



# Historic, Cultural, and Arts Resources

## GOAL

Continue to recognize, appreciate, and celebrate Sitka’s historic, cultural and arts resources, which are:

- **Ethnically, religiously, and racially diverse**
- **Highly valued and essential to defining Sitka and local quality of life**
- **Integral to the economic base of the community**

## 1 Current Status

### 1.1 Introduction

Historic, cultural, and arts resources are each unique, but also overlap and strengthen each other. These complementary resources are key assets that help define Sitka and local Quality of Life.

During development of the Sitka 2030 Comprehensive Plan, some of Sitkans’ words and thoughts about Sitka’s strengths and assets include:

- “Sitka’s history and culture”
- “Very strong local arts scene”
- “Rich pre and post contact history”
- “Arts appreciation and instruction”
- “Our creative and resourceful people, our rich cultures and history”
- “It is a culturally and economically diverse community”
- “Quality of life includes access to subsistence resources and local foods, culture and art, and a variety of healthy activities”
- “Sitka Fine Arts Camp”
- “Sitka is an intellectual and artistic outpost”

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<sup>1</sup> Photos on top border (L to R): 1-Sitka Music Festival Performance, photo by Clark James Mishler Photography from music festival website; 2-St. Michael’s Orthodox Cathedral; 3- Excerpt from Sitka Tribe of Alaska’s Place Names Map; 4- Totem Trail detail from NPS Sitka National Historical Park; 5-2016 Sitka Arti Gras Wearable Arts Extravaganza, photo by Xtinepix

## 1.2 Historic and Cultural Resources

Historic moments deeply impact communities far beyond their scope of time. It is hard to imagine a place anywhere in Alaska with more significant history than Sitka. Just a few highlights (chronologically) are:

- 10,000+ years of Tlingit villages, camps, and culture in Sitka and the Pacific coasts of Baranof and Chichagof Islands and smaller islands, with sophisticated practical and spiritual knowledge, customs, and practices.
- Tlingit-Russian trading, Russian settlement, and fierce Tlingit-Russian battles during the 1700s-1800s.
- Serving as the capital of Russian America beginning in 1808 with Russian forts, buildings, customs, culture, arts, and practices.
- Being the place where the Alaska Treaty of Cession transfer ceremony occurred in October 1867, when the Russians sold the Alaskan Territory to the United States (now Alaska Day).
- Place of Sheldon Jackson College, established in 1878 and the oldest institution of higher learning in Alaska.
- The founding place of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood in 1912, organized to fight discrimination. Construction of the first Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall in 1914.

Evidence of the attention to and passion for Sitka’s historic and cultural resources is found in the many people, groups, and achievements that recognize, preserve, and celebrate community history. Entities working on this include but are not limited to (in alphabetical order):

- Alaska Arts Southeast, Inc.
- Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Camp No 1
- Cape Decision Lighthouse Society
- City and Borough of Sitka Historic Preservation Commission
- National Park Service/Sitka National Historical Park
- Sheldon Jackson Historic Site Preservation Society
- Sheldon Jackson Museum, and Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum
- Sitka Historical Society and Isabel Miller Museum
- Sitka Maritime Heritage Society
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- US Forest Service

The Sitka Tribes of Alaska (STA) has long valued and led the way on historic preservation and related efforts, for example:

**1972 Sitka Indian Village Redevelopment Plan**, adopted by the Sitka Village Planning Council, details area history, inventory, and many excellent redevelopment and zoning ideas are still relevant today. This document is a good starting place for master planning: “The Village is an area where productive economic activity, history, and a quality residential neighborhood can co-exist” (page 86). This area is home to 14 clan houses and the Alaska

Native Brotherhood (ANB) Hall built in 1918. The ANB Hall is used daily and a National Historic Landmark. It also includes the Russian Orthodox Cathedral, restored Russian Blockhouse, historic Russian and Indian graves, several newly redeveloped homes, the business office for the Baranof Island Housing Authority, and most of Sitka's seafood processors along the water's edge.

**1995 Sitka Tribe of Alaska Historic Preservation Plan**, was prepared with funding from a Historic Preservation Grant in 1991 to "Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives" and subsequent grants to Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA). The Sitka Tribes of Alaska 1995 Historic Preservation Plan was the first in the US completed by American Indians, Alaska Natives, or Native Hawaiians. "Through this proposal, the Sitka Community Association [Sitka Tribe of Alaska] intends to carry out the formal development of its Tribal Historic and Cultural Preservation Program on behalf of its members and the general public, as a continuing memorial to the Native People of Sitka past, present and future." Anyone interested in Sitka's Tlingit history, culture, and arts should review this STA Plan, which includes a thorough and detailed Tlingit ethnography and ethnohistory with an emphasis on Sitka.

**1975-2002 Sheet'Kwaan Aani Aya - Sitka Area Native Place Names.** "To our Elders—thank you for thinking of our children. Gunalchéesh!" These maps and place names are an invaluable source of local knowledge about the natural and cultural world of Sitka Tlingits. The information on these maps honors and enriches local understanding of area history and culture; they are reproduced, courtesy of STA, in the appendix to this chapter.

Because the City and Borough of Sitka is one of 13 "Certified Local Governments" in Alaska, it and local entities here are eligible for federal Historic Preservation Grants. Since 1995, there have been 13 federal Historic Preservation Grants (which require a 40% match) awarded to Sitka entities totaling \$158,431. The most recent was awarded in November 2015 to the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society for work on the Japonski Island Boathouse.

The threat of demolition of Sitka's downtown U.S. Post Office built in 1934 led to a grassroots effort to protect Sitka's historic buildings. The City and Borough of Sitka began work and qualified as a Certified Local Government in 1994, then prepared an initial short Sitka Historic Preservation Plan in 1995. A more thorough **2017 draft Sitka Historic Preservation Plan** is out for public review now (February 2017). The draft Plan's goals are to grow a practical and purposeful preservation program in Sitka by:

- Further survey and inventory historic resources,
- Focus on education and outreach,
- Increase funds for historic preservation, and
- Assist the community in land use planning and sustainable economic development.

The draft Plan has a current inventory of Sitka's 13 listed National Historic Places (the official federal government list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed worthy of preservation) and eight National Historic Landmarks (a much smaller group recognized for their outstanding historical significance) (Figure 1).

In addition to historic places and landmarks, the plan lists 19 cemeteries and burial sites within the borough, which are sacred places and sites that represent Sitka’s heritage and continue to tell the story of longevity in the area.

Some building and property owners are eligible for federal tax incentives to encourage historic preservation of their properties if it is a National Historic Place or Landmark. The incentives range from 10-20% tax credits that reduce dollar for dollar the amount owed to the IRS, to easements that can increase tax deductions and decrease estate and property taxes.

Alaska also allows municipalities to exempt historic sites, buildings, and monuments from property tax [AS 29.45.050 (b)(1)(b)]. And, to encourage rehabilitation of all properties, Alaska allows a 4-year reduction in property taxes by the amount of an increased assessment due to completed improvements that enhance the exterior appearance or aesthetic quality of land or a structure [AS 29.45.050(f)] (note that there are many qualifiers to this section). Sitka would need to enact these programs by ordinance if it wished to participate.

<b>Figure 1 – National Register of Historic Places and Landmarks in Sitka</b>				
<b>Site Name</b>	<b>NR Date</b>	<b>AHRS No.</b>	<b>Period of Significance</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>HISTORIC PLACES</b>				
Cable House and Station	1977	SIT-00212	1904-1910	Communications Center and Quarters
Emmons House	1977	SIT-00258	1895-1899	601 Lincoln Street
Hanlon-Osbakken House	1992	SIT-00191	1892-1896	419 Lincoln Street
Mills, W. P., House	1977	SIT-00025	1915-1916	1 Maksoutoff Street (Cushing House, Longenbaugh House, Island Home)
Mills House	1978	SIT-00189	1911-1938	315 Seward Street (May Mills House, Rose Hill)
Murray Apartments and Cottages Historic District	1992	SIT-00447	1911	200, 204, & 206 Seward Street
Murray Apartments		SIT-00210	1921-1928	208 Seward Street, contributing to SIT-00447 (Murray Flats, Baranof Apts)
See House	1978	SIT-00195	1905	611 Lincoln Street
St. Peter's By the Sea	1978	SIT-00029	1899	611 Lincoln Street (St. Peter's Episcopal Church)
Sitka Pioneers' Home	1979	SIT-00097	1934-1935	120 Katlian Street, nomination includes Totem Square
Sitka U.S. Post Office and Court House	1997	SIT-00313	1938-1946	100 Lincoln Street
US Coast Guard & Geodetic Survey Seismological & Geomagnetic House	1986	SIT-00194	1916, 1929	210 Seward Street (Forest Service House)
Sitka National Historical Park	1966	SIT-00012	1804-1910	Sitka National Monument (1910) and Shiske-Nu

HISTORIC LANDMARKS				
Site Name	NR Date	AHRS No.	Period of Significance	Comments
Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall	1972	SIT-00001	1912, 1914	Katlian Street-ANB Hall, Sitka Camp No. 1
American Flag Raising Site, Castle Hill	1966	SIT-00002	1804, 1806-1867, 1959	Corner of Lincoln & Katlian Streets, (Baranov Castle & Castle Hill, NHL 6/13/62)
Old Sitka Site	1966	SIT-00006	1799-1802	Redoubt St. Archangel Michael (NHL 7/1/61)
Sitka Naval Operating Base and US Army Coastal Defenses	1986	SIT-00079	1939-1943	Japonski Island and series of smaller islands connected to it by the causeway that terminates at Makhnati Island
Russian-American Building No. 29	1987	SIT-00013	1850	202 Lincoln Street (Tilson Building)
Sheldon Jackson School	2001	SIT-00026	1910-1944	801 Lincoln Street (Sitka Industrial Training School; Sheldon Jackson Institute; Sheldon Jackson College)
St. Michael's Archangel Cathedral	1962	SIT-00010	1844-1966	Totally reconstructed per HABS
Russian Bishop's House	1966	SIT-00009	1842-1859	503 Lincoln Street (Russian Mission Orphanage, NHL 6/13/62)

*Source: draft Sitka Historic Preservation Plan, February 2017, City and Borough of Sitka Historic Preservation Commission*

Need to add paragraph about local Museums (focus, # visitors, etc.)

### 1.3 Arts and Cultural Resources

Sitka's vibrant, creative, and diverse arts and cultural organizations and facilities include (cut are not limited to):

- Harrigan Centennial Hall, owned and managed by the City and Borough of Sitka
- Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi Community House, owned and managed by the Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- Sheldon Jackson Campus, including Stevenson Hall, Allen Hall, and other buildings, owned and managed by Alaska Arts Southeast, Inc.
- Sitka Performing Arts Center, managed by the Sitka School District
- Greater Sitka Arts Council
- Island Institute
- Many, many individual artists
- Sitka Fine Arts Camp
- Sitka Monthly Grind
- Sitka Studio of Dance
- Sitka Summer Music Festival
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- Whale Fest
- Winter Jazz Festival

Arts have had a meaningful role in the Sitka economy for thousands of years. The totems, canoes, masks, regalia, and architecture of Sitka Tlingit reflect area culture, ancestry, and collective histories as much as they are works of art. A 2014 Southeast Conference publication quantifying the contribution of the Arts Economy of Southeast Alaska<sup>2</sup> also has quotes from two Sitka Native Alaskan artists that show this point well:

Sitka Tlingit Designer & Carver - "We are the Indigenous people and our Art belongs here, the art that is made for our own people. Art is the language that is common to all humankind. We Native artists are capable of not only bridging our own past with the present, but we are capable of bridging cultures with this common language. In addition to making art for ourselves, Native artists become either tourist artists, to satisfy a tourist market; or gallery artists, to satisfy a gallery market. This is my homeland and my art fits all of the above."

Sitka Mask Carver & Cedar Weaver - "The importance of our art and culture is as important now as it was 300 years ago. Seeing the amount of people doing our art – through language, carving, or dance – and keeping our heritage alive and moving is amazing!"

As an umbrella arts organization, the Greater Sitka Arts Council, which was founded in 1973, has helped the year-round, local arts community become visible. The Council's work has helped to change this. It has seen locals and visitors add a downtown gallery walk to their day or evening itinerary; the access and viability of artwork and performance surge; the Sitka community offer arts and cultural classes; bolster performance venues; sponsor public mural projects; support rise of arts nonprofits; and fuel arts integration in the lives of residents.

The Council continues to uplift the cultural life of Sitka, Alaska, through its wealth of arts programming and support services in education, professional development, visual and performing arts, and folk/traditional arts. The Council connects with families, educators, organizations, artists and community groups to foster arts and cultural activities that facilitate learning, personal growth, self-improvement, healing and sense of connectedness. This commitment is reflected in its diversified programming portfolio, some of which are included here:

- Individual artist grant program which awards thousands of dollars each year.
- Gallery exhibitions in partnership with City Hall and Sitka Community Hospital.
- Sitka Folk, a group working to preserve and present folk arts expression through song, dance, material culture and more. Events include monthly 'Open Mic Nights' and bimonthly 'Improv Class'.
- Sitka Community Theatre, a group creating an inclusive, collaborative environment where theatre enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels can discover their strengths. Events include 'Broadway Night' and 'Radio Adventure Hour'.
- Downtown Art Walks: Events uplifting the local community through furthering economic opportunities for artists, galleries, and small businesses.
- The Sitka Wearable Art Show: Creative runway performance that has become a state- and world-wide phenomenon.

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<sup>2</sup> *Arts Economy of Southeast Alaska*, September 2014, Southeast Conference, prepared by Rain Coast Data

- Wait Wait Don't Tell Me: A live staging of the popular, weekly news quiz show.
- Sitka Artisans Market: Where food, art and vintage meet.
- Sitkans Can Dance: Featuring local individual and couples dancing talent.
- Paris of the Pacific Melodrama: Presenting treasured Sitka history in a family-friendly context.

These highly valued [arts] resources enjoyed by residents also directly strengthen the economy. Applied research recently conducted by the American Planning Association demonstrates that arts and culture (which is defined to include historic resources) catalyzes economic vitality<sup>3</sup>:

“Concentrations of cultural enterprises and creative workers in a geographic area provide a competitive edge, likely by elevating the quality of life, improving a community’s ability to attract economic activity, and creating a climate in which innovation can flourish.”

This finding could well have been written specifically about Sitka. Sitka’s historic, cultural, and arts resources not only help define the community and its “social capital” but create local jobs, boost spending in town, and are top draws for sustainable tourism.

To see this, a simple glance at the Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau website shows that to draw visitors it highlights, “One of Sitka’s strongest distinguishing features is the cultural fusion of the Tlingit intermingled with Russian American influences. This robust duality emanates from the local galleries, art, downtown architecture, dance performances, and local museums.”

In 2014, the previously cited Southeast Conference publication quantifying the contribution of the Arts Economy of Southeast Alaska, noted:

“Artists and arts organizations are a key part of the Southeast Alaska economy. They create products and perform services. They generate spending and attract audiences, who in turn spend money at restaurants, hotels, and other local businesses. Artists impact education, and by positively contributing to the quality of life, they attract young people to the region and help retain those who are here.”

As a local example, Sitka Fine Arts Camp is working to document the social and economic benefits of its programs. In 2016, they had 765 unique registrants paying tuition to attend the Sitka Fine Arts Camp (SFAC). Sitkans take advantage of this resource, with 20% of Sitka School District students attending. In addition, two-thirds traveled to Sitka from other places to attend, including 13% from out of state.

Several foundations support the SFAC, and students pay tuition to attend (20% received over \$90,000 financial aid). Money from tuition goes back into the Sitka economy. The camp’s workforce included 17 full-time employees, 64 local part-time and seasonal employees. Over \$105,000 (self-

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<sup>3</sup> Economic Vitality: How the Arts and Culture Sector Catalyzes Economic Vitality,” American Planning Association Briefing Paper, 2011, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation.  
[www.planning.org/research/arts](http://www.planning.org/research/arts)

reported) was spent in the Sitka community by visiting camp parents. Over 1,200 visitors came to town during SFAC summer programs and as part of year-round rentals and programs. Approximately \$19,400 in sales tax was collected and paid to the City. Capital spending this year totaled \$599,900. These are just some of the quantified economic benefits.

In addition, the social benefits that SFAC brings to the Sitka community include high quality educational opportunities for youth and adults, year-round visitors to the Sitka community, and professional performing artists as part of its Performing Arts Series. All of these opportunities increase residents' quality of life and keeps people in Sitka. **NOTE: Before chapter is finalized, will add information from any other arts organizations that have quantified economic and social impact.**

Keep this SFAC example in mind and consider how large the combined social and economic benefits in Sitka must be of the many arts and cultural events, performances, and services. As more organizations work to quantify their social and economic impacts the Sitka these documented totals will grow.

## 2 Opportunities and Challenges

**On March 7 during the Planning Commission meeting we will work together to identify Historic, Cultural, and Arts opportunities and challenges to address in next 10-15 years. This will help determine Objectives and Actions. And, we will talk about which opportunities and challenges the City of Borough of Sitka is lead or has a role in accomplishing, and which are other entity's work. Following are a few ideas to consider.**

### Adopt and keep current a Sitka Historic Preservation Plan.

The Sitka Historic Preservation Commission will increasingly become an entity that looks for ways to invest in heritage assets in order to maintain Sitka's sense of place, its uniqueness as a city, create jobs, and support the visitor industry. A specific list of 10-year priorities is needed.

### Strike a balance between old and new.

A recent World Bank Urban Development Series publication<sup>4</sup> highlights the need for communities to find their own balance between preserving the old and making way for the new. Their topline advice:

- ***Balance conservation with an acceptable degree of change.*** Stakeholders should weigh the different values and trade-offs between conservation and development, identifying the acceptable level of change and the extent of adaptive reuse.
- ***Promote a blend of regulation and incentives.*** Measures to conserve historic city cores and heritage assets are not limited to rules and regulation that restrict activities. Incentives are also essential for achieving "integrated conservation."

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<sup>4</sup> *The Economics of Uniqueness: Investing in Historic City Cores and Cultural Heritage Assets for Sustainable Development*, 2012. US World Bank Urban Development Series. Editors: Licciardi, Guido and Amirahmasebi, Rana.



- *Ensure a dialogue between public and private sectors.* Heritage is a public good and the economic justification for public sector investment is well established. But, it is unreasonable to expect the public sector to be the sole investor, and the solution is to have a combination of public and private investment, with a balance between the two, varying depending on the project scheme and context.

Protect sacred sites and resources

Support heritage and cultural tourism

Increase public awareness of historic preservation opportunities, tax incentives, and grants available to rehabilitate properties.

Continued return of tribal cultural properties to Sitka Tribe of Alaska

Obtain National Register Historic District status for Sitka Indian Village

Rehabilitate as needed, celebrate, and honor clan houses

Integrate Sitka Tlingit place names into community facilities, services and places.

Support development of a Sitka Tribal Museum.

Its purpose will be to emphasize cultural viability through time. Exhibits and interpretation would focus on tribal choices and efforts at cultural maintenance (e.g., potlatches, funerary customs, clan houses, oral histories) showing the dynamic of Sitka Tlingit culture, accenting the adaptability and strength of Tlingit people and culture through time.

Diversify funding streams for the historic, cultural, and arts organizations.

Provide training and support to allow historic, cultural, and arts organizations to better document their social and economic contributions to Sitka.

### **3 Objectives and Actions**

#### **GOAL**

Continue to recognize, appreciate, and celebrate Sitka’s historic, cultural, and arts resources, which are:

- Ethnically, religiously, and racially diverse
- Highly valued and essential to defining Sitka and local quality of life
- Integral to the economic base of the community

#### **OBJECTIVES**

To be determined

#### **ACTIONS**

To be determined