

Crews Survey Baranov Museum This Week

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Alaska's oldest building has captured the interest of the Historic American Building Survey. Crews are in town this week to document the structure of the Baranov Museum, which was built by the Russian-American Company in the early 1800s.

Tiffany Brunson is the director of the museum and said the Historic American Building Survey, also known as HABS, documents historical buildings around the country and is run by three different agencies, primarily the National Park Service.

"So what they're actually bringing digital building survey equipment to come out and survey the Baranov Museum — the entire structure inside and out, and create architectural drawings essentially for the Historic American Building Survey."

Those drawings are then stored in the Library of Congress and will be available to the public.

"It's also of course available to us in the Park Service so that we have really good, really detailed architectural drawings of our building."

Brunson said the museum has had a building survey in the past, but it was more than two decades ago. While the building itself hasn't changed, the techniques used to conduct the surveys have. She said the digital format wasn't available in the early 1990s.

The museum, which is often referred to as the Erskine House, was selected by the Parks Service as a building to survey this year, and won't cost the museum anything. Brunson said a historic architect in Anchorage visited the museum back in 2003 and recommended it to the Parks Service as one that needed to be visited.

"Because the Baranov Museum is the oldest building in Alaska. We're the oldest of only four Russian-built buildings remaining in the United States. We're really a huge resource, not just for Kodiak, but for Alaska itself on the building practices of the Russian American Company and the first Russian settlement in Alaska."

Brunson said a great byproduct of the scanner that will be used during the survey is a fly-through of the building that will be turned into a YouTube video.

"They digitize that footage and you can go around the building — it's like a movie. So it's not something you can control yourself, but you can fly around the building and then through the building online, through YouTube. Which is a really great resource for people who can't make it to Kodiak who still want to see this building. Still see, at least a very brief view of our exhibits."

Operations at the museum won't be hindered by the survey this week, and it will maintain normal business hours for folks wanting to check out the exhibits in person. Overall, Brunson said they are very grateful that the Parks Service selected them for this project.

Once the crews wrap up their work here in Kodiak they will continue on to Cordova and Skagway to document other historic structures.