

BOOK REVIEW:

Archives reveal insights into Orthodox Church in Alaska

By Barbara S. Smith

Maps, illustrations, and Russian-style lettering by Ayse Gilbert.

25 black and white photos, historical and contemporary.

Alaska Historical Commission, large format paperback, \$12., 171 pages.

Available at B. Dalton, the Book Caches, Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum, St. Innocent's Orthodox Church (Anchorage), and by mail from Alaska Historical Resources, P.O. Box 6913, Anchorage, Ak 99502; add \$1 postage.

By Ann Chandonnet

During the early 1970's, officials of the Alaska Diocese of the Orthodox Church in America discovered several caches of old documents, rare books, and periodicals in the basements and attics of seven churches. And in mid-

1974, Barbara Smith began to sort out the mess, under a grant from the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education. Her Preliminary Survey was published in late 1974, and in 1976 she began microfilming the parish records, producing 11 rolls of exposed film.

Soon it became apparent that a new edition of her survey was needed; the 60 copies of the report was rapidly exhausted, and new requests could not be satisfied. So Smith, an archivist-historian, broadened her analysis and archival work into a book, Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska. The book is not only a religious history, but also an account of Alaska and its native culture. There are now about 10,000 Orthodox in Alaska.

An Episcopalian, Smith teaches Russian history part-time at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, and geared her book toward high school teachers, students,



and those in religious historical professions. The book is beautifully produced, on fine paper, with four attractive maps, illustrations, and Russian-style lettering by Anchorage visual artist Ayse Gilbert. The price makes it accessible to the many Alaskans interested in their own history, as well as to small local libraries.

In the past years, unless one knew Russian and/or could get to the Library of Congress, or libraries in Juneau, Fair-

banks, the bulk of records of the Orthodox Church in Alaska were inaccessible. Furthermore, the selling of Alaska in 1867 and the fact that Orthodoxy was no longer the official Russian religion after 1917 both caused rifts and dispersal of records.

The final 50 pages of Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska contain valuable appendices: a chronology of significant events affecting the Alaskan Orthodox from 1794 to 1980; a list of Orthodox clergy from selected areas, 1896-1925; a short glossary of Orthodox terms; and an annotated bibliography of chiefly English language sources for information about Alaskan Orthodoxy.

Scholars, Alaskan Orthodox, and amateur historians will find much of interest in this book, and in the sequel Smith is writing.