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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ever since the major political changes that resulted in the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 there has been a need for an up-to-date interesting version of the history of the ancient region of Vladimir. This brief “book” attempts to meet that need. It is a project of Serendipity-Russia. The two main authors, Berry Binder and Peter York, worked on the project through internships through Illinois State University and the University of Pittsburgh respectively. The internships were under the direction of Dr. Ronald Pope, founder and President of Serendipity: Russian Consulting & Development, Ltd., now known as Serendipity-Russia, and an Associate Professor of Russian politics at Illinois State University—now a professor emeritus.

This project has consumed a number of years, and the complete list of those who contributed to it has been misplaced. Hopefully those who are not herein acknowledged will be able to forgive this lapse—and enjoy seeing the project at long last approaching completion.

Those who helped to bring the project to its conclusion include Alexei Altonen, Director of Special Projects at Serendipity's American Home in Vladimir; and Steve Constantelos and Marlyn Miller who made very helpful editing suggestions. Oxana Ustinova, the American Home's Assistant Director and “information gatherer extraordinaire,” helped run down specific facts. Ultimate responsibility for the monograph's content lies with Dr. Ronald Pope.

For more information on Serendipity-Russia and the American Home, please see the main web site: www.serendipity-russia.com. To forward comments and/or suggestions concerning this history, please write to Ron-Pope42@cs.com.

For current “tourist information” on Vladimir, see: www.vladimir-russia.info. This is also a Serendipity-Russia project

Please note that this history is still “under construction.” The main thing that is left to be done is to finish adding illustrations. But we wanted to make the text available to as many people as possible while work on the drawings is underway.

Comments and suggestions are welcome.

We hope you will find what follows to be interesting and informative.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Any tour through *Vladimirskaya Oblast* (the Vladimir region) will definitely be a memorable experience. The following brief history is designed to help the traveler take in the unique atmosphere of this historic city and region. In such an ancient and significant place, it is difficult to keep track of all the dates, names and events. The following portrait of the region has been designed to diminish these difficulties, in part by enlivening the story with some of the interesting tales and legends that are so often overlooked when history is discussed. We hope you will enjoy this marvelous journey!

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Vladimirskaya Oblast is situated in the heart of the Russian Plain, approximately 190 kilometers (118 miles) northeast of Moscow. The region is covered with woods, rivers, lakes, peat marshes, and swamps. Quite naturally, the geography of the region has contributed significantly to its history. The checkerboard of forests and rivers located between two of ancient Rus's most vital waterways, the Volga and the Oka rivers, served as a key element in the rise of the city of Vladimir from eastern outpost to royal capital.

Russia's long, cold, dark winters, are one of the country's most familiar features. From November to March, the average temperature is below zero centigrade (32 F). Snow normally covers the ground from late November to early April. The summer months bring warmer weather to the region, with moderate precipitation. July, generally the hottest month, averages 18.1 C (approximately 66 F). Most Russians seem to prefer the winter months and wait anxiously each fall for the snow to begin.

The climatic features, like the terrain, have played an important role in the formation of ancient and contemporary Russian culture. One of the largest influences has been on the development of religion. Like most cultures, the ancient Slavic tribes based their religions on the forces of nature. The best known pre-Christian religion of the Slavonic peoples is called *Yazychestvo*. This polytheistic religion revolved around the worship of idols (*kap*) representing various forces of nature, including *Perun*, the god of thunder and lightning; *Dazhbog* (or *Yarylo*), the god of the sun; and *Svarog*, the god of the sky and celestial fire. These deities were worshiped, along with others, at sites commonly referred to as *Kapyshyve* (place for idols) before and after Christianity officially came to Rus in 988 or 989.

The influence of Orthodox Christianity

Since its adoption over 1000 years ago, Orthodox Christianity has played an extremely significant role in the shaping of Russian culture. Christianity officially came to Russia by way of the Byzantine Empire. However, Slavs were acquainted with Orthodox Christianity even before Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavovich ("The Red Sun") of Kiev (at that time the capital of the grand principality of Rus) adopted it officially. Familiarity with the Orthodox faith came primarily through merchants who ventured to Constantinople (the Byzantine capital), and beyond. After Prince Vladimir converted to the Eastern Orthodox faith, he "ordered that [a statue of] *Perun* [the god of thunder and lightning] should be bound to a horse's tail and dragged...to the river."

Thus, Prince Vladimir set about to Christianize Rus. Some took to the conversion readily, assuming the prince knew best. However, many struggled to retain religious beliefs that had been held for centuries. Out of these struggles came a mixture of Orthodox Christianity and pagan beliefs and symbolism.

The adoption of Christianity brought not only religion, but also enormous cultural influence from the Byzantine Empire. Today this semi-Eastern influence can be seen in much of the ancient religious architecture throughout Russia.

Early inhabitants

The far-eastern portion of the great European Plain, today known as the Russian Federation, was traditionally inhabited by ancient Slavonic tribes, the *Krivichi* and the *Vyatichi*, and Finnish (*Finno-Ugrik*) tribes, the *Meria*, *Muroma*, *Ve*, and *Chud*. Not until later would the more “cultured” Slavonic tribes from the south migrate northward.

Evidence of the oldest inhabitants of the region dates back to the Paleolithic era, some 25,000 years ago. These nomadic inhabitants are said to have used a site called *Sungir* as a temporary settlement for up to eighteen years. The *Sungir* archeological site is located on the eastern fringe of the city of Vladimir on the road to Bogolyubovo. For a number of years the site was not, as promised, preserved for its historic importance. Rather, it offered nothing more than a beautiful view of Bogolyubovo, *dachas* (country homes), and red brick rubble which was supposed to be turned into a home for the artifacts found at the site. An effort is now allegedly underway to properly exploit the site—but resources are obviously hard to come by.

A "Forest Fortress"

The vast forests of the Vladimir region protected the Slavonic and Finnish tribes from nomadic warriors who frequented the more open terrain of the south. At the same time, the vast network of rivers and tributaries allowed the inhabitants of the northern region to conduct trade with merchant cities in the South (Kiev) and the North (Novgorod).

The protection offered by the wooded north became more appealing to the Slavonic tribes in the South as “barbarian” raids and princely feuds became more frequent. The continuous flow of southern Slavs to the north led to a blending of people, culture, and language, producing a diverse heritage which most contemporary natives of *Vladimirskaya Oblast* share.

The “Golden Ring”

Today, many of the major cities of the region belong to the so-called “Golden Ring” (*Zolotoye Koltso*). These towns are known for their historic, architectural, and religious significance. Among the cities of the Golden Ring in *Vladimirskaya Oblast* are Vladimir, Bogolyubovo, and Suzdal. This is not to say these cities are the only ones worth investigating. There are countless additional attractions, from the beautiful crystal of Gus Khrustalny to the work of artisans in Mstyora, from the important industrial sector of Kovrov to the quiet charm of Mezinovsky, and the legends of Illia Muromets from the ancient city of Murom. The remainder of this history will provide information on the most noteworthy sites within the Vladimir region, but be sure to do some investigating on your own. In a land so vast and unique, interesting things can be found at any turn of the road. Here history blends with the present, opening up to the visitor the possibility of acquiring a real understanding of Russia.



VLADIMIR

(pop. 339,500)

Welcome to Vladimir! Considering the significant role this community has played in Russian history, it can legitimately be considered one of the five most historically important cities in Russia. Although today Vladimir is much like any mid-sized industrial city in contemporary Russia, it was once the capital of the grand principality of Rus. Because of its historical significance, this jewel of the Golden Ring should hold special prominence. However, the city has been overshadowed by the preceding and succeeding capitals of Kiev, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. Once revered and respected throughout Russia, current day Vladimir reflects its former status with a mixture of modesty and splendor.

The city of Vladimir has grown considerably since the days when it held the throne of Russian princes; however, many of the physical characteristics that the princes undoubtedly found attractive still exist. The city stretches across the top of a long cigar-shaped hill that forms the high northern bank of the Klyazma River, a tributary of the Oka. The Klyazma gave Vladimir merchants easy access to trade routes, and its steep, wooded bank served as a natural wall of defense against invaders from the south. The wooded, hilly terrain, and easy access to a major waterway, are perhaps the most significant factors which led to the establishment of a royal principality here.

Like many other facets of Russian history, those concerning Vladimir are sometimes highly contested. In fact, the very roots of Vladimir's founding are not exempt from controversy.

As has been discussed previously, the area occupied by the city of Vladimir has been inhabited by humans (at least intermittently) for approximately 25,000 years. Traditionally, the founding date of the permanent settlement of Vladimir was acknowledged as 1108, which is the date of the first mention of a community with this name in the Primary Chronicles. The founding of the city is attributed to Prince Vladimir Monomakh (Monomachus), who inherited the region as part of the Rostov-Suzdal principality in the eleventh century.

In the early 1990's it was asserted that the city is older than this. The claim is that a certain Father Georgy possesses chronicle material that mentions the city in 990, associating it with Vladimir the Red Sun (later St. Vladimir) the "father" of Russian Orthodoxy. Those who supported the new date argued, in part, that the traditionally recognized founding date was more acceptable to the former Communist regime, as affiliation with Russian Orthodoxy would conflict with the doctrine of state atheism.

This new theory has caused a great deal of controversy, particularly among those specializing in the history of Vladimir. The defenders of the previously uncontested founding year of 1108 dispute the claims of those who support

the new date, arguing that the new theory was fabricated in order to provide a reason to have a celebration, which was organized in 1995, the earliest that arrangements could be made after the alleged discovery of the new founding date. Some specialists in the history of Vladimir continue to argue there is no credible archaeological or written evidence which supports the claim that the city was founded in 990, while others disagree.

Regardless of which founding date is the more accurate, the city's most historically significant events occurred after the turn of the twelfth century. Serving its original purpose as a defensive outpost for the Rostov-Suzdal principality, Vladimir had little political or military influence throughout the reign of Vladimir Monomakh (1113-1125), or his son Yuri Dolgoruky ("long arms"--1154-1157). However, Vladimir rose in significance after Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky, son of Dolgoruky, officially transferred the throne from Suzdal to Vladimir, thus changing the name of the principality from Rostov-Suzdal to Vladimir-Suzdal in 1157. Under Princes Andrei Bogolyubsky and Vsevolod III "Big Nest" (*Bolshoye Gnezdo*--so named because he had a large family), Vladimir grew significantly in power and importance, replacing Kiev as the capitol of the Grand Principality of Rus in 1169. During the reign of Prince Vsevolod III "Big Nest" the city experienced its most substantial growth. Following his death in 1212, the consolidated "state" (Rus) divided into several smaller principalities.

In 1238 Vladimir, like all of Rus, fell under the Mongol-Tatar yoke which limited the city's ability to unify the multitude of royal thrones. Although the Mongol-Tatar occupation affected the authority of the Vladimir princes, the legitimate seat of Russian royalty was confirmed by the official transfer of the Russian metropolitans from Kiev to Vladimir in 1299. Following this transfer of religious power, each successive grand prince of Rus was crowned in Vladimir until 1432.

Beginning in the mid-fourteenth century Vladimir's power was severely challenged by the rise of the Moscow principality, specifically under Prince Ivan Kalita. The eventual "gathering" of the lands of Rus under Moscovite control, coupled with the stifling effects of Tartar-Mongol occupation, ultimately extinguished Vladimir's potential to flourish as a royal city. However, the exalted role the city once played in the formation of the Russian state has assured continued recognition of Vladimir as an important contributor to Russian politics, culture, and history.

A number of fascinating stories and legends enrich the official, academic study of Vladimir's history. It can be argued that these stories, regardless of their factual accuracy, help to define this beautifully majestic city. In a journey through the extraordinary history of Vladimir, truth and fiction mingle to create a magical sense of grandeur and awe.

Entering the City on the Road from Moscow

Our investigation of Vladimir begins from the western part of the city on Lenin Prospect (*Prospect Lenina*).

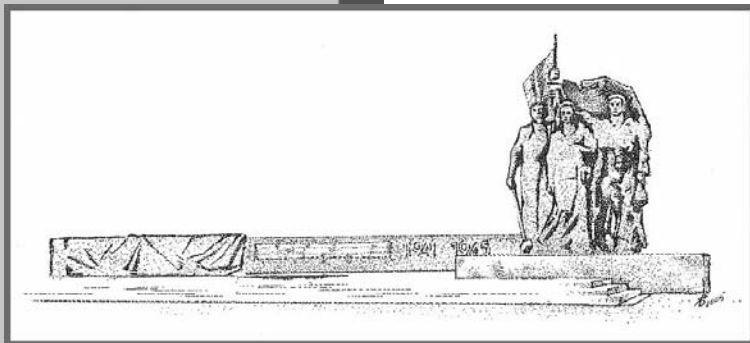
After the approximately three-hour drive from Moscow, depending on traffic, Vladimir will probably seem to be comfortably familiar. The provincial charm of the city is immediately soothing, as Vladimir offers the advantages of a large city, without the overbearing size and pace of places like Moscow or St. Petersburg. One of your first observations will probably be the contrast between the large apartment complexes and the traditional Russian cottages that are found throughout the city. Many of the cottages have been inhabited by one family for several generations. In contrast, most of the large apartment buildings are a product of the Soviet era; most of their initial inhabitants moved to Vladimir from the countryside during the Soviet period in search of the advantages of city life and the prospect of higher paying, industrial employment.

This mass influx of workers to Vladimir greatly expanded the city's boundaries. For example, the western part of the city we are currently examining was at one time, and is still to some extent, identified as *Yamskaya sloboda*, not Vladimir. Due to a need for housing, this small village was substantially altered in the early 1930s as new apartments were built to house Vladimir's growing labor force. Later, in 1935, *Yamskoye sloboda* was officially incorporated by the city of Vladimir, and the neighborhood became a part of *Leninsky raion* (Lenin district). The city's trolley lines and bus routes were extended into this newly annexed region, and the workers, who had previously had to walk several miles a day to get to their factory jobs, could now ride all the way to and from work.

There are two other areas in Vladimir proper which have experienced this same transformation: *Oktyabrsky* and *Frunzensky*. North of *Leninsky* (on the western side of the city) is the *Oktyabrsky* district. Once known as the village of *Marynka*, this neighborhood was incorporated by Vladimir and officially renamed in 1962. The *Frunzensky* district, previously the village of *Krasnoye Selo*, was officially incorporated by Vladimir in 1967. Today

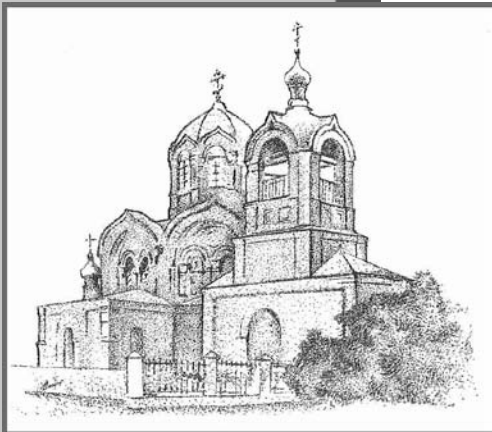
the area is identified by three names: *Frunzensky* (the official name), *Krasnoye* (the unofficial name for the newer parts of the neighborhood), and *Dobroye* (the name locals apply to the older part which is located along *ulitsa Dobriselskaya*).

Driving through the *Leninsky* district on the road from Moscow you will notice on the left Vladimir's monument to local Soviet soldiers killed during the course of the "Great Patriotic War" (World War II). The eternal flame that burns in memory of these heroes is joined by a sculpture of three figures: a worker, a soldier, and a mother/wife. Monuments like this one, although not always as elaborate, are to be found in almost every city and town in Russia. But it is unlikely that there is another war Memorial located on a patch of earth as interesting as this one. Originally, this site was host to a local graveyard and adjacent church. The graveyard was used for centuries, and,



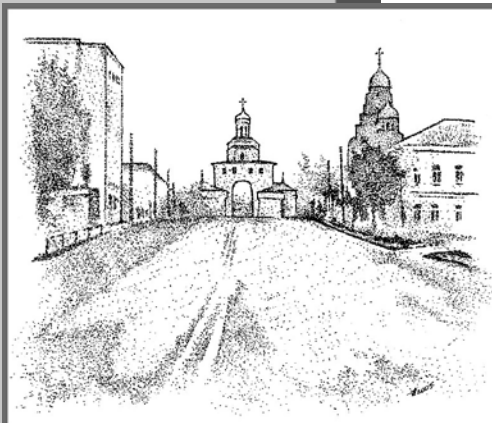
as the story goes, the revolutionary Russian populist, Alexander Herzen, was married in the church. However, in keeping with the Soviet policy of state atheism, the church was converted to a movie theater, and the graveyard replaced by a dance pavilion in the mid-1960s. The theater was appreciated; however, many people would not dance at the pavilion. Instead, young people would meet there to socialize and listen to music, but to take a spin on the hardwood floor for many of them would have been considered “dancing on bones.” Later, after continued limited use, the pavilion was replaced by the current memorial in the late 1960s.

Also during the Soviet era many of the original Vladimir street, park, and square names were changed to honor the Soviet state. This was done in virtually all Soviet cities (and many city names were changed as well, e.g., St. Petersburg to Leningrad, Nizhnii Novgorod to Gorky). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the people of Vladimir have begun to change the names back to the originals—as the above named cities have reverted to their pre-Communist names. In the following narrative, the streets, squares and parks will be referred to as they are currently known, and the previous Soviet names will be noted where relevant. As a visitor, you must keep in mind that local residents may still refer to these streets and areas by their Soviet names because these are what they grew up with and perhaps because of some longing for the past. In time, the reinstated names will of course prevail.



As for Vladimir itself, people jokingly claimed that the city escaped being renamed during the Soviet period because it was already named after the country's foremost "revolutionary," Vladimir Lenin.

Continuing east on Lenin Prospect, you will notice the city's grand cathedrals in the distance. This historic view, contrasted with the contemporary surrounding structures, illustrates Vladimir's blend of history and change. At this point Lenin Prospect ends, and a short northeasterly bend called Pushkin Street (*ulitsa Pushkina*) begins. While traveling along this short bend, be sure to notice (on your right) the beautiful nineteenth-century, red brick edifice of the Church of the Archangel Michael. This church at one time housed the Clocks and Time Museum; but it has been restored as a place of worship. After a sharp right turn, the road will once again head east, at which point it becomes the lengthy Noblemen's Street (*Dvoryanskaya ulitsa*).

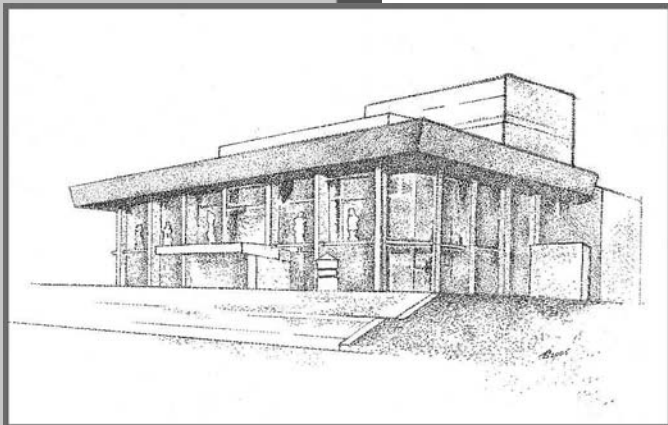


Noblemen's Street leads directly to the heart of Old Vladimir and the bulk of the city's historic sites. The road begins at the top of a rather steep hill. This hill is significant for much more than the view it offers. Known as Cool Hill (*Studyonaya Gora*), it is connected with a local legend which dates back to the mid-thirteenth century and the Russian saint, Prince Alexander Nevsky.

Grandson of Vsevolod III “Big Nest,” Alexander Nevsky is often recognized as the savior of Russian culture and the Russian state. As Prince of the semi-autonomous Nizhny-Novgorod principality located east of Vladimir, during the era of Tartar-Mongol rule Nevsky forcefully eliminated the threat of military annihilation by the (Germanic-Lithuanian) Teutonic Order at the Battle of Lake Chudskoye in 1242. In addition, Prince Alexander “dealt realistically with the Tartar-Mongol masters,” thus, securing the authority and legitimacy of Russian royalty. Nevsky, following in the footsteps of his grandfather and great-grandfather, held the title of Grand Prince of Vladimir-Suzdal (1252-1263). Nevsky's courage, determination, skill, and power have traditionally been remembered by the Russian people in times of national emergency. In fact, Joseph Stalin successfully employed Nevsky's defeat of the Teutonic Order as propaganda in his own struggle against the German-Nazi invaders during the “Great Patriotic War.” A film that was made about Alexander Nevsky during the "Great Patriotic War" is still popular today.

The legend associated with Alexander Nevsky and Cool Hill (the beginning of Nobleman’s Street) has nothing to do with the victories for which he is most widely known. In fact, the legend connected with this hill does not even involve the prince directly. Rather, it concerns two women and their battle to

win the undivided love of Prince Alexander. Legend says that these women, both vying for Alexander’s love, came to this hill to cry and discuss their competition for his affection. However, the wind from this high hill “cooled their souls and passion,” and consequently, their love for Nevsky, and their anger towards each other was calmed.



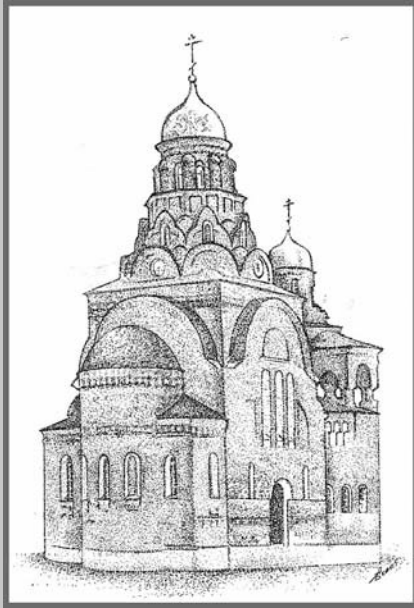
Proceeding along Nobleman’s Street, two structures come into view. To the right stands the early twentieth-century, red brick Old Believers’ Church of the Trinity (*Troitskaya tserkov*), and straight ahead stands the gleaming golden dome and white “block” shape of the

twelfth-century Golden Gates (*Zolotiye vorota*). As you approach these two architectural monuments, you will notice on the right Vladimir’s original main shopping “center,” the “Universal Store” (*universalnyi magazin*), and the popular Vladimir Regional Drama Theater (*Oblastnoy Dramaticheskyy Teatr*).

The *universalnyi magazin*, or *univermag* as it is popularly known, has been privatized and renamed Valentina. While it was once entirely government owned and operated, each floor now contains private shops that carry a variety of imported and domestic goods. For example, there is a one hour color film processing business on the second floor--in contrast to the Soviet period when color film itself was hard to find even in Moscow and was almost never available in cities like Vladimir.

In the Soviet period, the shelves of the *univermag* were, for the most part, filled with poor quality goods and there were frequently shortages of staple

products, but today almost anything you need can be found here. The same is true in the other private stores that have been set up in the renovated buildings along the main street and elsewhere in the community.

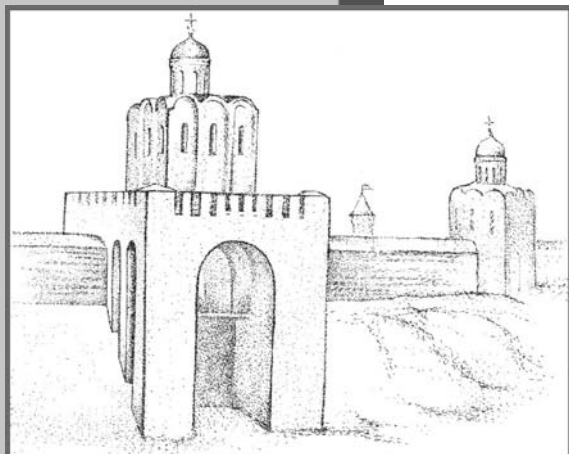


Built in 1913-1916, the Old Believers' Church of the Trinity (*Troitskaya tserkov*) today hosts an exquisite exhibition of glass, crystal, lacquer boxes, and embroidery from *Gus Khrustalny* and *Mstyora*. The exhibition provides a beautiful display of traditional Russian craftsmanship which has thrived for centuries throughout *Vladimirskaya oblast*. The lacquered papier-maché boxes on display showcase the skill and talents of Mstyora's most famous contemporary artists, particularly Yevgeny Yurin. In the past, Mstyora was well known as an icon-painting center, however, as the market for icons diminished under Soviet rule, the painters of Mstyora were forced to turn their skills to painting folk and other themes on lacquered pieces. The glass and crystal pieces displayed spotlight the talents of artists from Gus Khrustalny (literally "Crystal Goose"). The exhibit located here is equaled only by the one to be found in Gus Khrustalny's Crystal Museum (*Muzey Khrustalya*). Of particular note are the cut glass pieces, and the two large abstract glass sculptures. (Read more on Mstyora and Gus Khrustalny below.)



The Golden Gates and Old Vladimir

The Golden Gates, one of the most famous historic and architectural sites in Vladimir, have served to greet each visitor from the west for more than 800 years. Built by Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky in 1164, they were inspired by the entrance gates of both Kiev and Constantinople. Bogolyubsky had the structure built to enhance Vladimir's status as the rightful successor to the Grand Principality in Kiev. Although symbolically important, the Golden Gates were also practical, serving as an intimidating obstacle to attacking armies. In fact, the entrance was successfully defended against a number of attacks, including the eventually decisive siege by Tartar-Mongols under Baty Khan in 1238. The Mongols managed to breach the city's walls further south, allegedly at the point where Serendipity-Russia's model American home now stands. But the Golden Gates held firm as they did again during an artillery bombardment during the Polish-Lithuanian siege at the beginning of the seventeenth century.



Originally, the Golden Gates consisted of a four-sided tower with a high arched passageway, and a defensive platform above the arch. The entrance had oak doors gilded with copper which gave it a "golden" appearance. Above the doors a platform supported by wooden beams was built for the defenders, and a small church stood in the middle of this defensive position. Finally, to either side of the gates stood high earthen ram-

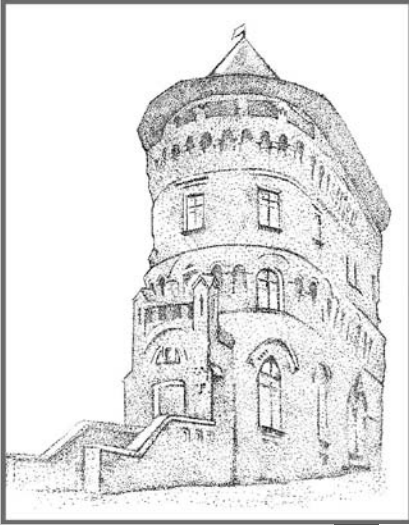
parts (a section of which still stands) topped with thick wooden fortifications.

Since their original construction, the Golden Gates have experienced a number of alterations. Perhaps the most significant was carried out under the orders of Tsarina Catherine II “the Great” in 1785. Legend has it that a certain bureaucrat from St. Petersburg had traveled to Vladimir for business purposes. Upon entering the gates, however, the bureaucrat's carriage became stuck in the narrow passageway. To get through the gates the official was forced to crawl out of his carriage. Obviously, he was very upset and consequently ordered that the earthen ramparts to the left and right be removed to avoid any more embarrassing situations. Since the original four-sided structure was top-heavy, and thus not structurally sound once the ramparts were removed, the four corner columns were added to stabilize the original tower.

Today, the Golden Gates are home to the Military History Exhibition and the Gallery of Soviet Heroes, located in the uppermost portion of the structure. Visitors will be impressed with the steep “medieval” stairway leading to the museum, which can be entered from a door located in the southeast corner column. Notable exhibits include a large diorama depicting the Tartar-Mongol siege of 1238, an array of Russian and foreign weaponry, Russo-Turkish War relics (1877-1878), and memorials to two Soviet heroes, the pilot Nikolai Kamanin and astronaut Valery Kubasov.

Nikolai Kamanin was born in 1908 in the small town of Melenki in the Vladimir region. As a Soviet air force colonel general, among other things, he was one of the first individuals awarded the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star for his courage, skill, and dedication during WWII. Valery Kubasov is also a native of the Vladimir region. Born in 1935, this boy from the small town of Vyazniki went on to become a cosmonaut and a national hero. Kubasov made his first flight as a member of the “Soyuz-6” space mission. Later, he was a member of the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz joint American-Soviet mission, and in 1980 was the commander of the “Soyuz-36” space mission.

As the unofficial symbol of Vladimir, the Golden Gates introduce visitors to the heart of “Old Vladimir.” After passing through (or around) the Golden Gates, one will find that the surrounding architecture is much more traditional, as most of the buildings are a product of nineteenth-century design. Also on the other side of the Golden Gates, visitors will find that the name of the street has changed from Nobleman’s Street (*Dvoryanskaya ulitsa*) to Big Moscow Street (*Bolshaya Moskovskaya ulitsa*, formerly known as *ulitsa III Internatsionala*, or 3rd International Street). The relatively large buildings along Big Moscow Street add a sense of narrowness to the avenue. This street is the oldest in Vladimir, and before the twentieth century it was part of the road to Siberian exile known as the Vladimirka. Although there are many interesting sites to admire throughout Vladimir, an observant stroll down this



street truly captures the simple essence of “Old Vladimir.”

The first stop on our survey of “Old Vladimir” leads us a bit off the main thoroughfare. After passing the Golden Gates, follow the narrow path to the right along the rampart to the very top. Here may be found one of the smaller, but quite interesting, museums in Vladimir. The Old Vladimir Exhibition (*Vystavka “Stary Vladimir”*), located inside an early twentieth-century red brick water tower, provides visitors with a glimpse of “petit bourgeois” life in Vladimir at the turn of the century. Inside the glass cases on either side of the entryway are various displays of early twentieth-century Russian goods, including a traditional “teakettle” (*samovar*), brandy and vodka dispensers, jewelry, and other consumer items. The most spectacular “exhibit” lies on the top floor of this museum—the viewing platform provides museum-goers with a stunning view of Vladimir, the Klyazma river, and the surrounding countryside. The observation deck has both open-air and glass-enclosed portions, providing an option for visitors with a fear of heights, as well as offering shelter during bad weather.

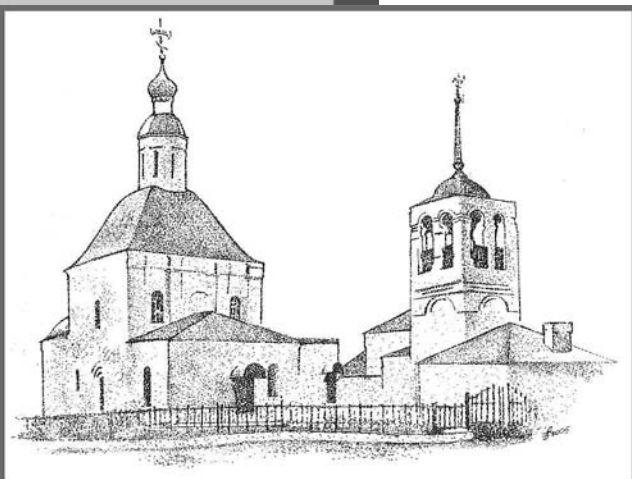


Leaving the water tower, you will notice the graffiti that has been carved into the brick walls, particularly on the wall facing south. Most of this was produced by Vladimir teens in the late-1980s, as this spot was informally designated by the city's youth as a place to buy, trade, and sell rock-and-roll albums and cassettes, mostly by American rock groups. Looking down the rampart from this side you will be surprised to see the backyard of an American style home complete with fenced-in yard, wooden deck, and a well-groomed lawn. This is no illusion. Built in the

spring of 1992 and officially dedicated on the 4th of July, the American Home (*Amerikansky dom*) provides a variety of services, including a popular and highly regarded American English and Culture Program, assistance with educational and cultural exchanges, humanitarian aid, and a variety of commercial services, including tourist services.

Built with American materials by American volunteers, the Home represents the bonds established between Russians and Americans following the Soviet era. Located on the outer base of the earthen rampart, as noted above, the

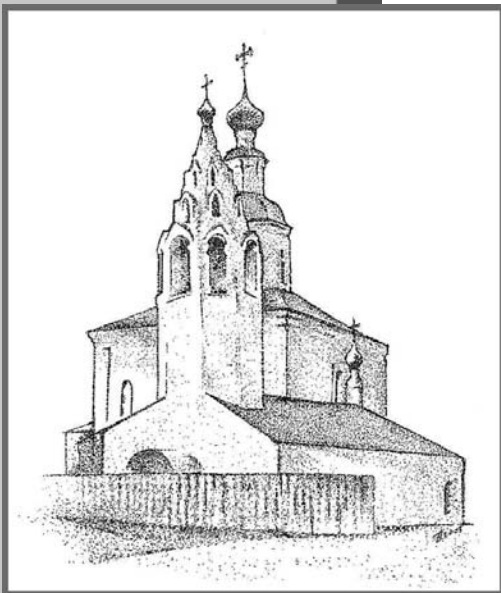
American Home occupies a historic location, as it is said that at this spot the Tatar-Mongol invaders finally breached Vladimir's defensive walls in the siege of 1238. The staff of the American Home point out that they are not a part of any new “invasion,” but rather they are a part of the bridge to Vladimir's future.



From the water tower museum you will also see the familiar onion domes of a Russian church to the east. Follow the stairs down on the eastern side of the water tower and bear to the left between traditional Russian homes.

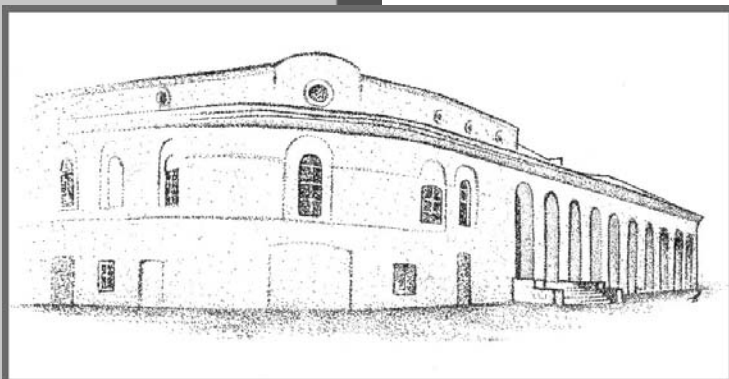
Soon on your right a gateway will appear to the quaint twelfth-century (1164) Church of Our Savior (*Spaskaya tserkov*) and the Church of St. Nicholas (*Nikolaievskaya tserkov*). The addition of a “golden” cupola and spire make these churches striking examples of medieval Vladimir-Suzdal architecture. Although they have been gutted numerous times by fire, succeeding architects have managed to retain many of the traditional features. These include the division of the walls into three sections with opulently decorated platbands (moldings), and the use of traditional white stone. The naturally lit interior of the Church of Our Savior is brought to life with icons and candles displayed throughout.

Scholars of Vladimir’s past are convinced that a revered temple for the worship of pagan idols once stood here. Historians believe this spot was chosen by Vladimir Monomakh for the construction of the first Christian church in the city specifically in order to supplant the pagan religion. Further, scholars believe that the white stone foundation of the Church of Our Savior was once the site of Andrei Bogolyubsky’s court. The Church of St. Nicholas was constructed during a wave of renewed effort to build stone structures beginning in the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century.



Continuing east, along St. George’s Street (*Georgyevskaya ulitsa*, which runs parallel and to the south of Big Moscow Street), you will pass behind the magnificently renovated bright yellow Church of St. George (*Georgyevskaya tserkov*). Before examining the church continue east to the end of St. George’s Street. Here, towering above the sprawling wooded valley dotted with cottages, you will enjoy a splendid view of Vladimir’s famous Assumption (Dormition) Cathedral (*Uspensky sobor*). This view provides an incredible opportunity to observe the naturally hilly and wooded terrain which Vladimir princes found so attractive—and defensible.

Returning to the Church of St. George, you will be awed by its beautiful yellow exterior, green roofs, and dome. Like the Church of Our Savior, this church was originally constructed with white stone. After a fire, however, the original building was replaced by the present structure in 1783-84. For a number of years the church hosted regular performances by several choirs under the direction of Edward Markin. In 2003 the building was returned to the Orthodox Church and Markin’s choirs now perform in the refurbished 19th century Hall of Classical Music on Big Moscow Street. An opportunity to hear one of these choirs should not be missed.



(In general, Vladimir is noted for the strength of its artistic culture, including its choral groups. Another small choir of note, with which the American Home has developed a special relationship, is the Vocal Ensemble Amadeus.)

In the same vicinity as the church there is a folk art center and an art gallery which also hosts con-

certs.

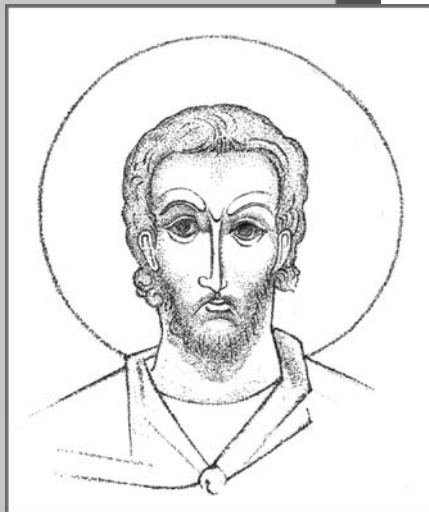
After conducting a thorough examination of these out of the way sites, you will inevitably wander back onto Big Moscow Street. At this time be sure to take a moment to check out the eighteenth-century Trading Arcade (*Torgoviye ryady*), occupying an entire block between Maiden's Street (*Devicheskaya ulitsa*, formerly *Krasnomilitseiskaya ulitsa* or Red Militia Street) and Gagarin Street (*ulitsa Gagarina*). With the addition over the years of numerous stores in other parts of the city, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the popularity of the Arcade has been diminished. However, at one time, this row of shops played an integral role in the life of Vladimiriters. As one observer has stated, "Peasants, merchants and craftsmen from far-away and neighboring areas converged on it on market days, and various fairs and festivals were held here." Plans have been prepared to do major renovation work on the Arcade and other historic buildings in the center of Vladimir.



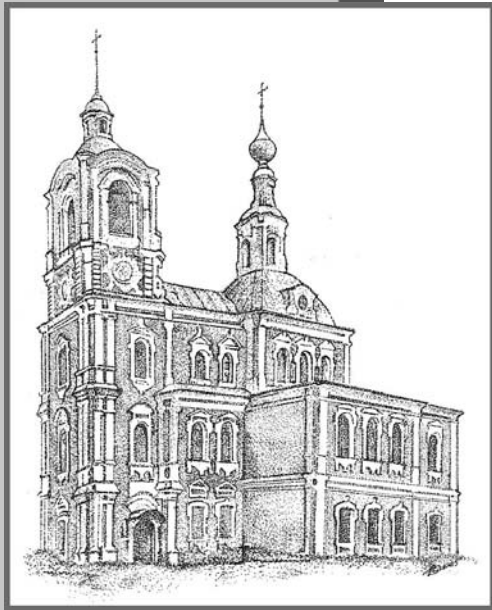
Before continuing towards the heart of "Old Vladimir," our survey will take another detour, this time through the back streets which lie to the north of Big Moscow Street. Following Maiden's Street north, arched gables (*kokoshniki*) and a towering green dome will come into view after a few blocks. If you continue, you will enter a sprawling courtyard with rows of well-kept flowers, and discover that the arches and domes belong to the Dormition Cathedral of the Princess's Convent (*Knyaginin Monastyr*).

Once home to the Soviet-era "Vladimir Region Orthodoxy and Atheism Museum," the complex has undergone considerable transformation since the fall of the Communist regime, and is once again a working convent. Surrounded by traditional Russian buildings, the grounds of the Princess's Convent are a striking representation of life in pre-revolutionary Vladimir.

The charming beauty of the convent grounds today may inspire a tangible sense of wonder, and the convent has an equally interesting past. It was founded by Princess Maria Shvarnovna (wife of Vsevolod III "Big Nest") in 1200-1. The Dormition Cathedral was constructed in the center of the convent, and served as the sacred burial site for women of the royal family. Many were buried within the walls of the convent, including Princess Maria Shvarnovna, Princess Anna (Vsevolod's second wife), and the wife and daughter of Prince Alexander Nevsky.



Although the existing cathedral (late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries) is not the original, it was built upon the original foundations, and is assumed to be a replica of the thirteenth-century structure. The striking convent grounds, beautiful as they may be, pale in comparison to the well-preserved seventeenth-century frescoes located within the cathedral walls. Almost all of the original wall paintings, designed and painted by artists from the royal workshop headed by the famous iconographer Mark Matveyev, have survived. Those of particular interest include: portraits of Andrei Bogolyubsky, Vsevolod III "Big Nest," and Alexander Nevsky



(southwest pillar); scenes from the Prologue (exterior of the altar arch); and the Last Judgment (entire western wall). Perhaps the most stunning, however, is the twelfth century “Our Lady of Bogolyubovo” (*Bogolyubskaya bogomater*) icon donated in 1992 by the Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Preserve.

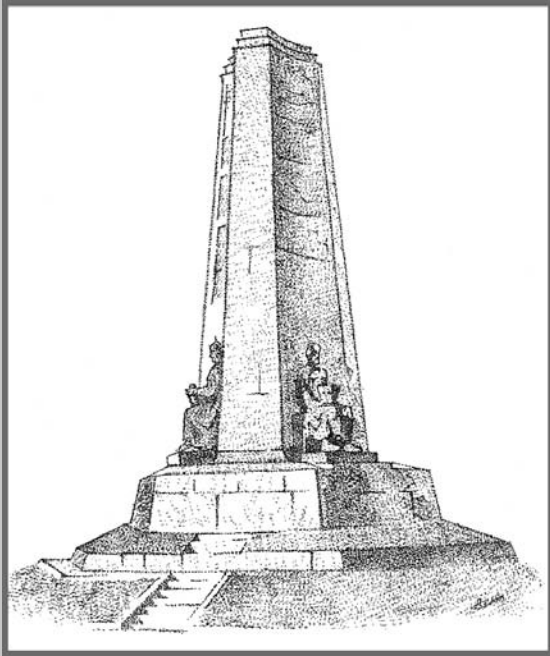
Before returning to the busy downtown streets, you may want to rest for a moment in the convent courtyard, as this place is perhaps the most tranquil to be found inside the city limits. Another option is to venture west down Princess Street (*Knyagininskaya ulitsa*, which runs perpendicular to Maiden Street in front of the Convent). After a very short stroll you will notice a baroque style church topped with “golden” cupolas on the right. This is the Church of St. Nikitas (*Nikityaskaya tserkov*) which was built in 1762-5 with funds donated by the merchant Semyon Lazarev. Architecturally this church is different from any other in the city. It is in fact not like any other church of the eighteenth century. Specifically, the interior of the Church of St. Nikitas is divided into three separate churches, each occupying its

own floor.



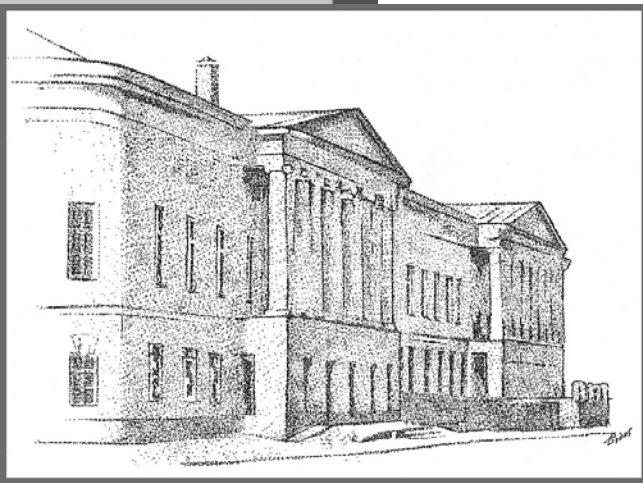
Returning to Big Moscow Street, our journey through “Old” Vladimir continues eastward to the heart of the city. Crossing the bridge which stretches over Murom Street (*Muromskaya ulitsa*), we begin our survey of the official Kremlin (fortress) of “Old” Vladimir. The city was originally split into three sectors, with the central sector, the Kremlin, located in the area stretching between Murom Street and Stoletovs Street (*ulitsa Stoletovykh*). After crossing the bridge, notice the intriguing red brick building

to the right. This structure, built in 1907, served as the meeting place for the city council (*Duma*) in the early twentieth century. Later, following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, this structure was turned into a “Pioneer Palace” (*dvorets pionerov*)—the meeting place for the Soviet equivalent of the Boy and Girl Scouts. After passing the old Pioneer Palace, you will come upon a large, paved plaza bordered by a large park to the right containing Vladimir’s most esteemed architectural treasures—Assumption Cathedral (*Uspinsky sobor*) and St. Demetrius Cathedral (*Dmitrievsky sobor*).



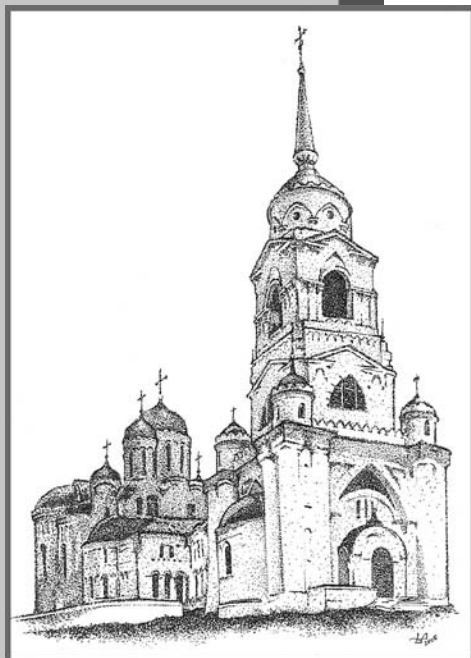
You will inevitably be eager to survey the most renowned structures in Vladimir, but don't neglect to examine the surroundings of the aforementioned plaza, or Cathedral Square (*Sobornaya ploshchad*, known as Liberty Square or *Ploshchad svobody*, during the Soviet period). Once the site for gathering the home guard for battle, and later the place where revolutionary decrees were announced, today Cathedral Square serves as the starting point for celebrations and festival processions. The 1958 memorial to Vladimir's 850th anniversary (based on the 1108 founding date) dominates the square. This mammoth, three-sided monument was designed by Dimitry Ryabichev and Alexei Dushkin. The three sides of the monument are meant to symbolize the three most important qualities of Vladimir: a soldier protecting the heart of the city from western attackers, a traditional artisan admiring the awesome craftsmanship of Assumption Cathedral, and a Soviet worker observing the growing industrial sector of Vladimir. However sincere the intentions, Vladimirites commonly refer to this monument as either the "Three Fools" ("*Tri duraka*"), or the "lazy bones" ("*lentyay*"), commenting that they "do as much as the officials who placed them here—nothing."

assumption Cathedral, and a Soviet worker observing the growing industrial sector of Vladimir. However sincere the intentions, Vladimirites commonly refer to this monument as either the "Three Fools" ("*Tri duraka*"), or the "lazy bones" ("*lentyay*"), commenting that they "do as much as the officials who placed them here—nothing."



To the north of Cathedral Square, in a small park in front of a building that used to house a bank, stands a modest sized statue of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, founder of the Bolshevik party, and the first leader of Communist Russia. It is interesting to note that a statue of Tsar Alexander II, who abolished institutional serfdom in 1861, once stood on the pedestal currently occupied by Lenin. The bronze monument to Tsar Alexander was erected in 1896 by private donations, as the city administration refused to pay for it. Following the Communist seizure of power, Lenin took the Tsar's place--and may or may not

be replaced at some future date. Also lying to the north of the city square is the former Nobel Assembly (*Dvoryanskoye Sobraniye*), and a boys' high school. Built in 1826 and 1841, respectively. The elegant yellow Noble Assembly hosted Vladimir's first anti-tsarist meetings prior to the 1917 Revolution.



Undoubtedly, by this time your desire to examine Assumption Cathedral, as it is commonly translated for tourist purposes (see below), and St. Demetrius Cathedral has been stirred. We will move on now through Pushkin and Lime Tree Parks (*park Pushkina* and *park Lipki*) and on to the cathedrals.

Dormition or Assumption?

In English there is a distinction between “assumption” and “dormition” that does not exist in Russian where both words are translated as *uspeniye*.

“Assumption” is the term used in Catholicism, while “dormition” is the English term used in Russian Orthodoxy. Assumption means “to take up,” and this is the phrase utilized by the Catholic Church to emphasize the fact that the Virgin Mary’s ascension into heaven included both body and soul. Dormition means “to fall asleep,” and is the term used in Russian Orthodoxy to stress their view that the Virgin Mary never died but only sleeps. The Russian Orthodox believe that only Mary’s soul went to heaven, while the body remained on earth.

So many cathedrals in Russia bear this name because of the importance the Russian Orthodox religion places on the Virgin Mary (*Bogomater*--"Mother of God"). The Virgin Mary is arguably the most important Orthodox religious figure, and her presence symbolizes tranquility and protection. This explains the prominent spot the cathedral occupies in Vladimir, where it is situated so that it is (or was at the time of its construction) visible from every part of town. The importance of the Virgin Mary also explains the smaller like-named cathedrals that are located in towns, villages, and monasteries throughout Russia.

Assumption/Dormition Cathedral

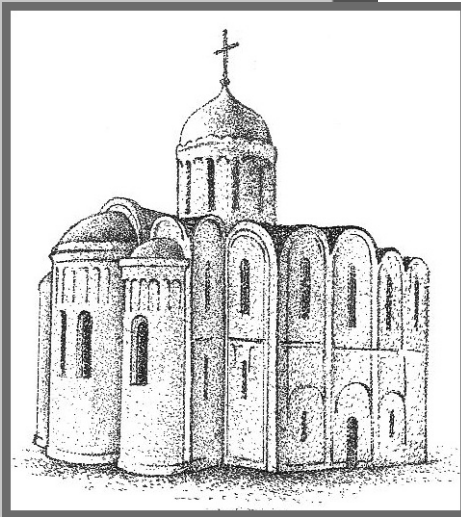
For nearly a millennium Vladimir’s *Uspinsky sobor*, or Assumption Cathedral (in keeping with the translation most guides use), has been recognized for its magnificent and unique craftsmanship, with reference to both its architecture and iconostasis—icon screen. Behind these most notable features lie equally amazing stories connected with almost every significant event occurring in the city.

Wanting to transfer royal authority, and indeed the grand principality, from Kiev to Vladimir, Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky began construction of the Assumption Cathedral on April 8, 1158. Bogolyubsky realized that the establishment of a majestic cathedral, to rival Kiev's St. Sophia, was necessary in creating a powerful sense of independence from the rule of Kiev. Through the construction of such a cathedral, Vladimir would establish a legitimate base of authority for the Christian church, a primary factor in the degree of power

enjoyed by each principality in medieval Rus. Thus, Prince Andrei began his ascendancy to Grand Prince of Rus, with Vladimir as the seat of the royal throne.

While the town's fortifications were being completed (including the Golden Gates), construction of the Assumption Cathedral began. Bogolyubsky chose to build the cathedral at the most visible and advantageous spot along the high riverbank of the Klyazma. In addition, he wanted this spot to be consistent with the original plan of the fortress set down by his grandfather, Vladimir Monomakh. In a defiant rejection of Kiev's authority, Prince Andrei recruited craftsmen from all over Europe (excluding Kiev) to undertake this monumental task, as Vladimir, still in its infancy as a center of culture, had yet to establish a solid school of artisans. Legend has it that a group of the foreign craftsmen were Romans sent to Bogolyubsky by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

Although the skilled workers were mostly non-Russians, Bogolyubsky relied on local peasants to do the manual labor. As might be expected, these workers were subjected to a number of physical horrors. One account describes peasant complaints about the harmful affects of breathing air thick with limestone dust. The prince, eager to finish his project as quickly as possible, did nothing to alleviate the peasants' ills. Rather, Prince Andrei responded with threats of "prison and sticks" (beatings) to all who complained.



Completed in three years, the Assumption Cathedral was greatly admired for its elaborate architecture and rich decorations. One ancient chronicler commented, "Prince Andrei built a stone church of splendor in the name of Our Lady and decorated it richly with gold and silver.... The church was as worthy of admiration as the temple of Solomon...." The original Assumption Cathedral was much simpler than the current structure. It had just four sides and a single dome. In 1185 the cathedral was destroyed by a citywide fire, which is said to have razed a total of 32 churches. As a result, under the direction of Prince Vsevolod III "Big Nest," the cathedral was rebuilt. Principally, the original four walls, which were badly charred by the fire, were effectively boxed in by a new structure. In addition, four new domes were added around the primary dome for support, one on each corner. Thus, as one author has stated, "the old giant was now surrounded by young soldiers...." In contrast to the initial construction, the renovations of 1185 required no foreign craftsman, as Vladimir, in a short thirty years, had developed enough local artisans to complete the task without outside assistance.

Upon completion, a stone wall was constructed to separate the Assumption Cathedral and some of the surrounding land from the rest of the city Kremlin. Traditionally, this fortified courtyard contained the dwelling place of the royal family. Hence, the Assumption Cathedral was the primary place of worship for each successive prince, and each grand prince was crowned here from 1174 to 1432, including Vsevolod III "Big Nest," Alexander Nevsky, Ivan Kalita, and Dimitry Donskoi.

Following the renovations of 1185, Assumption Cathedral once again fell victim to a devastating fire. However, this catastrophic event was only part of a much larger tragedy, the beginning of the Mongol-Tatar Yoke. Following their successful breaching of the city's fortifications in 1238, the nomadic invaders searched for the remaining members of Grand Prince Yury Vsevolodovich's family. The grand duchess, her children, and others had fled to the Assumption Cathedral for safety. Upon reaching the cathedral, they locked themselves in and climbed up to the choir loft to hide. Eventually, the invaders fought their way into the cathedral and slaughtered all inside. However, the assailants initially could not find the hidden duchess and her children. After what may be assumed to be some rather forceful questioning, the victors learned of the hiding place in the choir loft. Following a number of failed attempts to lure the royal family down, the attackers set the cathedral ablaze. The Primary Chronicles report: "Those present in the choir loft, praying, gave their souls to God; they were burned and joined the list of martyrs."

One may assume that some restoration occurred following the siege of 1238, however, no significant work on the cathedral was recorded until 1380. In fact, these repairs followed Moscow's, and perhaps Russia's, first victorious opposition to the Mongol-Tatar occupiers—at Kulikovo Pole, near the river Don. Led by Prince Dmitry Donskoi, the Russian princes struck a devastating blow to the Golden Horde, leading to the eventual demise of the Mongol-Tatar Yoke. Following this victory, Prince Donskoi initiated a massive renovation project to revive the splendor of Vladimir's Assumption Cathedral. However, perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most remembered, of these renovations was conducted under the supervision of Prince Vasily I. Prince Vasily sent the most famous iconographers of ancient Rus—Andrei Rublyov and Daniil Chorny to Vladimir's Assumption Cathedral.

Beginning in 1408, Rublyov and Chorny perfected their style of painting during the course of creating the frescoes inside the Assumption Cathedral. Many of these frescoes remain, though many have been lost over the years. The most remarkable example is the massive "Last Judgment," located under the west choir gallery in the central nave and inner south aisle. Notice the themes of optimism, sympathy, and lightness, true innovations compared to the gloom of traditional Russian-Byzantine art. No doubt Rublyov's and Chorny's style was influenced by the general mood of hope sweeping Rus following Donskoi's victory over the Tatars at Kulikovo Pole. The original iconostasis, also painted by Rublyov, was replaced with a Moscow-baroque style "icon screen" in 1773-74, and Rublyov's icons were sold to a small nearby village called Vasilievskoye. Later, in 1922, the originals were sent to Moscow for restoration, and can now be found in the Tretyakov Gallery in the capital.

Since the renovations, two significant additions to Assumption Cathedral have been made: the massive 1810 belfry and the 1862 Chapel of St. George (*Georgyevskaya tserkov*). The chapel, which joins the cathedral and belfry, has been the subject of some rather significant controversy over the years. Primarily, the chapel has come under fire because of the material used to con-

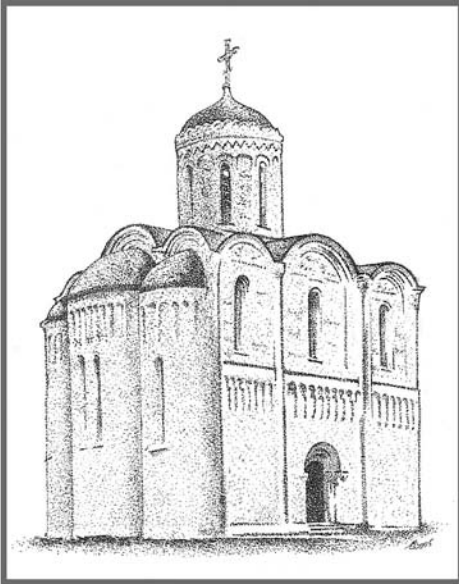
struct it. Rather than using limestone, as was the case in the construction of the original cathedral, the belfry and chapel were built of red brick covered in white mortar, resulting in a noticeably different color in comparison with the limestone. Nonetheless, the relatively new structures are quite magnificent.

Much like the Princess's Convent, a number of ancient Rus's royal family have been buried within the walls of the Assumption Cathedral. The space created between the original four walls and those added in 1185 was used as a burial vault for men of the royal family. The list of those buried within should be familiar—Andrei Bogolyubsky and Vsevolod III “Big Nest,” among others. Furthermore, local legend has it that a finger of St. Alexander Nevsky is located between two stones in the cathedral. Thus, one may witness a number of individuals kneeling and praying in front of a rather obscure part of the cathedral; they believe this is where St. Nevsky's finger is located.

Vladimir's Assumption Cathedral has indeed witnessed, and been a part of, many of the city's most historically significant events. Further, this cathedral, designed to reflect power, legitimacy, and authority, has for centuries been recognized as a symbol of Russia's glorious past. In fact, upon Moscow's rise to power and subsequent domination of post-Mongol-Tatar Rus, Italian architect Aristotle Fioravanti was instructed to use Vladimir's Assumption Cathedral as a model for Moscow's own Assumption Cathedral, which is located within the city's Kremlin. A true testament to the historical importance of Vladimir, it is no wonder this grand cathedral has become synonymous with the city itself.

Before continuing on towards St. Demetrius Cathedral, take an opportunity to observe the yellow three-story structure facing the park, built in Russian neoclassical style. Built between 1785-90, this building once hosted some of the Gubernia Administrative Offices (*Prisutstvenniye mesta*), including the district court. The term “gubernia” was the old title for region or *oblast* in Russia before the 1917 Revolution. These offices were also the site of Vladimir's first printing press, which was brought to the city by Muscovite publisher Mikhail Ponomarev in 1797. The populist Alexander Herzen did some editorial work here in the late 1830s.

Herzen was a revolutionary writer during the tsarist era and was exiled to Vladimir in 1838. Among his many works, the most significant for its association with Vladimir was his book entitled *My Past and Thoughts*. The third chapter of this book is devoted to the city and bears the title, “Vladimir on the Klyazma.”



St. Demetrius Cathedral

Next we turn our attention to Vladimir's famous St. Demetrius Cathedral. Often revered as one of the best examples of white stone carving in Russia, the cathedral was constructed over the course of three years (1194-7), upon the request of Grand Prince Vsevolod III "Big Nest." Reflecting the prosperity and might of the Vladimir principality, St. Demetrius's shining "helmet" dome has been a city landmark for centuries. From a distance travelers would recognize Assumption Cathedral's and St. Demetrius's golden domes like "lit candles held up to the sky." Although once the central portion of Prince Vsevolod's palace complex, today the cathedral stands alone as the former surrounding structures have been destroyed over the years.



Perhaps the most spectacular feature of St. Demetrius Cathedral is its intricately carved exterior. One could literally spend hours inspecting each elaborate grouping of images. Somewhat surprisingly, the scenes covering each facade are a mixture of Christian and pagan images, attesting to the mingling of folk and organized religions in medieval Rus. As one observer has stated, the carvings display "a unique blend incorporating heathen Slavonic interpolations with their roots going back to folk carvings in wood, and elements of Byzantine, Roman and even proto-Renaissance art." Of particular interest are depictions of Alexander "the Great" (right-hand window on the south front), Hercules (west facade), David the Harpist (central arch of all three facades), Saints Boris and Gleb (right side of northern facade), and Vsevolod himself (top left of the northern wall).

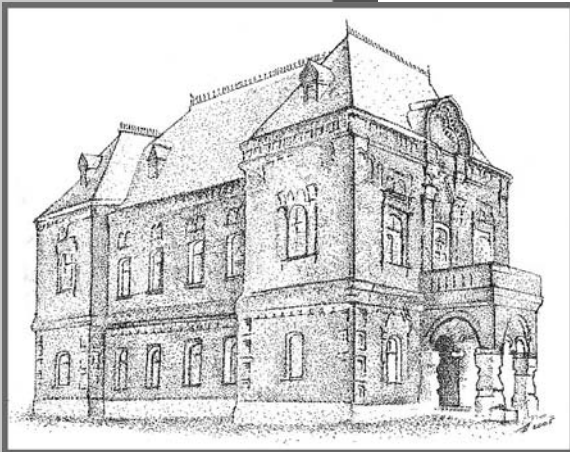


Another carving of particular interest is to be found on the second pillar east of the doors on the northern wall. On the eastern side of this pillar, approximately one foot above the claw "base" one may observe a small cross carved into the stone. Legend has it that this cross is the mark of St. Demetrius's main architect. This mark is also intriguing because it allows the modern day viewer a chance to comprehend exactly how deep the cathedral has sunk into the ground (due to its massive weight) over the years, as the architect presumably would have made this mark at eye level.

An additional unique feature of St. Demetrius Cathedral lies in the ambiguity of its name. Overwhelmingly, the cathedral's name has been attributed to Prince Vsevolod's personal patron saint—St. Demetrius of Salonica. Another theory, however, holds that the cathedral is named after Vsevolod's first son

Dmitri, the grand prince's primary heir who died at a young age. Regardless of which opinion is correct, the controversy adds to the many intriguing features of this grand monument.

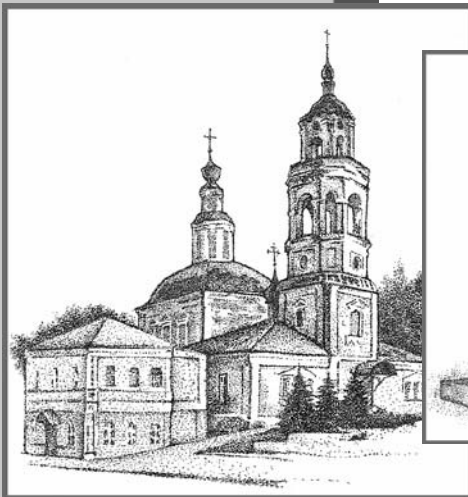
After being "under renovation" for 30 years, in June 2005 the interior of the cathedral was reopened to the public.



More of Old Vladimir

Concluding our survey of these two majestic cathedrals, often cited as among the best examples of twelfth-century white stone construction in the world, our adventure through historic Vladimir continues along Big Moscow Street. If a respite from walking is in order, take an hour or so to view the exhibits in the Vladimir Regional History Museum (*Muzey istoriy Vladimirskogo kraya*), located inside the two-story red brick building just a few paces east of St. Demetrius Cathedral.

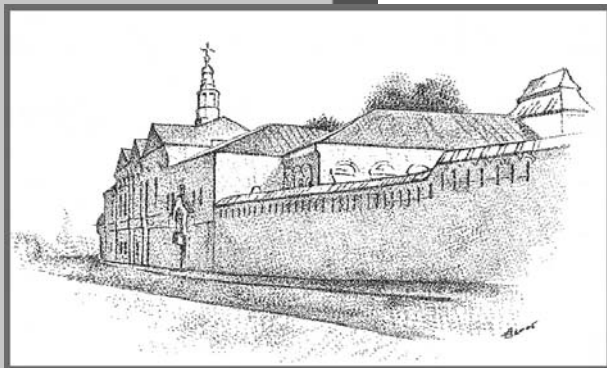
Founded in 1900 by local history professors and research specialists. The current staff is just as dedicated as the founders to the task of presenting the region's history to the public. As a result, despite very limited resources, the museum contains a number of fascinating well presented displays, including artifacts from Sungir, an excellent model of twelfth-century Vladimir, ancient tools, nineteenth-century aristocratic goods, and traditional peasant wares.



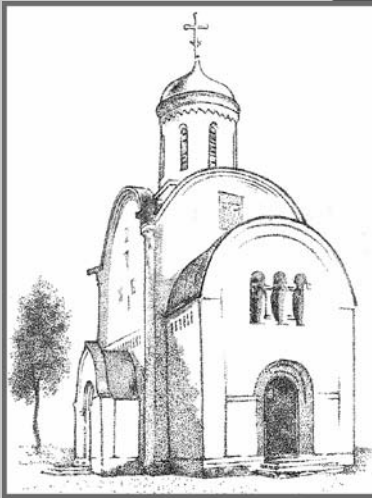
Continuing east along Big Moscow Street, the next historical site is the Nativity or Alexander Monastery (*Rozhdestvensky/Alexandrovsky Monastyr*). Often referred to as the Kremlin (fortress), the monastery, as explained previously, was not old Vladimir's main fortress, but only a portion of it. However, the monastery is the only complex surrounded by fortified walls still standing in the area of the ancient Kremlin.

ing in the area of the ancient Kremlin.

Founded in 1191, the Nativity Monastery has been subjected to a number of transformations over the years, in both appearance and function. From the late thirteenth century until 1328 the monastery was the seat of the Russian Church. It has been said that the chronicle code of 1305 was kept here, later to be known as the famous Lavrenty Chronicle. Through a number of substantial gifts from the likes of tsars Ivan IV "the Terrible" and Boris Godunov, Prince Ivan Shuisky, and Tsarina Yevdokiya Lopukhina, the monastery grew extremely wealthy and powerful. It was once a huge complex of elaborate buildings, including the late-12th century Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Lady (*Rozhdestva Bogoroditsy*). However, all of the contemporary structures date from the 18th century.

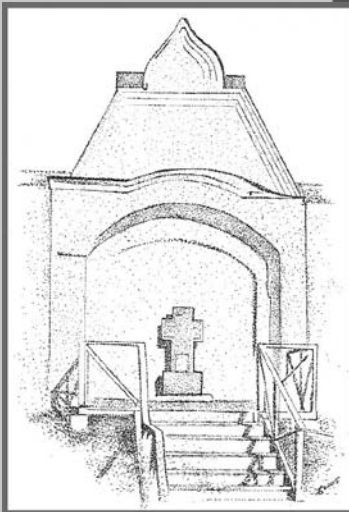


Most of the structures were rebuilt because of deterioration, but the Cathedral was destroyed by fire sometime prior to the eighteenth century. The



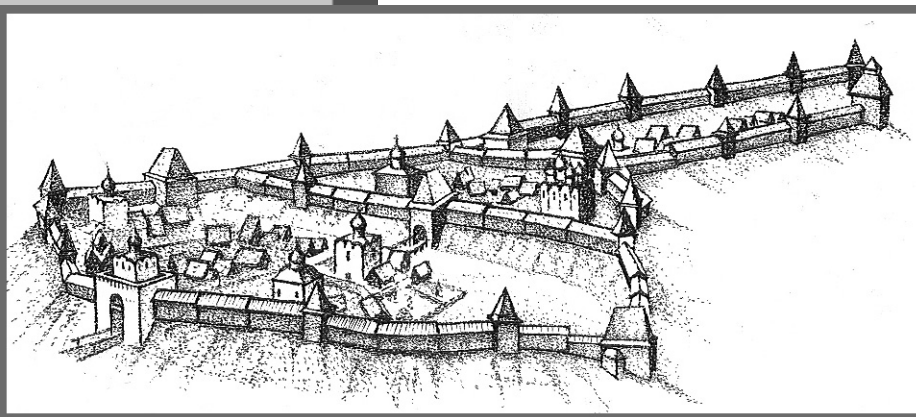
exact date and circumstances are unknown because there are no surviving records of the event.

Perhaps the most significant event in the history of the Nativity Monastery was the burial of Prince Alexander Nevsky on November 23, 1263. The cathedral in which the Russian saint was buried is no longer standing because it was destroyed by order of the Communist government in 1930. Also, the remains of Nevsky are no longer in Vladimir. In 1724 Tsar Peter "the Great" had Nevsky's remains exhumed and moved to St. Petersburg as a symbol in the new capitol of Russia's past victories and glory. However, the move was only symbolic, as a fire had previously destroyed the cathedral (where Nevsky was buried), along with the remains of Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky. Nonetheless, the Nativity Monastery grounds remain sacred due to the fact that Nevsky's ashes remain there. Also, the prince's original stone coffin is located within the monastery following its return in 1993 after decades at the Vladimir Regional History Museum.



Following the successful rise to power of the Bolshevik regime after the 1917 Revolution, the Nativity Monastery experienced what was undoubtedly its most profound change. Chosen as a perfect spot for their operations, the monastery was closed and the notorious NKVD (which became the KGB or Soviet secret police) used this location as their regional headquarters. Along with destroying an estimated twenty-seven churches and cathedrals in Vladimir, the KGB proceeded to use the monastery grounds for a number of "sacrilegious" purposes. First, locals say, the KGB put up a volleyball court over the portion of monastery grounds where Prince Nevsky was buried (presumably the most religiously significant site). Second, the KGB used the monastery grounds to systematically kill and bury an unknown number of citizens during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Today there is a plaque mounted on the northern wall of the monastery in memory of all those who lost their lives within the complex walls.

A good deal of restoration work has been done in this monastery, and it is normally open to the public.



Exiting the Nativity Monastery, and continuing east on Big Moscow Street, one will notice a drastic change in the style of architecture. At this point the journey through the original Vladimir Kremlin ends, as we enter the third, and last, section of "Old Vladimir." Unlike the other two sections of the original city, the third district contains no significant monuments to ancient heroes,

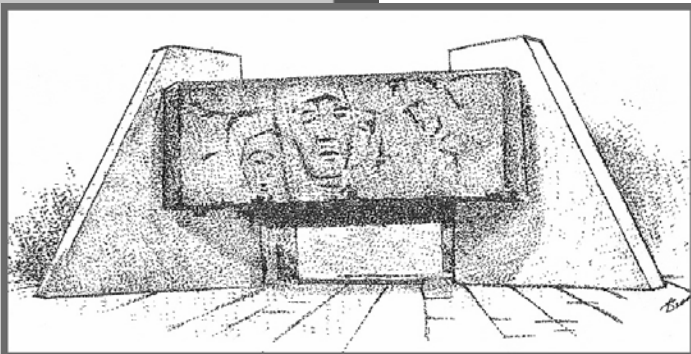
or historic cathedrals. Rather, this part of the old city represents the normality of historic Vladimir, as this was originally the section where the majority of

average townsfolk and peasants resided. This portion of the city provides one last glimpse of Vladimir's past. On the other side of this district is the beginning of Vladimir's "present"—the industrial sector. The border of this last part of old Vladimir is marked by an immense monument in honor of Mikhail Frunze, a hero of the Bolshevik "October Revolution" and Civil War. It is interesting to note that this point was once the site of the Silver Gates (the counterpart of the Golden Gates), marking the easternmost point of Vladimir on the banks of the river Lybed. Now the river is carried underground in a pipe.

At this point Big Moscow Street becomes *Bolshaya Nizhyegorodskaya ulitsa* (Big Nizhyegorodsky Street—or the main road to Nizhnii Novgorod; formerly known as Frunze Street). We are on the final leg of our excursion through this historic city.

Continuing east on *Bolshaya Nizhyegorodskaya*, the factories and smokestacks of Vladimir's industrial district come clearly into view. Nestled behind a tree-lined sidewalk and vending stands (*kioski*), one may notice a secluded complex beyond a sprawling, hilly lawn. This complex is Vladimir Central Prison. Not the most common tourist attraction, the prison, nonetheless, is significant. It was built in 1783 upon the order of Catherine II. At first, the institution was used to confine political prisoners. Most of the inmates died during their stay at the prison because of the harsh conditions. As a result, the prison has its own cemetery. Before the October 1917 Revolution, the prison, commonly known as "Vladimir Central," held famous revolutionaries such as the above mentioned Mikhail Frunze.

The prison also held its share of important inmates during the Soviet period, including Alexander Solzhenitsyn who served some of his term in Vladimir, as described in his internationally renowned work *The Gulag Archipelago*. Also, and perhaps most relevant to Americans, Francis Gary Powers, the American U-2 spy plane pilot shot down by the Soviets in 1960, was held in "Vladimir Central" from December 1960 until May 1962 when he was exchanged for the Soviet spy Rudolf Abel. The prison is very different from what Americans would expect. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the lightly-secured fences surrounding the prison grounds, made possible because harsh discipline rules within the walls of Russian prisons. (Russian law enforcement personnel who have visited American prisons invariably conclude that they are "resorts," not "proper places of confinement for hardened criminals.")



Continuing east on *Bolshaya Nizhyegorodskaya*, our exploration of Vladimir reaches its final destination—the military cemetery. Turning north onto *Pochayevskaya ulitsa*, you will notice the enormous and very impressive gates of this cemetery. Through the gates lies the familiar eternal flame monument, a standard memorial to those who died in defense of the Motherland during World War II. In contrast to

the World War II monument encountered when entering Vladimir on the road from Moscow, this cemetery presents a truly remarkable scene. Particularly breathtaking are the dramatic depictions of anguished faces, grieving for the loss of their beloved sons, husbands, and fathers. One out of every four inhabitants of Vladimir was sent to the front during the "Great Patriotic War"—and many of them obviously made the ultimate sacrifice.

Walking deeper into the cemetery, you will discover that it is much older than it initially appears. If you venture far enough you will come upon a yellow nineteenth-century church surrounded by tombstones and fenced-in monuments. The most impressive of the graves surrounding the church are those of Nikolai and Alexander Stoletov, located near the southwest corner of the church. The Stoletovs are perhaps the most famous Vladimiriters in recent history. General Nikolai Stoletov is renowned for his heroic defense of Shipka Pass in Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. His brother Alexander is considered by many to have been Russia's most accomplished pre-revolutionary physicist.

As noted earlier, this area of Vladimir, the eastern side, is the home of the city's major industrial complexes. There are more than fifty industrial enterprises producing a variety of goods. Vladimir is known for manufacturing tractors, chemical products, radio equipment, metalworking machines, and automobile parts and accessories. Unfortunately, to a greater or lesser extent, all of these large plants fell on hard times after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the ending of government subsidies. For example, the Tractor Works went from 17,000 employees to just a few hundred with regular pay checks during the 1990's. New managers are trying to rebuild Vladimir's traditional industries—while at the same time entrepreneurs are building new businesses. (The Tractor Works is back up to more than 4,000 employees.)

More Than a Thousand Years?

Notwithstanding the current debate over the city's formal founding date, Vladimir's antiquity and significance are unquestioned. Throughout the city's at least eight-hundred plus years of existence, it has witnessed an array of momentous events: Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky's ascent to power, the transfer from Kiev of the seat of the Russian Orthodox Church, the fall of the city to the Mongols, the heroic deeds of Prince Alexander Nevsky, the horrors of the Stalinist period, and much more. Taking its place among the most historically significant cities in the formation of Russian culture and the state, many identify Vladimir as the second cradle of Russian civilization—following Kiev. Considered a provincial town by contemporary Russians, much of Vladimir's charm lies in the preservation of its ancient relics and monuments. Ultimately overshadowed by its successors, Moscow and St. Petersburg, Vladimir has nonetheless maintained its importance as one of the most influential cities of medieval Russia. A glorious community of the past, Vladimir is striving to keep in step with the present and future.

BOGOLYUBOVO

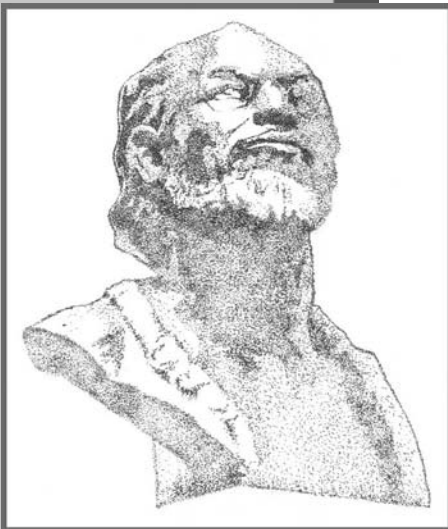
(pop. 4,000)



Eleven kilometers (or 6.6 miles) to the east of downtown Vladimir, past a grouping of country homes (*dachas*) on *Dobroselskaya ulitsa*, you will find the quaint, historic town of Bogolyubovo. Today, the community, which overlooks the Klyazma River, is little more than a village on the outskirts of Vladimir. However, it has a quite significant past. The story of Bogolyubovo, built where the Nerl River flows into the Klyazma, begins with the arrival of Prince Andrei Yuryovich (Bogolyubsky) in the 1150s.

Traveling north from Kiev to Rostov, carrying the blessed icon of the Virgin Mary, Prince Andrei happened upon the site. Here, legend has it, Prince Andrei's horse stopped and refused to continue.

After many attempts to move his horse, the prince and his retinue decided to set up camp. Later that night, the Virgin Mary appeared before Andrei and requested that the prince keep the icon in nearby Vladimir, and build a church on the holy spot where his horse had stopped. From this point on Prince Andrei came to be called Andrei Bogolyubsky, or “beloved of God.”



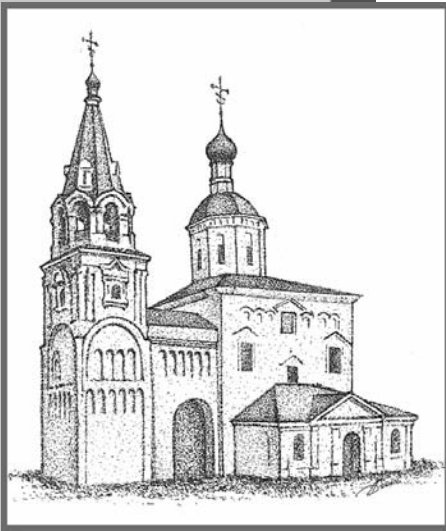
At this point in history, the Russian nobility was plagued with internal strife. Prince battled prince; brother battled brother; uncle battled nephew for control of the most influential principality in the land of Rus—Kiev. Andrei Bogolyubsky's father, Prince Yuri Dolgoruky, was at this time the Grand Prince of Kiev, thus making Andrei (the oldest son) the rightful heir to the Kievan throne. After the death of his father there was a struggle for power. Prince Andrei stormed south from his residence in Bogolyubovo and pillaged Kiev. Subsequently, Andrei moved the Russian Grand Principality from Kiev to northern Vladimir, near his country palace in Bogolyubovo. By moving the throne from the southern steppe of Ukraine to the northern forests of Vladimir, Prince Andrei did what many common folk had done before him—he took shelter in the wooded, hilly terrain.

The town of Bogolyubovo boasts two of the region's most famous landmarks: Prince Bogolyubsky's Palace, including another Assumption Cathedral (*Uspensky sobor*) and the Church of the Virgin's Nativity (*Rozhdestvenskaya tserkov*); and the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl (*Tserkov Pokrova na Nerli*). The Prince's Palace is known for its historic significance, and the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl for its architectural significance—as well as its “special relationship” with the Nerl river.

Upon entering Bogolyubovo it is impossible to miss the site of the prince's former residence, as the palace's bell tower (1841) looms beside the Vladimir-Nizhny Novgorod road. Bogolyubsky's palace was built between 1158

and 1165. Surrounded by earthen ramparts, white stone walls, and a deep moat, the prince's palace stood as a formidable presence in this naturally fortified area. Today the palace walls consist of red brick and painted mortar, and much of the original palace was destroyed over the centuries by fire, invaders, and the elements. The palace buildings (some old and some new) are now cared for by monks living in this working monastery.

The dominant structure within the palace walls is the Assumption Cathedral. This beautiful cathedral displays the familiar onion domes so often associated with the Russian Byzantine style. Constructed in 1866, this cathedral was built to facilitate the duties of the newly established monastery. Today the church continues to play its designated role and the monastery has remained in continuous operation since its founding, unlike many monasteries which were closed during the Communist period.



Directly behind the Assumption Cathedral lies a quaint, arched structure—the prince's residence adjoined by the Church of the Virgin's Nativity. Like most other structures within the former palace, much of Bogolyubsky's "castle" has been destroyed. However, the northern portion of the original residence remains, including a winding staircase, sealed doorways, and a passage to the Church of the Virgin's Nativity. Within these remains, legend has it, is the staircase where Bogolyubsky met his demise in 1174. Despite variations in the story describing the death of the prince, the major themes are the same.

One of the boyar (noble) families, the Kuchkovicks, began to view Prince Andrei as less than holy, due perhaps to his greed, conceit, and his ill-treatment of them. With the aid of Prince Andrei's wife Ulita (a nomadic princess from the Tatar-Kipchak tribe), the Kuchkovicks conspired to assassinate the prince. Having taken his keys and sword while he slept, Ulita left Andrei to the mercy of his would-be assassins. After a few drinks in the palace's wine cellar, the conspirators rushed into the prince's chambers. With his sword gone Andrei was defenseless, and was wrestled to the floor. After accidentally killing one of their own, the Kuchkovicks succeeded in stabbing Prince Andrei. Thinking he was dead, they left his chambers. But Andrei was a strong man, and he survived his initial wounds. He managed to descend the stairs, and upon returning, the conspirators found that the prince's body was gone. By candlelight, the murderers followed the drops of blood to where they found the prince, and this time they stabbed him repeatedly.

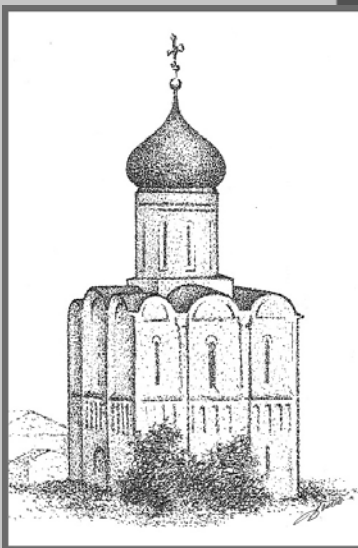
Following the assassination, the boyars, as the Russian nobility was called, pillaged the prince's belongings and prepared to defend themselves from the Vladimir retinue who would undoubtedly get word of the attack. However, the citizens in nearby Vladimir, wanting no part of the confusion, decided to remain in their city. The prince's body was thrown to the dogs until a loyal subject convinced the conspirators to cover it with a rug. Ultimately, Prince Andrei's body was moved to a stone tomb inside the Church of the Nativity, and later to Vladimir.

After Andrei's body was exhumed and moved to Vladimir, strange signs appeared throughout Bogolyubovo. The citizens blamed Prince Andrei's treacherous wife, Ulita, for his death and the subsequent "evil signs." Convinced she was to blame for these portents of bad fortune, the citizens drowned her in a nearby lake. Today this lake is called *Poganoye ozero*, or "Bad Lake." To add to the conspirators' woes, Andrei's brother, Prince Mikhail, came to Bogolyubovo and hunted down the Kuchkovicks. After capturing all the men of this boyar family, Mikhail chained each to a wooden frame and plunged them into a nearby lake. Today, this lake is called *Plavucheye ozero*, or "Swimming Lake."

The structure adjoining the prince's chamber is the Cathedral of the Nativity. Although originally built by Bogolyubsky in the twelfth century, the current church dates back to the eighteenth century. Like almost every other ancient settlement in Russia, Bogolyubovo fell victim to sporadic fires; presumably, the original church was also destroyed in this manner.

The cathedral is still used for special occasions. If you are lucky you may happen upon a traditional Orthodox wedding ceremony or baptism, both of which are moving rituals.

The interior walls are covered with stunning eighteenth-century frescoes which exemplify traditional Russian religious art. Finally, near the extreme west wall you will notice a hollow stone casket. Symbolically, this ancient tomb represents the burial place of St. Andrei Bogolyubsky. However, it was probably the casket of a worker who died during the construction of the cathedral, as the rounded composition is evidence of Asian influence, hardly something that would have been seen as befitting the Grand Prince of Rus.



One of the most, if not *the* most, famous examples of ancient Russian white stone architecture lies less than two kilometers to the southwest of the palace walls. Through the grassy fields, filled in the spring with flowers and families picking grasses and herbs, or covered with snow in the winter, you will catch a glimpse of the simple beauty of the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl. A favorite weekend spot for Vladimiriters, you will be charmed by the site of children grabbing ropes and swinging over—and dropping into—the silent Nerl (on warm days of course), and the boaters who row quietly in the shadows of this beautiful church. Lying atop a man-made hill, the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl appears as a floating apparition in the springtime, as flood waters from the Nerl surround the hill—but never reach the church itself. The church was built during Bogolyubsky's rule in 1165 and is said to honor his eldest son who died during a victorious battle with the Volga Bulgars.

The narrow inward-slanted vertical windows, the vertical facades, and the height of the walls give the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl a look of towering simplicity and lightness. The architectural stress on vertical lines continually draws the eye up to the dome, which unfortunately is not the

church's original. The original helmet dome was replaced by a cushion dome in 1803. The elaborate carvings on the exterior are something of a mystery. King David, of the Old Testament, is the primary focus of each wall, and he is found hovering at the top of each central facade amid birds and beasts. On each side of the facade are reliefs of griffins—mythical half-eagle, half-lion creatures. Underneath lies a row of female heads with slightly Oriental eyes. The explanation for these reliefs has been varied, but without going into a lengthy discussion, it is fair to say they represent a mixture of Orthodoxy influenced by Byzantine Christianity and pagan beliefs which were still considered legitimate when the church was built.

Today, Bogolyubovo is not home to any industry of note. However, the small village is known for its joint stock company cannery, *Bogolyubovsky*, which processes a variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as different types of canned meat.

Not much is left of the old Bogolyubovo, as no prince has resided within Andrei Bogolyubsky's palace for over nine centuries. However, the historic and architectural value of the town is undeniable. Once the royal seat of an enormous principality, today Bogolyubovo is appreciated by both tourists and local residents for its simple, tranquil beauty.

SUZDAL

(pop. 12,000)

Approximately 30 kilometers north of Vladimir (about 18 miles) on Suzdal Prospect (*Suzdalsky prospect*) lies the “living museum” of Suzdal. This ancient town is recognized internationally and is perhaps the most charming place in Russia. The town was promoted as a tourist destination throughout the Soviet period and its historic appearance remained untouched for this reason. Unlike most Russian towns, you will find no industry, rail lines, or apartment complexes in Suzdal. Instead of these modern characteristics you will find cobblestone streets, ancient churches, cathedrals, monasteries, traditional wooden architecture, and probably quite a few chickens and goats. Lying on the peaceful Kamenka River, Suzdal offers an amazing array of man-made and natural beauties. Try not to rush your stay here, as you will need at least the better part of a day to see the major sights.

There is a fairly modern tourist complex (GTK) located just north of the town, including a bank, post office, hotel, restaurants, and gift shops. But there are no modern structures within the town itself.

Suzdal is first mentioned in the Primary Chronicles in connection with a peasant uprising against a feudal landowner in 1024. It is said that in order to put down the uprising Grand Prince Yaroslav “The Wise,” of Kiev, slaughtered a large number of people with great brutality.

Initially the name Suzdal was given to numerous small settlements located in this area; however, with the increase of external danger and popular revolt, the feudal landowners found it necessary to build a stockade in the center of the region. These fortifications served as the foundation for the settlement's "kremlin," and in 1096 Suzdal was first mentioned in the chronicles as a "town." The connection of the name Suzdal with various settlements is so ancient that the very origin of the word has been lost.

Initially the town was associated with the Rostov principality, but by the mid-twelfth century it had come into its own as an independent principality, and served as the country residence of Prince Yury Dolgoruky (son of Vladimir Monomakh, and father of Andrei Bogolyubsky). Upon Bogolyubsky's ascent to Grand Prince, Suzdal became associated with Vladimir, and together they were known as the Vladimir-Suzdal Principality. In the thirteenth century the town once again became the host of an independent principality. In the fourteenth century it became the Suzdal-Nizhny Novgorod Principality, and in the latter part of the fourteenth century (ca. 1390) it was annexed by the Grand Principality of Moscow.

As can be seen from the surrounding villages, agriculture has been, and remains, the foundation of Suzdal's economy. However, the town also has an historic tradition of mercantilism, and a variety of artifacts illustrating this have been found in the area, including Arab coins, Byzantine cloth, and jewelry from Kiev. With the rise of Moscow's power, Suzdal slowly evolved from a political and economic center into a religious one. This was made possible by contributions from grand princes, other members of the nobility, and later the tsars for the construction of monasteries, convents, and cathedrals.

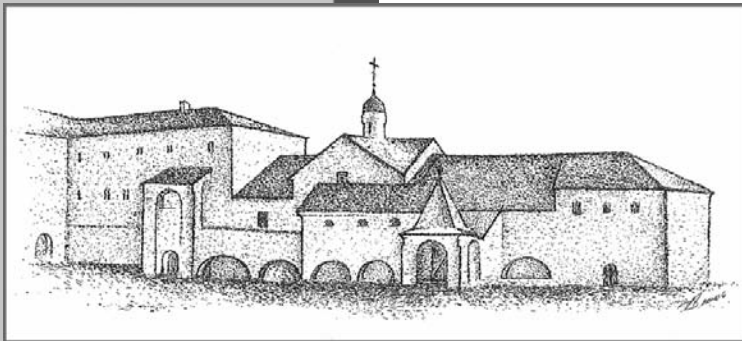
Present day Suzdal relies mainly on the influx of tourist dollars, which it earns in part because the city was able to escape Soviet industrialization and the systematic destruction of religious monuments. While preservation of this town has been attributed to state protection, this is probably due at least as much to the fact that the Moscow-Nizhny Novgorod railway was routed to the south, thus making industrialization not very practical. The beauty of Suzdal lies in its natural surroundings and the historical structures which lie around every corner. Due to the large number of architectural monuments located in the town, we will have to limit our discussion to a few of the main sites.

We begin our journey through Suzdal at what is perhaps its single most significant site—the Kremlin, or fort. Built in the twelfth century on a bend of the river Kamenka, the Kremlin was once surrounded by moats (except for a small isthmus) and earthen ramparts, making it a fortified island. The log walls and towers which once ran along the ramparts have long since been destroyed (probably by fire), and the moats have been drained. However, the original earthen ramparts are still evident, particularly along the southern and eastern walls. Locating the Kremlin is easy, just look for the blue, star-spangled onion domes belonging to the Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral (*Rozhdestvensky Sobor*).



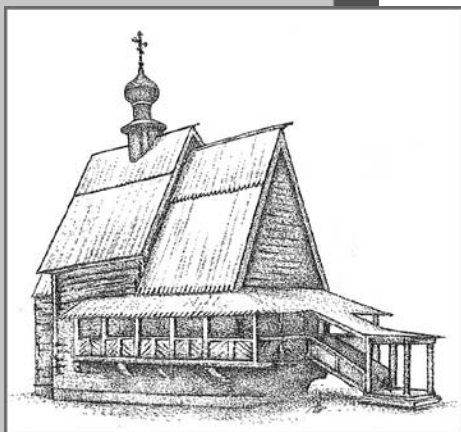
Lying within the Kremlin walls, the Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral with its unusually decorated domes, is one of the most photographed monuments in Russia—when the domes aren't badly in need of repainting. Built between 1222 and 1225, the cathedral is Suzdal's oldest standing church. This structure replaced the first stone structure in Suzdal—a twelfth century cathedral built by Vladimir Monomakh (Monomachus). Today, however, only the lower part of the walls remains from the thirteenth century, as the original white stone walls were replaced with brick in the sixteenth century. Obviously, the Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral is best known for its domes, but there are other, more subtle features to be admired. Notice the oriental-style female masks along the facade. These are very similar to those we have already seen in Bogolyubovo. Further, you will surely be drawn to the western and southern entrances. These are the so-called “golden gates,” a rare example of medieval Russian applied art. The doors are adorned with detailed scenes etched into copper and gilded. The Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral is a true testament to the skills of ancient Russian craftsmanship.

Running almost directly up to the southwest wall of the Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral is the L-shaped Archbishop's Chambers (*Arkhiyereyskiye palaty*). Initially built in the mid-fifteenth century, this complex underwent additions for three centuries. Today, the Archbishop's Chambers house some of the best exhibits of Russian history and art, which are included in the Suzdal History Exhibition (*Istoricheskaya Expositsiya*) and the Old Russian Painting Display (*Drevnerusskaya zhivopis*). In the former there may be found artifacts representing the political, social, religious, and military history of Suzdal. Included in this collection is a wooden scale model of the town in the thirteenth century, Russian and Tatar weaponry, embroidered fabrics, and traditional ceramic furnaces. In the Old Russian Painting Display there are many beautiful icons from the Vladimir-Suzdal school of icon painting which developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

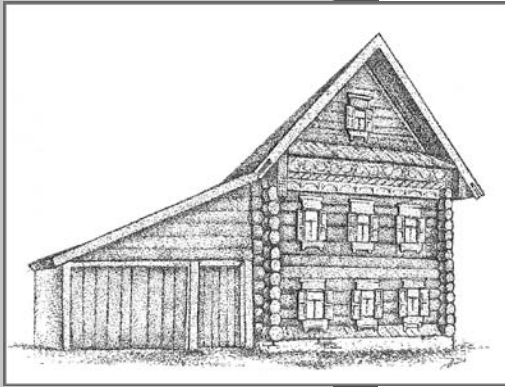


West of the Kremlin walls and ramparts lies the Kamenka River and a little wooden footbridge stretching across to the opposite bank. On a hot summer afternoon the pleasures of Suzdal can best be found along this route, as the splashing of children in the river and the beauty of the nearby Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral promote a feeling of serenity. Further along this route you will begin to make out the shape of finely scalloped onion domes to your left, on Dimitry Hill (*Dmitrievskaya Gora*). Here stands the Museum of Wooden Architecture and Peasant Life (*Muzei derevyannova zotchestva*). This open-air museum allows one to see examples of traditional wooden churches and dwellings. Transplanted from villages throughout the region (Golodovo,

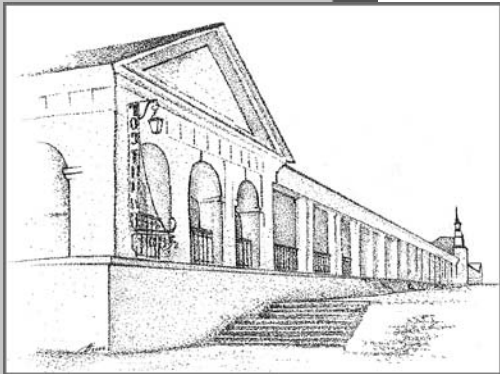
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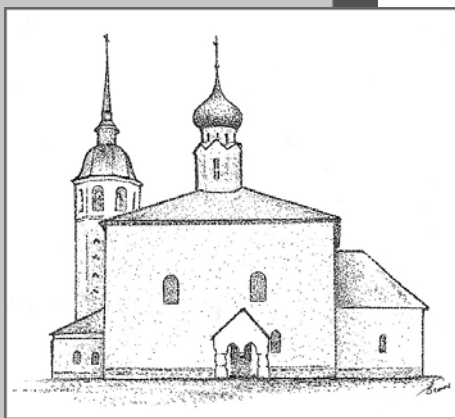


Kozlyatyevo, Potakino, Ilkino, and other communities), these structures have been set up to model traditional peasant life. Perhaps the most astonishing feature of these buildings (particularly the churches) is the fact that they were constructed without the use of metal nails. Of particular interest are the 1756 Transfiguration Church (*Preobrazhenskaya tserkov*) and the 1776 Resurrection Church (*Voskresenskaya tserkov*).

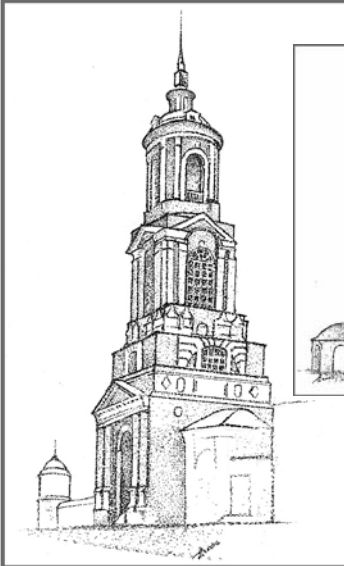


Crossing the Kamenka to the east bank, we continue our exploration. Past the Kremlin (heading north) the Trading Arcades (*Torgovyie ryady*) will quickly come into view. Built in the early-nineteenth century, the “shopping center” continues to provide services. It is interesting to note that many of the more expensive tourist stores along the western side used to sell goods only to foreign tourists for “hard currency,” i.e., dollars, German marks, etc. Now the stores are open to everyone.

While you look around the shops keep your eyes open for street vendors selling various beverages. If you are lucky you may be able to purchase a bottle or two of *medovukha*. This traditional Russian drink consists of fermented honey and water. It has a sharp, bittersweet taste, and is usually served cold. (Traditionally Russians have avoided cold beverages, believing that drinking them will cause a sore throat. More recently, shops and some kiosks have started selling cold soft drinks, especially in the summer.) Currently, *medovukha* is only produced in Suzdal. Widely consumed in medieval Russia, the drink lost much of its popularity with the introduction of its more potent relative—vodka.



Past the Trading Arcades, we continue our exploration along Lenin Street (*ulitsa Lenina*), Suzdal’s main thoroughfare.



Along the way are an almost overwhelming number of churches. Notice the tent-roofed bell towers of the sixteenth-century Monastery of the Deposition (*Rizopolozhensky monastery*), the seventeenth-century Church of St. Lazarus (*Lazarevskaya tserkov*), and the eighteenth-century Church of the Resurrection (*Voskresenskaya tserkov*). This style of bell tower is typical of Suzdal architecture.



A short detour off of *ulitsa Lenina*, heading west on Engels Street (*ulitsa Engelsa*) will take you to the tiny, serene thirteenth-century Alexandrovsky Convent (*Alexandrovsky Monastery*). Consisting of a tent-roofed bell tower, a small church, and a lone shack, the convent is said to have been established by St. Alexander Nevsky in 1240. Legend says that the convent was founded to shelter noble women whose husbands had died during battles with the Mongol-Tatars.

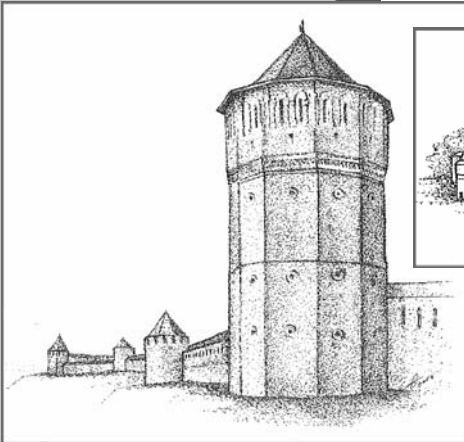
North of Alexandrovsky Convent, on *ulitsa Lenina*, you will find the impressive Monastery of Our Savior and St. Euthimius (*Spaso-Yevfimyevsky Monastery*). Originally built in the fourteenth century to defend Suzdal's northern entry, the wooden complex grew in size and composition thanks to donations from generous members of the nobility, including Vasily III, Ivan IV "the Terrible," and the Pozharsky princes. The stone structure which stands today is imposing. Surrounded by twelve towers and 6 meter (approximately 10 feet) thick walls, the Monastery of Our Savior and St. Euthimius was one of the most formidable monastery-fortresses in all of Russia.

Entering the monastery we pass through the largest of the twelve towers—the Entrance Tower (*Proyezdnyaya bashnya*) which stands 22 meters high (approximately 70 feet). The grounds of the monastery complement the powerful impression presented by the exterior. The courtyard is confined by the high surrounding walls and the abundance of towering structures.

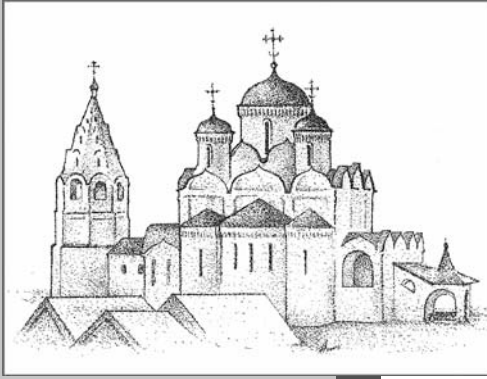


There are several notable buildings within the monastery walls. First is the Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Savior (*Spaso-Preobrazhensky sobor*). Built in the 1590s, this five-domed cathedral looms over the tomb of Prince Dimitry Pozharsky. Pozharsky is revered for leading the Russian army which drove Polish invaders from Moscow in 1612. The next building is the 1525 Assumption Cathedral (*Uspenskii sobor*), which houses a fascinating collection of Russian books. The books date from the fifteenth century and include the “Legal Code” of 1649 (containing the laws that officially established state serfdom), and Alexander Pushkin’s first published collection of poems (1826). Next,

is the monastery belfry, containing a number of different bells. Drawing crowds of tourists and even local residents, the bells are rung every hour on the hour. Finally, there is the monastery prison (*turma*) which was established by Catherine II “the Great” in 1764. The prison held religious and political dissidents imprisoned for life. One cell was earmarked for the writer Leo Tolstoy, the author of *War and Peace* and many other famous works, after he was excommunicated from the Orthodox Church. But he was never sent to the monastery. It is thought that progressive thinking and public opinion at the time prevented Tolstoy’s banishment to Suzdal.



Past the Monastery of Our Savior and St. Euthimius you can wander off the main road (*ulitsa Lenina*) and onto Third International Street (*ulitsa III Internatsionala*). Along this well-worn street you can take in the majesty of the monastery-fortress walls; also, this slight detour provides a breathtaking view of Suzdal, as you stand on a high bank of the Kamenka River. You will also be granted an amazing view of our next stop—the Intercession Convent (*Pokrovsky monastyr*). However, you should first follow Third International Street to the GTK tourist complex. GTK's modern construction is in definite contrast to the ancient structures we have visited thus far. You will find numerous footpaths which lead to the back of the complex, where there is a picturesque footbridge stretching across the Kamenka to the east bank. Stop and examine the Monastery of Our Savior and Euthimius from this vantage point. Then continue along the path to the Intercession Convent.



The Intercession Convent has received massive renovation in recent years. It is now both a working convent and a tourist facility where you can stay in log cabin-style buildings. Founded in 1364, the convent became a place of exile for Russian noblewomen whose families or husbands wanted them “out of the way.” Stone structures replaced the original wooden ones, as donations were made over the years, presumably from those who exiled their unwanted spouses and daughters here. Several structures within the courtyard are worth examining. The most obvious is the Cathedral of the Protecting Veil (*Pokrovsky sobor*), built in the early-sixteenth century. Recently renovated, the triple apse, frescoes, and whitewashed walls are impressive. However, these renovations are sometimes overshadowed by the new addition of “golden” shiny domes to the cathedral. Hidden behind the Cathedral of the Protecting Veil is the mid-sixteenth century Refectory Church of the Conception (*Zachatyevskaya tserkov*). Funded by Tsar Ivan IV “the Terrible,” the church is architecturally unique because of the red bricks forming a diamond pattern on the cornice. The Refectory Church of the Convent, grimly enough, once served as a women’s prison.

Among the noblewomen who were sent to this convent after coming into disfavor with their husbands was Yevdokiya Lopukhina, the first wife of Tsar Peter “the Great.” Perhaps the most interesting case, however, dates back to the founding of the convent, and the wife of Prince Vasily III—Solomoniya Saburova. Legend has it that Prince Vasily exiled Princess Solomoniya in about 1520 because of her inability to produce an heir. Subsequently, Prince Vasily married Yelena Glinskaya who bore him a male heir—who subsequently earned his place in Russian history as Ivan IV “the Terrible.”

In exile, so the story goes, Solomoniya gave birth to a son, presumably that of Prince Vasily III. Solomoniya's child, if indeed he was the son of Vasily, was a legitimate heir to the throne of Russia. However, fearing that her child would be killed by order of the new princess, Solomoniya had the child secretly adopted. Later, she proclaimed that the child had died and staged a mock burial. Legend or truth, the credibility of this story was given a great boost in 1934 when archeologists investigated the tombs of Solomoniya and her infant son. When the sixteenth-century tombs, located beneath the Intercession Cathedral, were opened they found something very peculiar: inside the infant's casket was a silk shirt embroidered with pearls and stuffed with grass—no bones were found.

The Apse

The apse is a portion of a cathedral or church that is often overlooked or left unexplained. It is frequently defined as a curved or many-sided end of a building. On the churches and cathedrals throughout the Vladimir Region the apse is commonly represented by a triple curve with narrow windows. In many structures the narrow windows are designed to disperse light on the inside. The back of the apse commonly houses the altar, where the actual religious ceremonies take place.

The location of the apse is not determined by chance, but like many aspects of Russian Orthodoxy it is symbolic. The apse is located on the eastern side of the cathedral or church because the sun rises in the East. Russian Orthodoxy equates the sun and light in general with God. Having the apse face east provides the best opportunity to bathe the altar in morning sunlight.

A small legend connects the two main religious cloisters in Suzdal, the Monastery of Our Savior and St. Euthimius and the Intercession Convent. This legend has it that running under the shallow riverbed of the Kamenka is a tunnel linking the monastery and the convent. Supposedly this tunnel was constructed by consent of both complexes. Although no one has ever seen this tunnel, many locals familiar with the history of Suzdal like to tell this story. Perhaps the exiled wives and daughters of the aristocracy preferred convent life in Suzdal to the more proper aristocratic life in Moscow or St. Petersburg?

Although Moscow and St. Petersburg are home to many of the most revered sites in Russia, they are at least rivaled by the natural beauty of Suzdal. The combination of natural and man-made treasures in this “living museum” are a testament to Russia and its people. This small town, which grew from a settlement in ancient Rus, is known the world over. Suzdal has won numerous awards for its achievements, including the Golden Apple Award from the International Federation of Journalists and Writers in 1983. Currently, the award is kept in the Archbishop’s palace within the Kremlin. It was given to Suzdal in recognition of its preservation and restoration efforts. Also, Suzdal has hosted filmmakers from every corner of the world. More than 25 movies have been shot in Suzdal since 1964, including the American television miniseries *Peter the Great*. A town that has no equal, Suzdal gives you more than a glimpse of eighteenth-century Russia—it gives you an actual feel for this period of history.

KIDEKSHA

(pop. 120)

Approximately 35 kilometers (21 miles) north of Vladimir, and 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) to the east of Suzdal, the quiet village of Kideksha lies on the banks of the River Nerl. Much like Suzdal, Kideksha was protected from the industrialization of the Soviet-era for tourist purposes. Thus, the village is also like a living museum—no trains, smokestacks, or high-rise apartment buildings. Even though Kideksha is much smaller and contains fewer historical attractions than Suzdal, the architecture, layout, and pace of this village are probably the best example of eighteenth-century life to be found in Russia.

Yury Dolgoruky chose to reside in Kideksha while awaiting his ascendancy to the throne. This particular area was selected by Dolgoruky because it was close to Suzdal, which at that time was only a settlement with feuding boyars. From

Kideksha he could monitor the shipments along the Nerl and Kamenka rivers. Once the prince left and after it was destroyed by the Mongols in 1238, the village gradually lost its significance. However, this decline did not deprive Kideksha of its place in Russian history.

Kideksha's most intriguing legend involves the first two patron saints of Rus: Saints Boris and Gleb. Boris and Gleb were the sons of Grand Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavovich (St. Vladimir, responsible for the official adoption of Christianity ca. 998 or 999) and Princess Anna (a Byzantine Christian by birth). Born to a Christian princess, Boris and Gleb were "born in purple," in other words, they were heirs to the Christian faith by birth, not conversion. When their father Vladimir died in 1015, a struggle for power began between his numerous heirs. Among them was an adopted son, Svyatopolk. During the struggle for the throne he invited Vladimir's legitimate sons, Boris and Gleb, to a false "conference" where he murdered them. Hence, Boris and Gleb became the first Christian martyrs of Rus, and shortly thereafter were the first to be canonized as saints. The murder of Boris and Gleb allegedly contributed to the Russian cultural tradition of *kenosis*, the emphasis on self-sacrifice and suffering.

Legend tells that Boris and Gleb stopped in Kideksha during their campaigns against Kiev. Upon this "exact" spot stands the Church of Saints Boris and Gleb (*Borisoglebskaya tserkov*). Built by Prince Yuri Dolgoruky in 1152, the church was dedicated as a shrine to the saints. The church has been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times (the first being after the Tartar-Mongol invasion). A few of the twelfth century frescoes, which remain in the church, show two figures on horseback, probably meant to be the church's namesakes.

After Yuri Dolgoruky's death, the family estate in Kideksha was passed down to his son Boris. Boris is buried along with his wife Maria and daughter Yefrosinya within the Church of Saints Boris and Gleb. In the 1670s, Timofey Savyolov, a military governor from Suzdal, found the royal caskets. Curious about their contents, Savyolov took a look through a crack in the lid of the prince's coffin. To his surprise, he found some very well-preserved articles. Savyolov's description reads: "On the top there is a robe sewn with gold...embroidered with a gold one-headed eagle its wings out spread, and from this eagle there runs two patterns sewn in silver and gold." This depiction was proven accurate during archaeological studies in Kideksha in 1947.

The Church of Saints Boris and Gleb, which is said to be the "oldest architectural monument" in the Vladimir lands, still towers over the River Nerl. Surrounding the ancient church are various structures built in the eighteenth century. The Church of St. Stephen (1780), a bell tower and a Holy Gate (mid-eighteenth century) create a harmonious composition inside the brick wall which encloses all the structures. Legend says that adjacent to the churches stood the tsar's palace. However, neither the palace buildings nor the earth ramparts, which would have inevitably encircled them, have survived. Today, one can only imagine what the palace might have looked like.

Despite Kideksha's fall from royal grace, its tranquil beauty is truly worth experiencing.

KOVROV

(pop. 170,000)

Located 65 kilometers (approximately 40 miles) northeast of Vladimir, Kovrov is the second largest city in the Vladimir Region. Like Vladimir, Kovrov lies on the banks of the river Klyazma. The city's past is a patchwork of history and folklore. Presently, Kovrov ranks second behind Vladimir as the most developed industrial site in the region. The city is noted for its machine and textile production, and well-kept "secrets" from its Soviet past when it was a "closed city"—see below.

The city of Kovrov possess an exalted position in the vast book of Russian legends. Because of the complexity of the founding of Kovrov, many locals have turned to folklore to explain the city's existence. The fable of Yelifanko marks the beginning of the community's mystic past.

One brisk winter day, so the legend goes, Grand Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky went to the forests outside of Bogolyubovo to hunt. While there, he became separated from his guards and got lost in the thick woods. Alone, with darkness setting in and the air growing colder, Prince Andrei wandered through the forest hoping to find his guards. In the distance he saw a glowing light and excitedly hurried toward it. As he neared the light he began to see the outline of a solitary shack (*izba*) within the deep, dark forest. The prince approached the door and knocked loudly. The resident of this home was a lonely hermit named Yelifanko.

Yelifanko answered the knock, "Who is there?" The prince replied, "It is me!" Now, Yelifanko, being a hermit deep in the woods, had never seen his prince before; however, "divine inspiration" allowed him to recognize the voice. Yelifanko immediately opened the door and let his master in. Elated to be in a safe, warm place, the prince said, "Servant, you have saved my life and I shall reward you." Thus, the hermit was granted many parcels of land around his home. Today this land is occupied by the city known as Kovrov.

This folktale may seem odd. For example, you may be asking yourself, "Why 'Kovrov' and not something like 'Yelifanko'?" In fact, prior to Kovrov becoming a city, the village was called Yelifanovka. Interestingly, this small entertaining fable does have some truth to it. There was in fact a Yelifanko; however, he was a hunter who lived with his relatives in the small village that was called Yelifanovka. Yelifanko often brought food to Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky, who lived in Bogolyubovo. As the fable states, Prince Andrei one day around Christmas became lost in the forest and was helped by Yelifanko. For this act of kindness he was awarded substantial lands along the Klyazma near Yelifanovka.

Yelifanko's son, Vasily, built a church in the village along the Klyazma, and dedicated it to the birth of Christ (since it was around Christmas when Andrei Bogolyubsky was saved). After a short time, Yelifanovka became known as Christmas Village (*Selo rozhdestvenskoye*) because of the church.

Christmas Village was located within the Starodub principality, which was founded by Yury Dolgoruky in 1152. The principality was first ruled by Ivan I Starodubsky, who was a son of Vsevolod III "Big Nest." The capital of the principality was the city of Starodub, located not far from Christmas Village. However, the small village was not considered of much importance within the large Starodub principality.

Over generations the Starodub principality became fragmented because each Starodub prince wanted his own area to rule. After continuous division, Christmas Village found itself within the largest segment of the former Starodub principality. This region was ruled by Vasily "Kovyor" Krivoborsky-Starodubsky. Christmas Village grew in importance in the region as Prince Kovyor showed particular interest in the small town.

In 1531, Prince Vasily Kovyor died and was buried in Christmas Village. Soon after the prince's death and burial the village was named Kovrova in his honor. Over the next two hundred years Kovrova continued to grow and became an important stopping point along the Klyazma. By 1778, the one time small village of Yelifanovka was considered a major stop between the large cities of Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow. During the same year the town was given the status of a city and with the name Kovrov. Today 1778 is considered the founding date of Kovrov, and in the center of the city a monument erected in 1978 marks the community's bicentennial.

Today, Kovrov is well known for its industrial importance to the Russian Federation, especially in the areas of metalworking and machine building. A couple of the more well-known factories in Kovrov are the V.A. Degtyarev Works and the Kovrov Excavator Plant. The V.A. Degtyarev Works produces ZiD motorcycles, which make up one-fifth of all Russian manufactured motorcycles. The Kovrov Excavator Plant manufactures large excavators for construction work.

In addition to these industrial behemoths, Kovrov was an important weapons manufacturer during World War II. This is the main reason the city was a "closed" during the Soviet era. Even today if you ask, "Where are the guns made?" you will probably get a strange look and will be told, "It's a secret."

While the present industrial center of Kovrov does not hold the same importance in ancient Russian history as Vladimir and Suzdal, legends like that of Yelifanko play an important role in understanding Russia's past. Although it is unlikely that any of the versions of the city's founding are historically accurate, the fables illustrate the emphasis Russians place on the "mysterious."

YURYEV-POLSKY

(pop. 22,000)

In 1152 Yury Dolgoruky founded a town in the middle of the fertile lands 68 kilometers (42 miles) northeast of Vladimir. Unsurprisingly, this town was named after its founder. The town was distinguished from the other Yuryev settlement, which is located in the Dnieper Basin, with the addition of the second name “Polsky.” The town’s full name, Yuryev-Polsky, means “Yury’s town among the fields.”

The town’s placement was chosen carefully. Just to the north are the upper reaches of the east-side tributaries to the Nerl River (which flows past Kideksha and Bogolyubovo). Also, the Koloksha River flows past the town and empties into the Klyazma. This location provided easy access to major trading routes. Yury Dolgoruky increased the town’s population by attracting Bulgars, Finno-Ugrians, and Russians. The prince gave plots of land and granted loans to those willing to settle in Yuryev-Polsky.

The town was surrounded with a moat and high earthen walls measuring 1,100 yards in circumference. They were 38 feet thick at the base and 22 feet high. Even today, parts of the wall still reach their original height. The Church of St. George (*Georgyevskaya tserkov*) was built in the settlement in 1152.

By the year 1212 the town was owned by Svyatoslav, a son of Vsevolod III “Big Nest.” At this time the Monastery of the Archangel Michael (*Mihailo-Arkhangelsky monastyr*) was built. And the famous Cathedral of St. George (*Georgyevsky sobor*) was built upon the same spot that Yury Dolgoruky’s Church of St. George had stood.

Early in the fourteenth century Yuryev-Polsky came under the rule of Moscow. Like many of the other cities, towns, and villages in the Vladimir region, ownership of Yuryev-Polsky changed hands. In the fifteenth century the town came under the control of Lithuanian Prince Svidrigailo. In the sixteenth century the town was given to the Tartar-Mongol Prince Abdul-Latif, who had come from the Crimea. Ivan IV “the Terrible” gave the town to yet another prince, Kaibulah of Astrakhan, as a reward for his military contributions during the war with Livonia. Despite the continual royal presence, Yuryev-Polsky declined because the rulers only extorted tribute from the town’s inhabitants. Consequently, the construction of new buildings was not resumed until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The majority of the town’s main architectural attractions are situated within Yury Dolgoruky’s old fortress. The west wall of the fortress-monastery contains the Church of John Theologos. This church, which was originally built in 1670 and reconstructed in 1963, acts as a gateway to the monastery. The five-domed Cathedral of the Archangel Michael is quite a magnificent structure. Built in 1792, the cathedral fits in well with the older surrounding structures.

One final structure just outside of the monastery is anything but a footnote. The Cathedral of St. George is the crown jewel of Yuryev-Polsky. Behind an early-twentieth century cathedral stands this serene cathedral which was built in 1230-1234 upon the order of Svyatoslav. The original Church of St. George, which was built in 1152, was knocked down because it was “dilapidated and collapsing.” The new cathedral was an extraordinary structure that was covered in beautiful stone carvings. Later, St. George was used as one of the models for the first stone church erected in Moscow (the Assumption Cathedral, 1326).

Sadly, in the 1460s the Cathedral of St. George began to badly deteriorate. In 1471, the famous Moscow architect Vasily Yermolin was dispatched to Yuryev-Polsky to restore it. When Yermolin arrived he found the cathedral in terrible condition; the vaulting and much of the walls had collapsed. Most of the intricately carved stones were smashed beyond repair. Despite this, Yermolin forged ahead and rebuilt the cathedral using some of the remaining stones. Today, the Cathedral of St. George resembles stone jigsaw puzzle.

Looking at the cathedral today, one may notice its yellowish-green tint. Undoubtedly, when the cathedral was built the stones were white, but time and subsurface water have changed its color. Also, it is evident which parts collapsed back in the 1460s—a visible line runs from the upper northern corner to the lower southwestern section. The north wall of St. George is the best preserved, and shows that the cathedral was unlike St. Demetrius in Vladimir, in that it was completely covered with carvings. The wall contains three separate depictions of Christ and on the blind arcading are the patron saints of the Vladimir dynasty.

One of the mysteries of the Cathedral of St. George is who actually made the carvings. One early chronicler wrote that the carvings were done by Svyatoslav III himself, though this has been thoroughly refuted. The second theory is that the work was done by Bulgar craftsmen. Since white stone building was brought from the land of the Bulgars, this theory seems quite plausible. Nevertheless, this theory has also been discredited. It is now believed that the carvings on this thirteenth-century masterpiece were done by two separate teams of Russian craftsmen. The Cathedral of St. George was the last structure in the region built in this style, and craftsmen from the “Vladimir-Suzdalian school of architecture” were able to use what they already knew to produce these uniquely Russian carvings.

The Russian Orthodox Cross

Unlike many of the other branches of Christianity, Russian Orthodoxy allows for a wide range of cross designs. A typical cross incorporates many symbols. The small, horizontal bar situated at the top of the cross symbolizes the tablet at Jesus’ crucifixion that read “Christ—King of the Jews.” The larger main cross bar may be placed in the middle of the cross, like those of Vladimir’s Assumption Cathedral, in which case it is a cross of the tenth century. If the bar is placed closer to the top, the cross is from the nineteenth century. The

third bar, which is slanted, according to one account, symbolizes the crossing of Christ's legs; another version is that it represents a scale of judgment.

The last symbol, located at the very bottom of many crosses, is the half-moon shape with the tips pointing toward the sky. This symbol is interpreted in many ways. First, it is said to symbolize a cup meant to catch the blood of Christ. Another theory is that at one time dragons were placed at the bottom of the cross to symbolize the crushing of paganism, and that over time the heads and bodies disappeared, so that now only the tails of the dragons remain. A third theory suggests that this half-moon shape represents the Tartar-Mongols and the Islamic religion. Placing it at the bottom signifies the alleged ultimate superiority of Christianity over Islam. Finally, a theory supported by many priests alleges that the symbol is actually an anchor representing peacefulness and tranquility.

It is evident that Yuryev-Polsky's fame lies in its past and in the Cathedral of St. George, but the town does contain some modern industry. There are two main plants. First, the Yuryev-Polsky Commercial Textile Komtex produces upholstery fabrics for furniture and cars. It also produces a wide range of Terry cloth fabrics and towels. The Yuryev-Polsky Plant Promsvyaz makes a number of technical instruments including welding equipment, starting, and charging devices.

Upon first glance, Yuryev-Polsky resembles a typical Russian provincial town. The grayish buildings and rows of high-rise apartment complexes conceal the fact that this town holds one of the most important architectural creations of ancient Rus. Situated only an hour outside of Vladimir, the small town's tranquil monastery and the Cathedral of St. George make for a worthwhile excursion.

GUS KHRUSTALNY

(pop. 85,000)

Located approximately ninety kilometers (56 miles) to the south of Vladimir is the sleepy industrial town of Gus Khrustalny (literally translated, "Crystal Goose"). Although this provincial town is not usually associated with the Golden Ring cities within *Vladimirskaya oblast*, its tourist appeal is no less significant. Gus Khrustalny was a so-called "closed" city during the Soviet period. Government officials declared this town off limits to foreigners because of its optics factories which manufactured sighting scopes for military weapons. However, after the fall of the Communist regime this diamond-in-the-rough has opened its doors to visitors.

The lure of this town lies in its large glass and crystal manufacturing complexes which produce brilliant examples of cut, colored, and shaped crystal and glass. Founded in 1756 by Akim Maltsov, the first glass factory employed

serfs that produced items for mass consumption. However, in the late eighteenth century factory workers began to produce pieces of great artistic quality. Legend tells us that one inspired man began the transformation.

According to the legend, a glass worker began his day as usual, getting up before the sun rose, and preparing for his winter walk to work. Upon waking, the man found his small daughter sick and crying. He consoled her as best he could but knew that only one thing would make the girl feel better—bright summer flowers which she loved dearly. The man looked for fresh flowers but the winter weather had destroyed any hope of finding them. He promised himself that before the day was over he would fulfill his daughter's wish. When the man returned home from work he carried with him an object wrapped in rags which he presented to his ill child. After carefully unwrapping the gift, the girl found a beautiful arrangement of colorful flowers. However, these were not fresh flowers; they were not even real—the father had spent his day carefully blowing glass into the shape of flowers. From this point on, the makers of traditional plates and glasses produced by the factory became less prestigious than the master craftsmen who created flowers, animals, and other items from crystal and glass.

Today samples of many of these artistic works can be found in Gus Khrustalny's Crystal Museum (*Muzey Khrustalya*), located in the town's former Cathedral of St. George (*Georgiyevsky sobor*), a red brick structure designed by Leonty Benois (1892-1903). The interior of the building is beautifully decorated with wall paintings by Victor Vasnetsov and mosaics by Vladimir Frolov. Today the building is missing the familiar cupolas which would identify it as a church. The cupolas, a mixture of Orthodox and Catholic styles, were torn down by Communist revolutionaries in the early twentieth century. After the revolution, the church served as a gymnasium (boys' school). It was converted into the current museum in 1973.

During the civil war that followed the Bolshevik seizure of power (1918-22) there was only one incident which occurred in Gus Khrustalny worth noting, as little blood was shed in this region. This incident involved a Bolshevik officer named Lavrentyev. While the war was raging, Lavrentyev stole potatoes from citizens of the town for the Red soldiers fighting on the front. In retaliation a group of citizens murdered him. Today an eternal flame burns in his memory in the center of the town.

The fact that glass manufacturing sprang up quickly in this area is no coincidence. The city is situated close to many rivers and not far from the large cities of Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod. Raw materials, such as sand and timber, are plentiful in the Meshchora Forest, within which Gus Khrustalny is located.

Today, Gus Khrustalny boasts three separate glass factories, each with its own specialty, and one little known sewing machine factory. The Dzerzhinsky Gusevsky Glass Factory is one of Russia's largest manufacturers of technical glass. This factory produces hardened and triplex glasses for automobiles. The

Quartz Glass Factory has the honor of being Russia's largest manufacturer of transparent quartz glass. Finally, the Gusevsky Crystal Factory produces the most popular items exported from the city. This crystal and glass factory is one of Russia's oldest enterprises. The artistic pieces produced here have received high marks in exhibitions in such places as Brussels, Montreal, and Osaka. Finally, the Shveimash Firm, which makes the "Chaika" sewing machine, has its factory located in Gus Khrustalny.

Although this small industrial town is largely overshadowed by its neighboring cities, Vladimir and Ryazan, its attractions and history are important. If the opportunity arises, take a tour through one of the crystal and glass factories and marvel at the craftsmanship.

MEZINOVSKY & MILTSEVO

(pop. ???)

South of Gus Khrustalny, over some rather unbelievable "roads," surrounded by dense forest and peat bogs, lies the small village of Mezinovsky. This village is not traditionally associated with tourism, as it has but one truly significant attraction. The tourist expecting to examine a lone thirteenth-century cathedral, like in Bogolyubovo, will not find it here. Nor will one find a flourishing, historic community of artisans, as in Gus Khrustalny or Mstyora. In fact, unless one searches diligently, only livestock, infamous Russian mosquitoes, and the remnants of a closed factory may be found. To find any attraction here, one must ask a local, "*Gde Matryonin dvor?*" ("Where is Matryona's home?").

Matryona's home plays an important role in the history, literature, and culture of the Soviet era. In this shack, which lies approximately three kilometers (a little less than two miles) away from Mezinovsky in an even smaller village named Miltsevo, lived the now famous Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In the 1950's Solzhenitsyn spent one of his many terms of exile in this small shack. A mathematician by trade, he was originally exiled for political criticism during the Stalin era. Later, Solzhenitsyn became famous for his books which exposed the brutality of Stalinist labor camps, including: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), *Cancer Ward* (1968), and *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974-1978).

Living in Miltsevo, Solzhenitsyn would walk to work in Mezinovsky and to the church down the road. The dissident taught mathematics at the local school, and kept to himself when he was not working. Although people in the villages around Mezinovsky knew that he was there for a reason, no one ever knew exactly why, and asking such questions was definitely against the unwritten rules of the Soviet era. However, he was treated with respect as a teacher, and looked upon as a good man by most who remember him, or have heard stories, about his time in the area.

In a village as small as Mezinovsky, news travels rapidly, and consequently, secrets are nearly impossible to keep. However, on the night before the KGB was planing to secretly move Solzhenitsyn, someone warned him. Solzhenitsyn disappeared before the agents' arrival the next morning and temporarily eluded the authorities. To this day, no one knows who informed him.

While living in Miltsevo, Solzhenitsyn worked long and secluded hours to produce some of the books which have made him internationally famous. One of these works is a short story called "Matryona's House." Presumably written while he was living in Miltsevo, this story is semi-autobiographical and provides vivid details of village life in the mid-1950s. The story is told from the perspective of a lonely traveler (perhaps in exile), who has just come from the east, looking to settle in the densely forested "heart" of Russia. Finding a job as a mathematics instructor, the man is taken in as a boarder in the home of Matryona Vasilyevna. The story focuses on the unselfish nature of Matryona. The narrator is unmistakably Solzhenitsyn.

As mentioned previously, the villages of Mezinovsky and Miltsevo possess none of the ancient splendor enjoyed by the likes of Bogolyubovo and Kideksha. Rather, their historic significance lies in an era much closer to us than that of Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky or Saints Boris and Gleb—the era of Stalin and Communism. Contemporary Russia has seen the Communist monopoly of power end and state socialism recede. In this new epoch the nation has found the former dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn front and center in national politics. Who knows, perhaps one day the quiet villages of Mezinovsky and Miltsevo will brandish signs reading, "Alexander Solzhenitsyn Taught and Slept Here (ca. 1953)."

MSTYORA

(pop. ???)

If one recalls our visit to the exhibition in the Old Believers' Church of the Trinity (*Troitskaya tserkov*) in Vladimir, then it will be easy to imagine the artistic reputation Mstyora carries. The small village is located 103 kilometers northeast of Vladimir (64 miles). Mstyora, like most of the towns in *Vladimirskaya oblast*, is considered an industrial community. This quaint settlement is situated on the banks of three separate rivers: the Mstyorka, Tara, and Klyazma. Today, virtually every home is completely encircled by gardens, which many city-dwellers find soothing.

Mstyora was founded when a small "monastic" community settled there in the late fifteenth century. The settlement was originally named Bogoyavlensky (Epiphany). Early in the 1500s the settlement grew as more craftsmen and tradesmen chose to settle in the community. By the late 1500s Bogoyavlensky had approximately 200 families. The influx of craftsmen and tradesmen ultimately proved to be of special importance.

As the village continued to grow, it was awarded to the little known Romadanovsky princes for their devoted service to the grand prince. Though the Romadanovskys spent most of their time in Moscow, Bogoyavlensky became their family estate. Later the family was buried in Bogoyavlensky's Church of the Epiphany, which was built in 1687. Over two and a half centuries the small village changed noble hands several times. The name of the community changed as well. In the early 1800s, Bogoyavlensky became known as Mstyora, after the nearby Mstyorka River.

The local villagers had a reputation for being hardworking and entrepreneurial. With this foundation, the village was transformed into a trade center. The location of the town, situated near the major roadways and on the main rivers between Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod, also contributed to its growth and success.

The merchants from Mstyora traveled along the Klyazma, Oka, and Volga rivers trading food and icons. Over time demand for the Mstyora icons became larger and larger due to the improving skills of the painters. By the eighteenth century, icon painting had become the main commercial activity in Mstyora. As the art of icon painting drove the small village's economy, the artists of Mstyora became revered and famous. In 1724, thirty of the Mstyora painters were summoned to work in Moscow for the ruling family.

Mstyora was also referred to as a village of *ofeni*. The *ofeni* were merchants who bought and sold a wide range of merchandise. They traveled all over Russia selling their goods out of horse carts. As might be expected, their most prized products were the Mstyora icons. The icons sold well in the Caucasus, the Urals, Siberia, the Volga region, and even in Bulgaria. The Mstyora icon artists quickly mastered additional painting techniques originally developed in Novgorod (an ancient city located just south of St. Petersburg) and Moscow, adding to their appeal.

Entering the mid-1800s the Mstyora icon industry seemed unstoppable, but in 1861 the village was dealt a devastating blow. In this year the Nizhny Novgorod Railroad was built 14 kilometers from Mstyora. The villagers' horse carts could not keep up with the trains delivering cheap, printed icons from Moscow. This inevitably ended the careers of many of Mstyora's icon artists.

Though severely weakened, the icon artists forged ahead into the twentieth century. However, thanks to the new Communist government's official opposition to religion, after the 1917 Revolution there was greatly reduced demand for icons—but life went on in the small village.

The out of work icon artists, unwilling to let their talents be wasted and traditions die, turned their painting skills in a different direction. They began painting spoons, cups, plates, and matryoska dolls. Despite the work this gave the artists, they were still not content. They founded a guild called Old Russian Folk Painting, and in 1932 the guild began to master the art of miniature painting. Soon the Mstyora artists were applying their new style to boxes, coffers, and other lacquered items made of papier-mâché.

Though this was following the example of the artists in the community of Palekh (which lies north of Vladimir and was at one time part of *Vladimirskaya oblast*, Mstyora painters created their own style. For example, in the Palekh style, the painting is usually done on a black background, whereas Mstyora miniatures usually cover the entire surface and include a colored background.

The subjects of these paintings sometimes include images from everyday life such as country scenes. But usually the miniature paintings depict fairy tales, songs, and folk epics. For this work Mstyora natives have received many awards, including several international gold medals from Paris (1937), New York (1939), and Brussels (1957). If you go to Mstyora, you should not miss the opportunity to visit its School of Miniature Painting.

It is very easy to get caught up in the intricate details of Mstyora's miniature painting tradition. However, it would be a shame to overlook the other treasures that can be found throughout the village. Mstyora is also well-known for its embroidery and jewelry enterprises. Founded in 1923, the embroidery shop produces garments decorated with the hand sewn "Vladimir seam" and "white satin-stitching." The jewelry firm produces a wide range of goods, including bracelets, brooches, necklaces, and a variety of tableware.

Mstyora is such a small village that if you blink you might miss it. However, it is evident that to judge the village by its size would be a mistake. Like the rest of the settlements of the Vladimir region, Mstyora too has a rich history. Though the village's past has included many changes, the inhabitants have remained hardworking and talented. While in Russia, be sure to obtain a lavishly decorated Mstyora lacquer box as a souvenir. In order to make sure the artwork was actually done in Mstyora, look at the bottom left corner of the painting. If the painting was done in the small village, you will see a very small handwritten "Мстєра." (Of course, artists painting in the Mstyora style can also label their work in this way. The only way to be absolutely certain that you have a genuine Mstyora box is to buy it in the village—or to buy it from a reputable source. However, if you like what you are buying, it may not be so important to you where the work was done.)

ALEXANDROV

(pop. 69,000)

Situated 111 kilometers from Vladimir (approximately 69 miles) and just over 100 kilometers from Moscow is the small provincial town of Alexandrov. Alexandrov (also commonly referred to by its ancient name, *Alexandrova sloboda* ("sloboda" means a large village), is yet another settlement within the Vladimir region that was a favorite place of the Russian princes throughout history. The city was once the residence of one infamous Russian ruler, *Ivan Grozny*—Tsar Ivan IV "the Terrible". Today, Alexandrov is known as an industrial center with a hardworking labor force. The modern industry is complemented by some historically important attractions that provide the city with

color and interest.

The city is thought to have first been mentioned in 1339 in the will of Ivan Kalita (nicknamed “moneybags” because of his immense property holdings). Among Ivan Kalita’s land possessions, “Great Sloboda” was listed, most likely referring to Alexandrov. Much later, in 1513, the village was mentioned in a book from the collection of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra. Legend tells us that the town’s name originated from Alexander Nevsky, who was rumored to have made frequent stops in the village on the way to his native town of Pereslavl.

Alexandrov provided a place for the Russian princes to rest and to hunt during religious pilgrimages and other trips. In 1525, Prince Vasily III took particular interest in the village and soon made it his residence. Earlier, in 1513, he had the Church of the Intercession (*Pokrovsky tserkov*) built where the city is now situated, marking the beginning of the community's growth. The church was reconstructed in the seventeenth century to include an abbot’s chambers and a refectory. The church was also used by Vasily III’s son, Ivan IV “the Terrible,” as a court chapel. Some of the earliest frescoes still survive.

Ivan “the Terrible” made Alexandrov his home for 17 years. He left Moscow with his family for the small town in December of 1564. He moved for the same reason that Yuri Dolgoruky left Suzdal for Kideksha and Andrei Bogolyubsky left Vladimir for Bogolyubovo—the Moscow boyars had become very violent and threatened Ivan’s authority. While living in Alexandrov, Ivan was forced to sign a truce with Sweden and Poland after losing a war with Livonia. Also while in the city he established his “terror-inspiring” security force, the *oprichniki*. In 1570 Ivan struck a huge blow against the boyars and their estates. He sent his *oprichniki* to attack the major trade centers of Novgorod and Tver. In Novgorod alone Ivan “the Terrible’s” followers killed 40,000 people, including women and children. Such campaigns were typical for Ivan and eventually earned him his well-known nickname.

Ivan IV also carried out his terror within Alexandrov. Many prisoners were brought to Alexandrov to be tortured and killed in horrific ways. Two German adventurers, Taube and Kruse, who served with the *oprichnina*, left a detailed account of their life in Alexandrov. According to their account, the tsar “seldom spent a day without visiting the torture chamber.” In Alexandrov, the tsar’s prisoners were shot with arrows, tied to barrels of gun powder and blown up, torn to shreds by wild dogs after being wrapped in a bear skin, and in most cases simply drowned in the pond outside of Alexandrov. Consequently, during this time the community was known by many as “a blood-thirsty town.” Only after the murder of his son (which he was responsible for) did Ivan IV “the Terrible” leave Alexandrov and return to Moscow.

Despite Ivan IV’s departure from Alexandrov, the city still retains a sinister aura that seems unwarranted. According to a Federal law, individuals who have been convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison are forbidden, after release from prison, to move to the capital. The law states that ex-convicts

cannot permanently reside within 100 kilometers of Moscow. The city of Alexandrov is located 101 kilometers from Moscow, and, as a result, is known as an ex-convict haven. Because of the easy commute to Moscow, many former inmates in fact find Alexandrov an attractive place to live—but this does not necessarily justify the city's negative reputation.

Getting back to the city's history, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the grounds upon which Ivan IV "the Terrible" lived were transformed into a monastery for women. (Russian doesn't have a separate word for "convent.") Interestingly, the convent is known throughout Russia as being the only one built in medieval times with the help of women. Within the convent grounds, which are located in the center of the current city, there are many historically significant structures. The previously mentioned Church of the Intercession is located here along with the city's version of the Assumption Cathedral. Ivan IV made large contributions to these two structures during his residency. After sacking Novgorod and Tver, Ivan ordered massive copper-plated oak doors from both cities to be brought to Alexandrov. Today the doors can be found on the south and west sides of the Church of the Intercession.

Also on the convent grounds is a prominent tent-shaped bell-tower. Built upon the foundations of an early sixteenth-century belfry, the bell tower (commonly known as the *kolokolnya*) majestically towers above the other structures with three tiers of bells. Situated next to the bell tower are living quarters. Within these residential quarters lived Maria, the stepsister of Peter the Great, who lived in exile in Alexandrov from 1698 to 1707.

Enclosing the convent are large white walls and towers of stone. These additions from 1662 make the convent resemble a fortress or kremlin. The large walls of the convent not only enclose this treasure of Alexandrov, they separate the ancient from the modern. Today Alexandrov is another city within the Vladimir region that is, as noted above, known for its contemporary industry. The city produces a wide range of transistors, man-made precious stones at the All-Russian R&D Institute of Mineral Raw Materials Synthesis, and textiles. However, the best known products of Alexandrov are television sets. The *Aleksandrovsky zavod* was the largest producer of TV sets sold in Russia. They now have substantial foreign competition.

The city of Alexandrov may not be as old as Vladimir or Suzdal, but it does have an illustrious past. It has hosted royalty on their trips outside of Moscow, and has even been considered home to several princes. The residence of Vasily III and his notorious son Ivan IV "the Terrible" unquestionably establishes Alexandrov as an important city in Russia's history. The fact that Ivan "the Terrible" made Alexandrov the unofficial political and religious center of Russia for 17 years during the sixteenth century solidifies this claim. The city's mystical beginnings and periods of darkness make Alexandrov one of the most interesting cities in the Vladimir region.

MUROM

(pop. 110,000)

On the eastern most boundary of *Vladimirskaya oblast*, on the banks of the river Oka, lies the city of Murom. Approximately 136 kilometers southeast of Vladimir (approximately 84 miles), this scenic community is a large and relatively modern industrial city. However, recent modernization cannot overshadow the long history of this community.

Officially, Murom is the oldest city in *Vladimirskaya oblast*, first mentioned in the Lavrentyev Chronicles in 862. This is quite an astonishing fact, as this is the same year many historians consider to be the founding year of the Russian state itself under the rule of a Varnagian (a "Viking") named Rurik.

The very name of Murom is significant. It is most likely derived from an ancient Finno-Ugric tribe which once inhabited this area, the Muroma. Archaeological remains from the Muroma date back to the first millennium B.C. in the form of fortified towns. Much later, Murom served as the capital of the Murom-Ryazan principality in the early twelfth century under Yaroslav Svyatoslavovich, grandson of Yaroslav "The Wise" (who drafted Rus's first code of laws, *Russkaya pravda*, ca. 1030).

In 1239, like many Russian towns, Murom was completely destroyed by the Mongols, but despite this setback, the town recovered. After a period of princely strife (so common in medieval Russia), Murom was the capital of an independent principality until annexed by the Grand Principality of Moscow in 1392. Because of the destruction and upheaval over these two centuries, nothing from ancient Murom has survived intact. Archaeologists have uncovered many small pieces of white stone in the city. These findings suggest that white stone cathedrals and churches may have once stood in Murom as the still do in Vladimir and Bogolyubovo.

Although, as we have noted, the city's name most likely came from the ancient Muroma people, some identify the city with a more illustrious name, Ilya Muromets. He is an heroic figure in Russian folklore comparable to a Hercules or Gilgamesh—or, in some ways, Paul Bunyan. Many of the legends involving Ilya Muromets describe his superhuman, yet mortal powers, as he battles monsters of the forest or huge armies. Many of the tales express a love of the motherland and the desire to defend it (particularly from Tatars). Other tales express themes denouncing idolatry (*Kapyshve*). The stories are filled with magic, heroism, and adventure. However, Ilya Muromet's name, like the city itself, is probably also derived from the ancient Muroma tribes, undermining the theory that the city was named after the legendary hero.

The layout of the city's center, similar to that of Vladimir and Moscow, was based on the radial plan of development prevalent throughout ancient Rus.

This circular layout is much different from the grid style Americans are used to. This system was developed to protect the royalty of each principality, as the prince's quarters, the nobility, and the most sacred cathedrals were surrounded first by soldiers and then by commoners.

In 1788 Murom became a district (*uyezd*) town within the Vladimir gubernia, and the town was reconstructed according to the new conventional grid pattern. This transformation to the uniform block style was done over a hundred-year period, and the city's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century churches and monasteries were kept intact.

The center of Murom abounds with architectural masterpieces, including Resurrection Church (*Voskrensenskaya tserkov*, 1658), the Savior Monastery (*Spassky monastyr*, mid-17th century), and the Monastery of the Annunciation (*Blagoveshchensky monastyr*, late-17th century). Also, the cone-shaped top of the Church of St. Cosmas and St. Damian creates a picturesque scene on the bank of the Oka River.

Today, Murom hosts a number of industrial enterprises that are known throughout Russia and around the world. A variety of car radios are produced by the Murom Radio Manufacturing Plant and an array of original carved furniture is manufactured by the joint stock company, *Murom*.

Although Murom's ancient historical significance is its most notable characteristic, it has been the host to more recent events which are also noteworthy. For example, the city was the birthplace of both Vladimir Zvorykin and I.S. Kulikov. These names undoubtedly are unfamiliar to most tourists, but at least some of their accomplishments are well known. Zvorykin became successful in America where he invented the cathode ray tube (CRT), which made television and computers possible. Kulikov was an influential painter during the Soviet period. Also, the city of Murom is the only city in *Vladimir oblast* which can boast a station on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. During World War II trains left from this station carrying Russian soldiers to the Nazi-Soviet front. The engine of one of the troop trains was fittingly named "Ilya Muromets."

A FINAL WORD

We hope you have found this tour through the historic region of Vladimir of interest and value. If you have not already done so, we hope you will be able to see for yourself at least some of the things discussed in the preceding pages. And please don't hesitate to return to visit—and wonder at—more of this part of ancient Rus.

Also, please do not hesitate to send us comments on this "history for tourists." Your feedback will be appreciated. Send your comments to: Ron-Pope42@cs.com.

CHRONOLOGY OF VLADIMIR OBLAST AND ANCIENT RUS

- 700-862** Vikings begin to move down into northern Russia, and in 862, Rurik conquers the Slavic town of Novgorod. Rurik becomes the first Viking to rule Russia. Also, in 862 the city of Murom is founded.
- 978-1015** The rule of St. Vladimir I, who is the first to introduce Christianity to Russia. The unofficial founding of the city of Vladimir by St. Vladimir in 990. The sons of St. Vladimir, Boris and Gleb, are murdered by their step-brother, Svyatopolk, in 1015. Boris and Gleb later become the first Russian saints.
- 1024** The Primary Chronicles mention Suzdal for the first time.
- 1108** Vladimir Monomakh builds a fortress on the high bank of the Klyazma. The settlement later becomes the city of Vladimir.
- 1113-1125** The rule of Vladimir Monomakh. His reign is carried out from the city of Kiev.
- 1125-1157** The rule of Yury Dolgoruky. In 1152, the grand prince has the Church of Saints Boris and Gleb built in Kideksha, and founds the town of Yuryev-Polsky. Also, in 1147, Dolgoruky builds a small outpost on the Moscow River which later becomes the city of Moscow.
- 1157** Yury Dolgoruky's son, Andrei Bogolyubsky, becomes ruler of Rus. He transfers the throne from Suzdal to Vladimir.
- 1158** Construction of Vladimir's Assumption (Dormition) Cathedral begins under the supervision of Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky.
- 1164** Vladimir's Golden Gates are built.
- 1165** The Church of the Intercession on the Nerl is constructed in Bogolyubovo.
- 1169** Vladimir replaces Kiev as the Grand Principality of Rus.
- 1174** Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky is murdered by the Kuchkovicks and Vsevolod III "Big Nest" ascends the throne.
- 1191** Nativity Monastery, where Andrei Bogolyubsky and Alexander Nevsky are later buried, is founded in Vladimir.

- 1194-1197** At the request of Grand Prince Vsevolod III “Big Nest,” St. Demetrius Cathedral is built in Vladimir.
- 1200-1201** Wife of Vsevolod III, Princess Maria Shvarnovna, establishes the Princess’s Convent in Vladimir.
- 1222-1225** Nativity of the Virgin Cathedral is built in Suzdal within the Kremlin. Also in 1223, the Tartar-Mongol invasion of Russia begins.
- 1230-1234** Svyatoslav III has the uniquely carved Cathedral of St. George built in Yuryev-Polsky.
- 1238** Vladimir falls after the Tartar-Mongol siege.
- 1240** Alexandrovsky Convent is established in Suzdal.
- 1242** Alexander Nevsky defeats the Teutonic order (German-Lithuanian) at the Battle of Lake Peipus.
- 1252-1263** Alexander Nevsky rules as Grand Prince in Vladimir.
- 1325-1340** The rule of Ivan I Kalita “Moneybags.” The seat of the Russian Orthodox Church is moved from Vladimir to Moscow. In 1339, “Great Sloboda” (thought to be the present town of Alexandrov) is mentioned for the first time in the will of Ivan Kalita.
- 1362-1389** Dmitry Donskoi holds the throne. In 1380, he defeats the Tartar-Mongols in the Battle of Kulikovo on the Don. Grand Prince Donskoi was the first to win a decisive battle against the Tartar-Mongol army. Also in 1364, the Intercession founded in Suzdal.
- 1408** Vasily I sends Andrei Rublyev and Daniil Chorny to create frescoes inside Vladimir’s Assumption Cathedral.
- 1460-1505** Ivan III “the Great” rules as Grand Prince of Russia. He refuses to recognize Tartar-Mongol superiority and defeats their armies. This ends two centuries of Tartar-Mongol oppression in Russia. Also in 1471, the Cathedral of St. George in Yuryev-Polsky is pieced back together by Vasily Yermolin. From 1475-1479, Moscow’s Assumption Cathedral (*Uspensky sobor*) is built.
- 1513** Alexandrov is officially mentioned as a village.
- 1533-1584** Reign of Ivan IV “the Terrible.” In 1547, Ivan IV is crowned in the Moscow Kremlin and given the title of Tsar of All Russia.

In 1561, construction of the Cathedral of the Intercession (also known as the famous St. Basil's Cathedral) is completed on Red Square. In 1564, Ivan arrives in Alexandrov where he lives the next 17 years. From here he unleashes a terror campaign against the boyars in Novgorod and Tver.

- 1612** Prince Dmitry Pozharsky drives Polish invaders from Moscow.
- 1613-1645** Mikhail Romanov becomes Tsar of All Russia. This is the beginning of the Romanov Dynasty.
- 1689-1725** Peter the Great rules with the title of Emperor of All Russia. He introduces Western culture and customs to Russia and builds the first Russian naval fleet in the Baltic Sea. The capital is transferred from Moscow to St. Petersburg.
- 1756** The town of Gus Khrustalny is founded as well as Akim Maltsov's glass factory.
- 1762-1796** The German-born wife of Peter III, Catherine II "the Great," rules Russia. Upon the order of the Tsarina, Vladimir Central Prison is built on the eastern side of Vladimir in 1783. In 1778, Kovrov is officially recognized as a city.
- 1801-1825** Reign of Alexander I, who defeats the armies of Napoleon and drives him from Moscow.
- 1894** Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia, ascends the throne.
- 1917** Tsar Nicholas II abdicates the throne and the Provisional Government is established. In October (under the old Russian calendar), Vladimir Ilych Lenin and the Bolsheviks overthrow the Provisional Government and form the Soviet State.
- 1918** Tsar Nicholas and his family are executed in the city of Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg). The capital is moved from St. Petersburg back to Moscow.
- 1924** Lenin dies and Joseph Stalin becomes the leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
- 1932** The Old Russian Folk Art Painting guild is founded in Mstyora by former icon painters.
- 1941-1945** World War II or, as it is called in Russia, the Great Patriotic War is fought--and won largely on the Russian front. The USSR suffers more than 20 million casualties.

- 1953** Stalin dies and is succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev. Under Khrushchev's two-thirds of the Russian Orthodox churches are shut down.
- 1960-1962** American U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers is held in the Vladimir Central Prison.
- 1964** Khrushchev is forced from power and Leonid Brezhnev becomes general secretary.
- 1979** Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
- 1985-1991** Mikhail Gorbachev is general secretary of the USSR. He introduces *perestroika* (restructuring), *demokratizatsiya* (democratization), and *glasnost* (openness). These reforms are meant to revive the Soviet State.
- 1991** The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ceases to exist on December 21st.
- 1992-1999** Boris Yeltsin is elected President of the Russian Federation. He is the first elected leader of Russia in more than 1,000 years. Also on July 4 of 1992, the American Home is officially established and dedicated in Vladimir.
- 2000** Vladimir Putin becomes the second elected President of the Russian Federation.

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Interviews

Berry Binder, the first intern to work on this project (May-June 1995), interviewed a number of people in Vladimir and elsewhere in the region. These included Andrei Tikhonov, Instructor of History, Vladimir Pedagogical Institute (now Vladimir State Pedagogical University) and Lydia Ilyna, Director of the Vladimir-Suzdal Museums of History, Architecture, and Art.

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