian Orthodox tradition.

²⁵ The memorial no longer exists.

on to the chapel and the grave. The same narrow path led us further on, and the same centuries-old trees surrounded us. But here is the chapel.



From Top to Bottom: the Chapel, the Memorial, Father Nikita's Cell, and the Chapel.

Picture taken by Tikhon Shalamov during his 1903 trip.

American Orthodox Messenger, Vol. VIII, #10, (New York, NY, 15-28 April 1904), 193

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

The chapel stands amid the dense forest, on a knoll, guarding [the grave of] the Blessed One. The Elder himself chose this place for his eternal repose. He was not worldly and did not want to associate with those who were worldly. Even from his compatriot Russians during his lifetime he received “only contempt and humiliation” (see the letter by the Elder himself in Kodiak Archive).²⁶ For this reason he wished to repose in the thicket of the wild woods even farther away from the people and from all their hustle and bustle.

The chapel was built by us under the Right Reverend Nikolai, a former Bishop of Alaska.²⁷

Riuppe had already opened the doors of the chapel and was waiting for us on the threshold. Praying silently, we entered.

By the right side of the *ambo*,²⁸ there was a simple wooden coffin placed above the place of the earthly repose of the relics of the Blessed Elder. Candle stands were replete with candles – a sincere gift to the memory of the Elder from Kodiak inhabitants.

I opened the royal doors.²⁹ Riuppe gave out candles to those praying. Children lit the censor³⁰ and, facing the coffin, started the *panikhida*³¹ singing about the blessed repose and eternal rest of the Elder and his fellow ascetic zealots: the Right Reverend Ioasaf, Martyr Juvenaly, Makarius, Stephan, Nektarius³² and other reposed laborers of Kodiak Mission. Our funerary songs directed to the heavenly throne of God rose on high with the incense. It seemed as though the Elder heard them from his grave, and his soul hovered among us. We prayed by the grave, with our souls humbled and our knees bent, “Lord, let him rest where saints repose, accept him as one of your blessed ones, and let this beacon of Orthodox faith shine for

²⁶ The original letter from St. Herman says that he “более видал презрения и слышал укоризны и насмешки, и к коим уже и привык” (*Issledovaniia Russkikh na Tikhom Okeane v XVIII-pervoi polovine XIX v.: Rossiisko-Amerikanskaia Kompaniia i izuchenie Tikhookeanskogo Severa 1815-1841: Sbornik Documentov*, p. 56), which, literally, means “saw more contempt and [sometimes] heard reproaches and [sometimes] was made fun of.”

²⁷ The construction of the Chapel (1893-1898) was overseen by Father Tikhon Shalamov. It was Bishop Nikolai who donated the funds and the Alaska Commercial Company that helped to transport the supplies.

²⁸ *Ambo* (also, *ambon*), in the Russian Orthodox church, are the steps leading to the raised platform in front of the iconostasis (partition decorated with icons).

²⁹ Royal doors, in the Russian Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches, are the central doors in the iconostasis. They lead into the altar and only clergy can use them during church services.

³⁰ *Censor* is an incense burner used to accompany Orthodox services.

³¹ *Panikhida* is a memorial service in Russian and Greek Catholic Churches.

³² The monks from the first Russian Mission to Alaska, who arrived in Kodiak in 1794.

everyone just as you let shine the diadem of holiness of the great Seraphim³³, a holy contemporary and a fellow ascetic laborer with our Elder.” We thought, “What a great joy it would have been to the Faithful [Orthodox] Church and what an impactful and incurable shame to the proud, heretical and lost Christianity of this country.”³⁴ But it is our Lord Himself who predetermines the times and the years, and therefore let everything be in His holy and mighty will. The Elder left us a long time ago, but he is “still living” with us in holy memories and in the visitations from the other world to pure souls. This is the manner in which recently the old Riuppe saw the Blessed Elder: Riuppe lost the Chapel key and for a long time, in vain, was searching for it at home in all corners and chests. Having lost any hope to find it, he already unscrewed the chapel lock, so that he could open the door for the pilgrims. Suddenly, at night, in a light sleep, he sees the Elder and hears a voice, “What are you looking for? The key is in a pouch hanging on the wall.” Immediately, Riuppe got up and retrieved the key from the pouch.

We should start making accurate notes about the Elder’s otherworldly visitations and his prayerful intercession for those who, in faith, ask for his assistance. Can it be that America is not worthy to see and get illumined by this torch of faith and piety and that forever this light will be concealed from impious eyes?

May it not happen. “In my place, there will be another monk seeking solitude”, “there will be a monastery here,” he prophesized. It means the Elder foresaw that the place of his righteous life will not be forgotten, that his efforts will not be wasted and that Spruce Island would hear again church singing and will bloom with prayers and monastic deeds. However, time passes. Where are you, heroes of the spirit, the heavenly-minded, earthly angels? Respond... the Elder is calling you. Gather in! No response... Are you afraid of a distant foreign land? But our Lord oversees with his all-seeing eye the sons of men even here, at the edge of the world. Also, with a little help from the Russian Mother Church and assistance from the great and merciful Russian people you can start a great challenge – a fulfilled life in the name of

³³ Shalamov refers here to St. Seraphim of Sarov, canonized in 1903 and considered one of the most revered Russian Orthodox saints. The paths of the future saints, Seraphim and Herman, intersected in 1778 at Sarov Monastery, where they were both accepted as novices and even, at some point, shared a spiritual father, Hieromonk Nazarius, later the Abbot of Valaam Monastery.

³⁴ At the beginning of his missionary career on Kodiak, in 1892 and 1894, Shalamov had an ongoing conflict of interest with the local Baptist missionaries, the Roscoes, who were in charge of the Baptist orphanage on Woody Island across from the village of Kodiak.

Christ. The Elder will guide you with the example of his life and through prayers. You will be welcomed here by the humble sons of Alaska, your brothers in faith.

Instead of following the appeal of Father Arsenii (see *Orthodox Messenger*) for Russian monastics to start a monastery in the hustle and bustle of a pagan American city³⁵, the monastery should be built in the wilderness of Spruce Island, by the grave of Elder Herman. For this is how the best and most glorious Russian monasteries – Kiev, Sergiev, Solovki, and Valaam [Kievo-Pechersk Lavra, Trinity-Sergius Lavra, Solovki Monastery, and Valaam Monastery] – started in the quietude of the forests or on uninhabited islands. Such should be the place for the first American monastery.

The day was turning toward evening and we hurried to the night quarters – some to the cell of Father Nikita, some to the house of Z. Riuppe. We did not have much time to sleep: the weather worsened overnight – strong winds from the ocean were pushing the waves that could hem us in at Spruce Island, which would have been quite an inconvenience for us because of all the little children. For this reason, at dawn, we prepared the boat and, having said our good-byes to the old man, left Spruce Island. A lonely Z. Riuppe saw us off, standing by the *laida*. The wind was getting stronger and soon turned into a storm. Our “ship” was battered and fiercely attacked by the waves. Having relied on the help of the Elder, we bravely continued our journey through the stormy sea.

Our female companions and children, in fear and sea-sickness, huddled at the bottom of the boat. Fortunately, the tailwind was pushing us ahead and we passed the dangerous Mill Bay Cape before the surf grew too strong. It was not yet 2 o’clock when we, happy and satisfied, saw Kodiak and our dear church. The children soon recovered from the rolling and pitching and were merrily leaving the boat with the imprint of New Valaam and its Elder in their little hearts.

³⁵ In 1905, Father Arsenii (Chagovtsov), with the help of St. Tikhon (Belavin), the Bishop of North America, founded the first Orthodox monastery in North America near the village of South Canaan, PA [thus the reference to a “pagan” city in Shalamov’s notes as an allusion to a pagan area in the Old Testament]. The monastery soon became a true spiritual center and pilgrimage site for the American Orthodox.