

Restoration program highlights activities at Sitka National Park

By KENNETH ADKISSON

The carving of a 22-foot totem pole to help celebrate the Bicentennial, and the beginning of a restoration program for the Russian Mission Building will highlight summer activities at Sitka National Historical Park.

The Bicentennial totem pole will honor and celebrate our nation's 200th anniversary by depicting important events of the history of the U.S. from its birth through the space age. Carbed in a traditional Northwest Coast Indian art style, the totem pole will also offer a symbol of the contribution of Native Americans to the cultural heritage of the nation.

Carving of the pole will take place at the Visitor Center of Sitka National Historical Park where the work can be viewed by park visitors.

Built in 1842 and occupied continuously until 1969 by the Orthodox Church, the Russian Mission Building in Sitka today, is perhaps the most outstanding example of Russian American architecture left in Alaska.

During its lifetime the mission has served as the residence of the Orthodox bishop of Sitka and all Alaska, and as a seminary and training school.

The mission can be seen as

historically important for three reasons. First is its actual physical link with the Orthodox Church and such important figures as Father Veniaminof who became Bishop of Alaska.

Secondly there is the building itself. Its architectural integrity is unquestioned and as such it is perhaps one of the best remaining original examples of Russian American architecture.

Thirdly, there is its symbolic importance as a link to the larger story of Russian America, Russia's grand adventure in the New World, a story of colonization, economic expansion, and the spread of the Orthodox faith.

Today, with most of the evidence for colonial and economic expansion gone, the Orthodox Church remains a living testimonial to the role played by Russian America in the story of our nation, and the mission building remains a link with that heritage.

Age and the elements have taken their toll on the mission. The foundations are badly rotted, the exterior weathered and checked, the interior aged and neglected, and the roof seems to let more water in than it keeps out. In its present condition the mission reflects little of the story that was Russian America, or of the Sitka that was the capital of Russian America.

Preservation work on the mission that is schedule to begin late this spring will mark the beginning of what is planned to the story of our nation, and the mission building remains a link with that heritage.

Age and the elements have taken their toll on the mission. The foundations are badly rotted, the exterior weathered and checked, the interior aged and neglected, and the roof seems to let more water in than it keeps out. In its present condition the mission reflects little of the story that was Russian America, nor of the Sitka that was the capital of Russian America.

Preservation work on the mission that is schedule to begin late this spring will mark the beginning of what is planned to be a seven-year program resulting in the comprehensive preservation and restoration of the historic building.

Plans for this year include: archaeological excavation to determine earlier grade levels of the surrounding land and to provide a record of events, to recover material related to the existing foundations and crawlway space, grading to control water runoff and improve the drainage, to provide temporary structural bracing where necessary, initial preservation of removable interior finishes, removing and salvaging first floor flooring and framing necessary to permit

structural repairs, repair of the roof, and completion of the historic studies reports which are to provide much of the data needed for final restoration.

A Chilkat robe recently woven by Dorica Rockwell Jackson will be on display at the Visitor Center. The robe took almost a year to complete including weaving and dyeing of the wool.

The thunderbird design on the robe was adapted from an illustration in George T. Emmon's 1907 publication "The Chilkat Blanket." The weaving project was sponsored by the National Park Service in order to help keep alive the tradition of Chilkat weaving and to enable the visitors to the park to share in maintaining this distinctive and characteristic art from through the process of demonstration of the techniques.

Cultural demonstration of Tlingit arts and crafts will be provided daily between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. through the Alaska Native Brotherhood Indian Cultural Center which is located

at the park visitor center.

The National Park Service will host special evening programs during the summer months beginning about the first week in June and lasting through Labor Day. The programs will be offered three nights a week and will generally feature films or guest speakers on Alaskan topics.

For further information on the summer activities at Sitka National Historical Park, contact the Park Superintendent, Sitka National Historical Park, P. O. Box 738, Sitka, Alaska 99835.