

Part 1 of Dawn Lea Black's and Daria Safronova-Simeonoff's Project "Kodiak Area Orthodox Priests' and Missionaries' Letters and Travelogues from the 19th and 20th Centuries"ⁱ

From the Travel Journalⁱⁱ of the Orthodox Missionary Hieromonk Anatoliiⁱⁱⁱ.



His Very Reverend Anatolii Kamenskii, Bishop of Tomsk and Altai, circa 1914-1920

(photo taken for an Orthodox web-site, "Education and Orthodoxy),
<http://www.orthedu.ru>)

On the 21st of the coming year [1896?], on Friday, I had an opportunity to fulfill my long-term desire – a trip to Spruce Island-New Valaam and a visit to the grave of Father Herman. The weather was favorable. Also, there were lots of those who wanted to accompany Father Tikhon [Father Tikhon Shalamov, Dean of Kodiak Parish, 1893-1905] and me. The people of Kodiak revere the memory of Father Herman. The skipper of our humble boat^{iv}, as during the trip to Afognak, was an old sailor, Simeonoff, from the very Simeonoffs who came to Alaska during the reign of Emperor Nikolai [Nikolai I, reigned 1825-1855]. Our two companions, mother and her daughter, felt seasick right at the beginning of the trip and we had to let them off the boat on Woody Island. By two in the afternoon our boat was nearing Spruce Island. In the tall grass we could barely discern two *barabaras* [Native sod-houses] right by the shore. When there was only one quarter of a mile left, our presence became apparent: first a woman and then a man appeared. They turned out to be the Riuppes^v, the only dwellers on Spruce Island [Monk's Lagoon] who lived in one of the *barabaras* noticed by us. The owner of the other *barabara*, Mushin^{vi} was not there. They say that before, the settlement of Yelovoe [Russian for "abundant with fir trees"] was quite populous. To

the left, under the shadow of century-old spruce trees one can see a derelict, half-collapsed chapel with old cemetery crosses beside it. The abundant vegetation of Spruce Island is apparent to any visitor. Nowhere in Alaska, neither on the continent, nor on the islands did I see such lavish grass and such straight, extremely tall spruce trees as grow here – the island was called “Spruce Island” for good reason.

As soon as we landed, we immediately rushed to visit the grave of Father Herman, since we did not have much time at our disposal. It was not safe to stay there for more than two hours: the strait that we had to cross again on the way back is sometimes quite stormy and there were many cases when a sudden wind either from the ocean or from Ouzinkie Strait would detain the visitors for a couple of days or even a week. The road to the grave of Father Herman starts to the right of grassy marshland. A narrow path winds its way through the century-old spruce trees as straight as candles. In some places it is interrupted by huge rotting logs. After fifteen minutes of walking, the path brings one to an expansive clearing and runs along the left side of it. To the right, one can see fire-burnt rubble and farther down, behind the stream, in a glade, a small house immersed in greenery. This is what remains from the larger habitation of Hieromonk Nikita.^{vii}

A couple of steps before his little house, one can see the traces of the fire that ended in such a tragedy for the hermit. I was also shown a spot where they found his charred remains. At the spot one can still see a melted stone and other cast-iron things. The whole house, made out of thick logs has turned into ashes. The locals are still surprised by the fact that century-old spruce trees, in the shadow of which the house stood, were not damaged. It was in vain that I looked for any traces of fire on them. Having postponed a more detailed inspection of the memorable glade till a return trip, I rushed to the grave of Father Herman that is located farther away, in the depth of the forest. At first, amidst the trees, I spotted the white shape of the monument. A smaller glade than the one we just passed, opened up. On the slope to the left we saw a fence, slightly dilapidated from old age. To the left of its entrance is the grave of Father Ioasaf, covered by a raised box of thick boards and with a cross at his head; to the right is another grave of a larger size, in the shape of a small house with a roof, also with the cross at the head, exactly like the small grave houses one could see on Valaam Island near the so-called “Pustyn” [literally, “desert” – a wilderness place chosen by monks for monastic seclusion]. This was the sepulcher of Father Herman, built by Father Nikita. The inscription cut on the side wall, “Hieromonk Nikita and Vladimir” confirms the fact. In between these two graves is a wooden monument just recently built to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Orthodoxy in America.

The monument is in the shape of a chapel. The upper compartment is built to house the icons and a *lampada* [church oil lamp hung in front of an icon], which is kept burning by the pious Riuppe couple who come here every Sunday to pray. A mysterious quietude and reverent silence enveloped the graves. The rays of the evening sun were illuminating only the tops of the trees, unable to penetrate the density of the forest. The singing of the *panikhida* [Orthodox memorial service] broke through the intense silence, echoed through the virginal *taiga* and disappeared somewhere in the distance. The sight of all those present kneeling down, stirred my soul and left an indelible impression in my memory. The reverence paid by the locals to the memory of Father Herman is remarkable! Shaking with emotion, they would recite multiple stories about the feats and labors of Father Herman in this wilderness!

The return was occupied by the conversation about Father Herman. The Riupes showed us Father Herman's garden to which the industrious elder, at night, would carry baskets of kelp from the beach. We also entered the cell of Father Nikita where the accoutrements from the old Yelovskaya chapel are now stored. Here, while inspecting the icons, my attention was drawn to two of them: one is that of Our Lady of Kazan^{viii} and the other one is the Vladimir Mother of God.^{ix} According to oral history, it was one of these icons that Father Herman carried to the beach when the settlement was in danger of being flooded. But it is unknown which icon exactly he chose, and no one can be really sure of this. In the Kodiak church I was shown yet another Mother of God icon associated with this oral history.

On the way back to Kodiak, in the middle of the strait, our boat was caught in a sudden squall, and for a while the lives of nine humans were in peril. During one gust of wind our boat tilted so much that we almost took on water over the left side. We would have capsized, but for an experienced hand which lowered the sail. Nevertheless, there is a good side to this squall: the whole distance which usually takes two to three hours to cross, we covered at an incredible speed of 15-18 miles an hour.

ⁱ This new translation of Father Anatolii's complete travelogue differs slightly from that of Lydia Black's translated excerpts presented in Sergei Korsun's *Herman: Wilderness Saint* in "Appendix I: The Fate of New Valaam," pp. 163-178.

ⁱⁱ Anatolii, Father (Kamensky), "From the Travel Journal of an Orthodox Missionary Hieromonk Anatolii," *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, no. 3 (1896), (New York: Russian Orthodox Church in America).

ⁱⁱⁱ Hieromonk Anatolii (Kamensky) was an Orthodox Missionary to Alaska and Minnesota. Served as the Dean of St. Archangel Michael Cathedral in 1895-1899. Became the Archbishop of Irkutsk (1920) and was severely persecuted by the Soviet regime. Died in 1925 at the altar during a church service in the city of Omsk.

^{iv} Later in the article, the author gives a technical term for the boat as "velbot" (вельбот), a narrow skiff with multiple oars.

^v The Riupes were the descendants of a former *promyshlennik* [Russian traders usually working for the shares of a profit of a company] of German origin, Riuppe who was assigned as a teacher to the orphanage school at New Valaam [Father's Herman's village on Spruce Island]. In the late 19th century either his son (or his grandson), Zakharii Ruppe 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*, pp. 166-167). In the Russian edition of Sergei Korsun's book titled *Venerable Herman of Alaska*, the name is spelled "Руппе" (Roope) (p. 108), while in a very similar English edition of this 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* (publisher Native Village of Afognak, 2000), the name is listed as "Rupii (Ruppe?)" , margin note "from Kodiak", (p. 10 of 19, *Confession Records for Theotokos Church at Afognak for 1902*).

^{vi} Mushin is mentioned as "Moonin" in a reference from Korsun's *Herman: Wilderness Saint* (p.166) and as "Мунин" (Moonin) in the Russian edition of Korsun's *Venerable Herman of Alaska* (p. 108). According to Korsun, one of Moonin descendants later become a priest of Kenai parish (*Venerable Herman*, p. 108; *Herman: Wilderness Saint*, p. 166).

^{vii} Nikita (Marchenko), a monk from Valaam Monastery, Russia, settled down on Spruce Island in 1886, despite the Ober-procurator of the Holy Synod's direct order to return to Russia. While there, he tended to and marked the graves of St. Herman, Monk Ioasaph, and Sophia Vlasova. On December 25, 1887 he burned to death.

^{viii} Our Lady of Kazan icon is a highly venerated Russian icon dating to the year 1579. It is believed to have been instrumental in expelling Polish, Swedish, and French invaders from Russia (Talbot-Rice, David and Tamara, *Icons and Their History*, 95-96, (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1974.))

^{ix} Vladimir Mother of God is one of the most revered Orthodox icons dating back to the earlier part of the 12th century. It has been credited with multiple miraculous interventions, especially in relation to two Tatar invasions (Talbot-Rice, David and Tamara, *Icons and Their History*, 12-13, (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1974.))