

NAVIGATING THE 'DRUNKEN REPUBLIC': THE *JUNO* AND THE RUSSIAN
AMERICAN FRONTIER, 1799-1811

By

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To my family, friends, and faculty mentors

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Interest in Russia's colonization of the Pacific Northwest coastline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has grown in recent years. The renewal of turbulent US-Russian relations has accelerated this trend. Reviewing primary and secondary sources, I explore the political, intellectual, social, and economic conditions of the Russian American colonies during the early nineteenth century from aboard the *Juno* – a ship that plied the waters at the time. The ship is a cultural hub that unites these conditions, demonstrating how different historical perspectives can be brought to bear on the narrative of initial Russian colonization in the Pacific Northwest.

Rather than focusing on a particular person or narrative, I employ a multi-disciplinary approach to examine the intellectual, commercial, and technological environment in which the colonies began. I conclude with an explanation of how and why Russian America continues to be relevant in American and Russian popular culture. Like the plays, fiction, and musicals the ship inspired, I divided my analysis into five acts, exploring how the ship was used by its American, and later Russian, owners in

the Pacific Northwest. I close with an analysis of Russian America and Alaska as objects of cultural memory in the minds of Russians and Americans.

CHAPTER 1 LIBRETTO

In July 1811, Russian colonists at Sitka loaded the *Juno* with a cargo of sea otter furs and goods recently obtained from Canton, China via American intermediaries. The combined cargo was valued at over 200,000 Russian rubles. Her destination was the port of Petropavlovsk, along the eastern coast of Kamchatka. At the time, the *Juno* was the workhorse of the Russian American Company's fleet. She was one of the few company ships large enough to routinely make the dangerous passage from the colonies on the American continent to Russia's eastern continental frontier. After the *Juno's* purchase in October 1805, she had made several such voyages, following the Aleutian Island chain to the Kamchatka peninsula.

Her captain in 1811, a navigator in the Russian Navy named Sergei Martynov, set out against strong contrary winds.¹ According to Kyrill Timofeevich Khlebnikov, an accountant in the employ of the Russian American Company, harsh weather conditions kept the ship at sea for more than three months before they were able to approach the Kamchatka coast. Such trips normally took two months under better conditions. But on November 15, 1811, less than twenty-five miles from Petropavlovsk, strong winds blew the ship onto the rocky shore near Shipunsky Point. The only survivors were three crewmembers, Stepan Noritsyn, Mikhail Posnikov, and a man with the surname of Valgusov. They made it to Petropavlovsk to report what occurred.²

¹ Aleksandr Ivanovich Alekseev, *The Destiny of Russian America: 1741-1867* (Fairbanks: Limestone Press, 1990): 138. Originally published as *Sud'ba russkoi ameriki: 1741-1867*, 1975.

² K.T. Khlebnikov, *Baranov: Chief Manager of the Russian Colonies in America*. (Kingston, Ontario: The Limestone Press, 1973), 80-81. Originally published as *Zhizneopisanie Aleksandra Andreevicha Baranova, glavnago pravitelia rossiiskikh kolonii v Amerike*, 1835.

Khlebnikov, who had recently returned to Petropavlovsk from the Russian American colonies, was taken to the scene. Nineteen crewmembers, including the captain, had died. Khlebnikov located a report from Martynov among the bodies and wreckage, wherein the captain wrote,

With the vessel entrusted to me, I have arrived from the port of Novo-Archangelsk [Sitka] in the most wretched condition. I have been sailing for three months from the Northwest coast of America and struggling against unending storms. Now already in sight of the shore here for 19 days, I have only 3 sailors and they exhausted, and 5 young apprentices whom I brought with me for training; of them, the two oldest perform sailors' duties in addition to their own. The other three take the wheel, bail out water (which comes aboard during strong winds at the rate of 5 inches every hour) throw out the lead sounder and keep the ship's journal. Sailing a three masted ship with these 8 people is a difficult undertaking, the rest of my crew...³

With that, according to Khlebnikov, the report ends. The three survivors indicated that the last storm they encountered tore away the steering gear and chains, leaving the *Juno* helplessly adrift. The crew attempted to anchor the *Juno* in a nearby bay, but strong currents and winds dragged the ship onto a reef. Stranded upon the reef, the surf pounded the vessel until it was slammed into the rocky shore. For six hours, the *Juno* laid helpless on the rocks. Each wave that pounded the ship carried away more of the timbers, cargo, and crewmembers until all were lost. After hearing the grisly tale, Khlebnikov and his associates found and buried nine bodies that were strewn upon the shore. "Let us," he wrote, "draw a veil over this awful picture and turn our attention again to the main scene of action."⁴

Khlebnikov's main scene of action was Russian America. At the time, the Pacific Northwest coastline was a frontier beyond the frontiers of the European powers and the

³ Khlebnikov, *Baranov: Chief Manager*, 80-81.

⁴ Khlebnikov, *Baranov: Chief Manager*, 82.

young American republic. Initial European attempts at colonizing the area proved difficult. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British fur hunters from Canada were prohibited from trading along the Pacific coast due to the prerogatives granted by the British Crown in the charter of the British East India Company. The highly successful Cook and Vancouver expeditions accurately charted the coastlines on behalf of the British Empire and the EIC. But the great geographic distances that Company ships had to travel to reach the area prohibited British colonization beyond a couple of ports on Vancouver Island at the time.

The Spanish over-extended themselves to colonize as far north as San Francisco due to fears of Russian expansion, making only a token attempt to establish control further north. Recently, historians have sought to correct the image of landlocked Spanish explorers in the area, detailing the voyage of Esteban Jose Martinez in the 1780s, for instance.⁵ This voyage also exposed Spain's precarious position so far from Europe. Yet in 1789, despite the sparsity of British or Spanish settlements in the Pacific Northwest, Britain and Spain nearly went to war over competing claims to Vancouver Island when Martinez detained two British East India Company ships at Nootka Sounds. The threat of war was narrowly averted by what became known as the Nootka Conventions (1791 and 1794).

Even merchants from the United States, lured by the prospects of the fur trade with China, made two unsuccessful attempts to establish a permanent settlement at the mouth of the Columbia River prior to the War of 1812. Russia, in the words of historian

⁵ James K. Barnett, "Alaska and the North Pacific: A Crossroads of Empire" and Iris H.W. Engstrand, "Spain's Role in Pacific Exploration during the Age of Enlightenment" in Stephen Haycox et al., eds., *Enlightenment and Exploration in the North Pacific 1741-1805* (Anchorage: Cook Inlet Historical Society, 1997).

James K. Barnett, was thus the “least experienced and most unlikely competitor in the drama of European conquest.”⁶ The Russian empire was engaged in a near-continuous string of European and Central Asian conflicts throughout the eighteenth century. Maritime activity, both naval and commercial, was relatively new to Imperial Russia. Peter the Great’s dream of possessing a powerful navy yielded limited maritime influence around the eastern Baltic and northern Black Sea at the start of the nineteenth century. But Russians started arriving in the Aleutian Islands to hunt furs in the eighteenth century, shortly after Bering’s two expeditions in the North Pacific.⁷

Siberian merchants, who had the most precarious legal standing in Russian society, established a vast network of Cossacks, peasants, and Siberian natives to collect and sell furs from all over Siberia for domestic and foreign markets.⁸ As sea otter populations diminished along the Siberian coastline, these merchants and the fur hunters in their employ (referred to as *promyshlenniki*) began to hop from island to island in barely seaworthy vessels in search of the increasingly elusive pelts. With the costs of these expeditions rising beyond the capacity of individual merchants in Siberia to afford, they began to form small companies to share the risk and/or profits of the expeditions. Such arrangements often broke up after a single voyage to the Aleutian Islands or the Alaskan coastline, and reformed with different combinations of merchants. Grigory Ivanovich Shelikov, the founder of the company that would become

⁶ Haycox, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, 5.

⁷ James R. Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 3-6. Gibson provides an excellent summary of four waves of Russian occupation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁸ Some historians have traced the beginning of Russia’s domestic fashion industry to this period. See Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry 1700-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

the Russian American Company, was involved with 10 such companies in an eight-year period during the 1770s and 1780s.⁹

By that time, the Chinese were the primary customers for Russian sea otter furs. Chinese traders paid up to 100 rubles for each pelt. But the Chinese limited trade with the Russians to Kiakhta, a small Russian outpost 100 miles south of Lake Baikal. As a result, the market was prone to frequent closures by Chinese officials, who often objected to Russian expansion close to China's borders.¹⁰ In 1784, Grigory Shelikov established the first permanent colony on the Alaskan Island of Kodiak. Shelikov shrewdly realized that having a permanent settlement in Russian America gave the Shelikov-Golikov Company the advantage of being able to hold out during such closures, and rush furs to market when they reopened.¹¹ Despite his failure to obtain monopoly protections for their company from Catherine the Great during her return journey from the newly conquered Crimea, Shelikov's settlement at Kodiak did catch the attention of several influential court members. As a result, his company was the most prominent when Tsar Paul I decided to combine merchant activities along the Pacific Northwest coast.

In 1799, while the *Juno* was nearing completion in Dighton, Massachusetts, Tsar Paul I transformed the Shelikov-Golikov Company into the Russian American Company

⁹ Grigory Shelikov, *A Voyage to America, 1783-1786* (Ontario: Limestone Press, 1981), 6. Originally published as *Rossiiskago kuptsa Grigor'ia Shelikhova stranstvovanie s 1783 po 1787 god iz Okhotska po vostochnomu okeanu k amerikanskim beregam*, 1791 and 1792.

¹⁰ S.B. Okun, *The Russian-American Company* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 15-17. Originally published as *Rossiisko-amerikanskaia kompaniia*, 1939. Okun, steeped in Marxist methodology, focused upon the economic competition between the British and the Russians over access to the Chinese fur market.

¹¹ Mary E. Wheeler, "Empires in Conflict and Cooperation: The Bostonians and the Russian-American Company." *The Pacific Historical Review*. 40, no. 4 (Nov 1971): 421.

(RAC). Owing to the Tsar's fears of American and British republican influences near Russia's new American colonies, Paul granted the RAC a monopoly charter for fur hunting along the Pacific Northwest coast north of 55 degrees north latitude. He modeled the new company after the British East India Company, inaugurating Russia's first joint stock company. In 1802, Russia's new Tsar, Alexander I, issued an *ukaz* permitting naval officers to temporarily enter into RAC employment without losing promotional opportunity or pay. This ruling aimed to attract naval officers from St. Petersburg to the colonies in order to protect imperial and financial interests in the company. These two acts, the founding of the RAC and involvement of the Russian navy, tied the American colonies to Russian domestic and foreign interests. Following the Tsar's example, Russian aristocrats slowly began to buy company shares.¹²

Historiography

Khlebnikov was among the first Russians to chronicle the early history of Russian America and the RAC. In 1835, he published *Life of Alexander Andreevich Baranov, Chief Manager of the Russian Colonies in America*. Khlebnikov was fortunate to have a plethora of unpublished manuscripts and documents to draw upon; many of them lost to subsequent historians.¹³ Published texts detailing the geography of the Pacific Northwest coastline began appearing in Russia shortly after the Bering expeditions.

¹² Peter A. Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company, Vol. 1* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 54-56. Originally published as *Istoricheskoe obozrenie obrazovaniia rossiisko-amerikanskoj kompanii i deistvie eia do nastoiashchago vremeni*, 1861 and 1863.

¹³ Frank Golder, *Guide to Materials from American History in Russian Archives* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), 145-146. The history and location of RAC documents is a fascinating subject in its own right. According to Frank Golder, an American scholar that scoured Russian archives immediately before and after the Bolshevik Revolution, many of the documents were lost after one archive refused the documents due to the expense of preserving them.

Non-Russian manuscripts were also published in the 1700s, most notably accounts of the British captains Cook and Vancouver. In the early nineteenth century, American, British, German, and Russian adventurers spun yarns about their exploits in these uncharted waters, documenting the geography, ethnography, and commercial prospects of the Pacific Northwest.

Historical interest in Russian America waxes and wanes with the vacillations of contemporary Russian and US diplomacy. Nevertheless, there is a plethora of information on how the Pacific Northwest was explored, colonized, and exploited in books, articles, international conferences, and even dramatic performances. Each generation of scholars, politicians, authors and poets in Russia and America seems to rediscover Russia's history in the Western Hemisphere. In the early twentieth century, historiography of Russian America in both countries was dominated by one question: what was the motivation for Russia's seventeenth and eighteenth century expeditions in the North Pacific. As Stephen Haycox pointed out in 1990, late nineteenth and early twentieth century American historians like Hubert H. Bancroft and Frank Golder argued that scientific exploration was the sole reason for the Russia's exploration efforts.¹⁴ In what could be described as an attempt to re-write the history of the Pacific Northwest's exploration and settlement, they cast doubt upon Russia's claim to have explored the area in 1648. They questioned the expedition leader's technical prowess, the descriptions of the lands he saw, and the quality of the ships that made the journey.

From the 1930s through the 1950s, historical documents in Russia and America were examined on both sides of the Atlantic (or Pacific, if you prefer). They showed

¹⁴ Stephen Haycox, "Russian America: Studies in the English Language," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 59-2 (May, 1990): 243.

Russia's territorial interest in the Pacific Northwest in particular, and validated the 1648 expedition. But even with documentary evidence, it was an uphill battle to reverse the idea, offered by earlier American scholars, that Russian exploration of the Pacific Northwest was a matter of idle scientific curiosity rather than an indication of intent to colonize and settle the region. Works in this vein, even when they recognized the valuable contributions Russians made to our scientific understanding of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, reinforced the idea that Russian America was peripheral to the histories of *both* America and Russia since Russian colonization could be viewed, more or less, a haphazard mistake.

In 1939, Soviet historian Simeon Bentsianovitch Okun argued that Russia's exploration of the Pacific Northwest was connected to plans for potential territorial expansion. His *The Russian American Company* focused on Russia's imperial expansion in the Pacific Northwest under the auspices of the RAC. Examining Russian designs for the Alaskan coastline, California, and Hawaii, Okun argued that Russian exploration and settlement were the result of economic considerations, inspired primarily by Russian aristocrats under the influence of French mercantilist ideas from the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century, Okun was among the first to study how the RAC operated, and his work received much attention in both America and Russia.

From the 1950s until shortly before his death in 2008, Nikolai Bolkhovitinov argued that Russian America was a prism through which Americans and Russians could gain a better understanding of one another during and after the Cold War. His *Stanovlenie Russko-Amerikanskikh otnoshenii, 1775-1815 (The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations 1775-1815)* argued that commercial activity, both in the Atlantic and

the Pacific, played a crucial role in shaping nineteenth century relations between both countries. Bolkhovitinov was instrumental in making documents pertaining to the RAC and US-Russian relations available to scholars, helping to compile and publish archival documents in English and in Russian.¹⁵

Following Bolkhovitinov's work, Soviet historians in the 1970s expounded a more nuanced view of the RAC's activities. In 1975, Aleksandr Ivanovich Alekseev published his *Sud'ba Russkoi-Ameriki, 1741-1867 (The Destiny of Russian America, 1741-1867)*. In it, Alekseev disputes the notion that the New World was explored and colonized in a haphazard manner. He argues that successive waves of state-supported exploration and merchant activity in the eighteenth century, led primarily by a string of competent Siberian governors acting on behalf of the Tsars and Tsarinas, paved the way for Russian commercial exploitation of the Alaskan coastline. Alekseev produced a triumphal narrative that praised Russian exploration efforts, and downplayed the disastrous influence they had on native populations.¹⁶

In America, Richard A. Pierce was instrumental in making Russian secondary sources concerning Russian America available to English speaking readers. His Limestone Press, established in 1972, also produced numerous translations of Russian primary source materials about the Pacific Northwest. Pierce and Bolkhovitinov paved the way for a number of international conferences that have been held over the past 30

¹⁵ Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *Russia and the United States: An Analytical Survey of Archival Documents and Historical Studies* (London: M.E. Sharpe Publishers, 1986) and Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *The United States And Russia. The Beginning of Relations 1765-1815* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1980).

¹⁶ Alekseev, for example, wrote, "Astonishing, bold, and enterprising is the Russian: he plied the Siberian rivers, cut his way through the thickets of the Far Eastern taiga, mastered the Asiatic shores of the Pacific Ocean, and reached Kamchatka." Alekseev, *The Destiny of Russian America*, 35.

years. Sitka hosted at least three international conferences on Russian America: in 1979, 1987, and 2010. Pierce compiled the papers presented at the 1987 conference under the title *Russia in North America*.

In 1994, The Cook Inlet Historical Society hosted a conference in Anchorage to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Vancouver expedition. The proceedings were edited by Stephen Haycox, James Barnett, and Caedmon Liburd and published as *Enlightenment and Exploration in the North Pacific, 1741-1805*. Scholars presented on the intellectual, scientific, and technological underpinnings and motivations of European exploration and settlement of the North Pacific. Five years later, Nikolai Bolkhovitinov sponsored an international conference in Moscow in celebration of the 200-year anniversary of the founding of the RAC. This conference also coincided with the publication of the three-volume *Istorii Russkoi Ameriki*, with articles from Russian and American scholars.

In May 2001, the University of Alaska, Fairbanks hosted the “Meeting of Frontiers” conference as part of the Library of Congress’s efforts to digitize Pacific Northwest archival documents from Russia and America. In 2010, Sitka hosted a third international conference on Russian America, with the papers being published under the title *Over the Near Horizon: Proceedings of the 2010 International Conference on Russian America*. In 2012, the Fort Ross conservancy hosted a bicentennial celebration of the founding of the Russian fort north of San Francisco. Papers and presentations at these conferences around the world had wide-ranging topics, but many dealt directly or indirectly with Russian imperial colonization and the legacy Russia and the United States share in Alaska.

Russian America has also inspired more popular, participatory forms of historical remembrance. In 1956, Montana State University student Frank Brink penned a pageant drama about Russian American colonization entitled *Cry of the Wild Ram*. Brink intended his biopic about the RAC and its first Chief Manager, Alexander Baranov, to be a community project that would connect the populace of Kodiak to their history. Like other pageant dramas of the 1950s, Brink hoped that producing the play would have an “integrating effect” upon people of different races and religions through community engagement in the outdoor performance, set in the location where Russian American history was made.¹⁷ The town of Kodiak began producing the play annually from 1966, two years after a devastating earthquake and tsunami leveled most of the town. With the support of the community an outdoor amphitheatre was erected near Fort Abercrombie, a base created to defend the island in World War II. The annual production was discontinued in 1991 amid logistical concerns and increasing criticism about the play’s insensitive treatment of native populations. There were attempts to revitalize the production by UNC Chapel Hill’s Institute of Outdoor Drama, but these efforts did not get off the drawing board.

In 1983, Soviet composer Alexei Rybnikov and poet Andrei Voznesensky produced a revolutionary rock opera about Russian America. Their *Yunona i Avos* centered on the love affair of Russian aristocrat Nikolai Rezanov and Concepcion de Arguello, the daughter of the commandant of Spanish San Francisco. The opera took its name from two ships in Russian America at the time – the *Yunona* (AKA the *Juno*) and the *Avos* (which, anachronistically, was not finished at the time the events in the

¹⁷ Frank O. Brink, “Cry of the Wild Ram” (Masters thesis, Montana State University, 1956), iv.

opera took place). Poet Voznesensky used the love story as a plea for better understanding between the between the United States and the Soviet Union. This was accentuated by the rock musical score, and modern dance orchestrated by Alexei Rybnikov. The production was a huge success, and still plays to sold out audiences at the Moscow Lenkom theatre, where it debuted thirty-one years ago.

Despite these efforts, Russian America is still largely considered a subaltern field of study - a tangential subject for both Russian and American history in the early nineteenth century. It is frequently dismissed as an exception to the pattern of Russian and American continental expansion, and therefore beyond the purview of American or Russian narratives. There are two primary reasons why the early history of Russian America does not seem to fit into Russian or American history. First, the early years of Russian America are best understood at the local level. That is, the patterns of development and motivations for European presence along the Pacific Northwest coast are closely tied to the individuals that traded in, or colonized, the area rather than to the machinations of political entities in Europe and the United States. Historian Gwenn A. Miller persuasively has shown the value of localized studies of Russian America. Her *Kodiak Kreol: Communities of Empire in Early Russian America* compares and contrasts the settlement of Kodiak and the creation of a Creole population to colonization in the American west and Russian east.¹⁸

Second, but equally important, the history of European and American activities in the area is not distinctively national. The exploration, exploitation, and colonization of the Pacific Northwest involved Spanish, British, Russian, and American state and non-

¹⁸ Gwenn A. Miller, *Kodiak Kreol: Communities of Empire in Early Russian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2010).

state actors during the early period. The commercial activity that followed initial exploration had transnational characteristics, with profits being made in such disparate cities as Irkutsk, Boston, St. Petersburg, and Canton. Competing claims of territorial ownership of the area by the governments of Spain, Russia, Great Britain, and the United States was a late *reaction* to such commercial activities. In 2006, Russian historian Alexander Iurevich Petrov argued that the best way to understand the myriad international and transnational connections that emerged from Russian America is to study the area from the perspective of the domestic and international markets that sprang up around the Pacific Northwest fur trade.¹⁹

More recently, American scholar Ilya Vinkovetsky has explored the peculiarities of Russian America from the perspective of empire from 1804 until its sale to the United States in 1867. In his *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire*, Vinkovetsky looked at how the colonies re-shaped geographical perspectives in continental Russia, and how the RAC adapted to differing European trends in management of overseas holdings.²⁰ Vinkovetsky also focuses on contemporary use and misuse of terminology like *empire*, *imperialism*, and *colonialism* in Russian American historiography. He demonstrates that the colonial policies that emerged, a fusion of changing European imperial norms that justified the subservience of indigenous populations, had a disastrous impact upon the native populations of Russian America.

¹⁹ Aleksandr Petrov, *Rossiisko-amerikanskaia kompaniya: deiatel'nost' na otechestvennom i zarubezhnom rinkakh: 1799-1867* (Moscow, 2006), 10.

²⁰ Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Guided by Jurgen Osterhammel's work on the complex relationship between imperialism and colonialism, Vinkovetsky examines how the Tsarist state, the RAC, and the Russian Navy had to negotiate their often incongruent priorities to resolve conflicting colonial and state interests in the administration of colonies. Osterhammel recognized that colonial reality was "shaped by particular local features overseas, by the intentions and opportunities of the individual colonial powers, and by broader tendencies in the international system... Colonization is thus a phenomenon of colossal vagueness."²¹ Osterhammel's analysis of colonialism, and Vinkovetsky's subsequent reading of Russian-America as a case study, both highlight state policy in the formation of colonialism. As we will see, my work examines the crucial period *before* 1818, when the state took a more active role in the process of governing the colonies. These years demonstrate complexities in the formation of colonies that are overlooked in Osterhammel's and Vinkovetsky's analyses.

Like a ship on the horizon, the *Juno* is occasionally sighted in published and unpublished texts pertaining to Russian America. Her commercial, diplomatic, scientific, and military endeavors found their way into scientific treatises, histories, memoirs, literature, poetry, and even a Russian rock opera. Her owners, officers, crew, and supercargo earned legendary status both in Russian and American historiography and popular literature. In the Pacific Northwest, beyond the frontiers of Europe's imperial influence, the *Juno* was transformed from an American, Yankee merchant vessel into a Russian ship that charted coastlines, opened diplomatic relations, waged war, and protected the newly founded Russian colonies.

²¹ Jurgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, trans. Shelly L. Frisch (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), 4.

And yet, the *Juno* was not a naval vessel. At the edge of world, she *became* whatever was needed. From 1799-1805, she plied the Pacific fur trade on behalf of an influential Rhode Island merchant family. But when the Russian American Company purchased the *Juno* in 1805, she became an instrument of Russian political control over the area - owned by Russian merchants, and commanded by Russian naval officers that signed contracts to work for the RAC.²² During her service, Russian settlements along the Pacific Northwest coastline underwent a dramatic transformation. From isolated outposts under the tentative administration of merchants and *promyshlenniki*, these colonies became settlements inhabited by Russians, natives, and creoles, ministered to by the Siberian Russian Orthodox diocese, and governed by a joint stock company.

Characteristics of Russian America, 1799-1811

The years 1799-1811 were a period of imperial praxis, where European ideas were pressed into service to build empires. European explorers, inspired by the Enlightenment, sought the farthest edges of the shrinking number of lands unknown. Merchants expanded their commercial and political influence. They both converged on the Alaskan coastline at the time, testing their ideas of the natural and commercial world. Before Russian America was consolidated under direct Russian imperial management in 1818, it was studied by merchants, explorers, and scientists. The early

²² The brevity of the *Juno*'s service to the RAC was not unusual. Built in 1799, she became a Russian vessel in 1805; sinking six years later. Of the 26 vessels used by the Shelikov-Golikov and later the Russian American Company during Baranov's tenure as Chief Manager (1792-1818), only five ships had a lifespan of ten or more years. At least 14 vessels were wrecked in such service. Two of the five vessels that survived ten years or more of sailing the Northern Pacific, the *Juno* and the *Atahualpa* (renamed the *Bering* when she entered Russian service), were American merchant vessels sold to the Russians.

nineteenth century was a period when those on the far-flung periphery could, at times, exert disproportionate influence on policies set in the European and American capitals for these regions. In the initial absence of direct political control, Russian America was literally and figuratively a fluid frontier – favoring commercial enterprises over political and social stability, and encouraging inhabitants to adopt a variety of social roles unthinkable on the continent.

Ships like the *Juno* navigated these waters. They were at times self-contained communities, invested with sovereign powers to negotiate with foreign powers in the absence of direct orders from the metropole in ways inconceivable with overland expansion. As a result, Russian America was also a cosmopolitan frontier. Its leaders at the time negotiated with the Americans, British, and Spanish. Russian, Spanish, British, and American explorers, merchants, naval officers, and company employees were dependent upon one another for survival in an environment that was hostile. In addition, Americans, Danes, Brits, and Prussians were all employed in the Russian colonies, even during the late eighteenth century.

There was also a profound urge to rationalize and describe this frontier – a prerequisite for eventual political subjugation in the period that followed. As we will see, Russians and non-Russians alike used science and technology, commerce, and ideas shaped by the Enlightenment to examine this frontier. It is easy to overlook the technological and scientific benefits that ships like the *Juno* gave to the vastly outnumbered Russians that colonized the area.²³ The abilities to accurately chart

²³ Sheila Jasanoff, “Reconstructing the past, Constructing the Present: Can Science Studies and the History of Science Live Happily Ever After?” *Social Studies of Science* 30 no. 4 (Aug., 2000): 623 and Sheila Jasanoff, (ed). *States of Knowledge: The Co-*

positions and to safely traverse vast distances without succumbing to diseases were advantages that those on the *Juno* enjoyed because of advances in the technology of sailing during eighteenth century. Such advances allowed the ship to become both a product and producer of knowledge. Before and after the *Juno* was purchased by the Russians, she conducted commercial and scientific expeditions that plotted political, ethnographic, and geographical space. She was, by far, the most advanced ship in the Russian American Company's fleet during her tenure.

When the early history of Russian America is viewed from her bow, we glimpse a fascinating moment of maneuver. Before interests were solidified along the coast or in the seats of power, colonists had to negotiate new social norms and manage relations with foreign powers while living just beyond the political reach of Europe and America. The *Juno* played a role in this process. She was also crucial to the immediate survival of the Russian American colonies. Her short but eventful life helped to shape the Russian periphery before the Tsarist government began to shape colonial practices and policies.

Production of Science and Social Order (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13. Historians often overlook the complex relationship between science and technology on the one hand, and social and cultural change on the other. Sheila Jasanoff, one of the pioneers in the interdisciplinary field of Science and Technology Studies (S&TS), noted the strained relationship in her address to the History of Science Society in November, 1999. "Historians of science," she expounded, "often seem to share with scientists the suspicion that the firm ground of reality will dissolve into a quagmire of make-believe if social constructivists are allowed to have their way with science and technology." But overcoming the tendency to think that technology and politics occupy separate spheres, Jasanoff has argued that, "[b]oth doing and being, whether in the high citadels of modernity or in its distant outposts, play out in territories shaped by scientific and technological invention. Our methods of understanding and manipulating the world curve back and reorder our collective experience along unforeseen pathways."

Memoirs from the *Juno*

Gleaned from the memoirs and biographies of the intriguing, foolhardy, and legendary personalities that plied the Alaskan coastline in search of glory and profit, the stories of those that sailed upon the *Juno* illuminate how this frontier was explored, exploited, and colonized. These stories also reveal how such activities on the periphery shaped the participants. Russian America frustrated the expectations of those that explored it, and often forced them to rethink the assumptions that they brought from Europe and the United States. The needs of the colonies often forced such men to assume social or political roles for which they were ill equipped or unqualified in the metropolises. Thus, while many view the history of Russian America from the perspective of empire and imperialism, the *Juno's* lifespan tells the story of how men of various occupations and backgrounds transformed, and were transformed by, their experiences beyond the frontiers of empire.

The *Juno's* owners, passengers, crewmembers, and officers also played an important role in *documenting* the status of the fledgling Russian colonies eighteen years after Shelikov landed at Kodiak. Their texts were also part of a larger effort to bring an encyclopedic knowledge of far-flung regions of the globe back to metropolises in Europe and the United States. The process of Russian exploration in the North Pacific began with Bering's two expeditions in the 1720s and 1740s. Natural scientific voyages continued with British, Russian, and American explorers throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, occurring in conjunction, and at times in conflict, with the commercial endeavors. The agenda for this exploration was shaped largely by Enlightenment ideas that remained popular among Europe's literate population. Beyond mapping the coastline, Russian and non-Russian explorers attempted to

produce accurate written descriptions of flora, fauna, and natural phenomena they observed. Many were inspired by the Encyclopedists, who sought to collect comprehensive knowledge of the natural world. The rush to discover and document unknown lands inspired many British, American, German and Russian explorers, scientists, and merchants to the Pacific in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Studying the plants, animals, natural resources, commerce, and native populations along Russia's newly colonized coastline was a crucial step in subjugating it. Academic and scientific classification was a crucial first step in establishing intellectual hegemony over peripheral territories.²⁴ The transport of amateur and professional natural historians along the Pacific Northwest coast for the purposes of comparing and contrasting natural and ethnographic *specimens* justified their eventual conquest. Their writings also offered the increasingly literate European population titillating tales of adventure in strange lands.

Beyond entertainment value, natural history was privileged as a crucial enterprise during the period. For the Encyclopedists, it was the foundation for scientific investigation of the natural world. As James Llana illustrated, the Encyclopedists defined science as the application of human reason to objects of natural history. Thus,

[d]epending upon the path taken from natural history, one arrives at mathematics or physics... the objects of natural history offer the science of general physics; studied for what sets them apart into smaller groups, the objects of natural history yield the particular sciences of natural history,

²⁴ John R.R. Christie, "Ideology and Representation in Eighteenth-Century Natural History" *Oxford Art Journal*, 13 no. 1 (1990): 3. As Christie points out, natural historians were contemporaries of the Enlightenment *philosophes*. Both amateur and professional natural historians brought the ideals of Enlightenment Europe all over the world in their investigations long before other scientists. In addition, Christie points out, they brought specific skills like "hunting, finding, drying, stuffing, arranging and displaying; horticultural skills of fertilizing, growing, cutting and grafting" to these areas.

namely zoology, physical astronomy, meteorology, cosmology, botany, mineralogy, and chemistry. Supporting the arts, trades, manufacturing practices, and all the natural sciences, the simple study of natural history carries a great deal of epistemological weight in the encyclopedic scheme.²⁵

Voyages of discovery and exploration depended upon having natural historians on board. They lent scientific legitimacy to the expeditions, and brought the intellectual ideas of Europe to bear upon the lands that were “discovered.”

In this vein, Shelikov introduced Russian America to elite circles throughout Russia. After his return from the Kodiak colony that he founded, Shelikov reported what he had done to the Governor of Irkutsk. Knowing that his report would eventually wind up in St. Petersburg, Shelikov included a number of observations about the natural history of Kodiak, including descriptions of the natives and their cultural practices. Shelikov’s report was published in 1787, and again with some modifications in 1791, as *A Voyage to America, 1783-1786*. He shamelessly promoted the settlement he founded, downplaying armed confrontations with the Alutiiq natives. He cast the “savages” as a naive, simple, but dangerous people who could be brought around to Russian ways and faith if only the Court were to extend its protection to Shelikov’s endeavors.²⁶

²⁵ James Llana, "Natural History and the Encyclopaedie" *Journal of the History of Biology*, 33 no. 1 (Spring 2000): 4.

²⁶ Shelikov deftly couched his aggressive actions as “zeal for the interests of the Highest throne.” In agreement with his partners, he believed that “the first duty was to pacify the savages in the interest of the government” (Shelikov, *A Voyage to America*, 40-41). At the end of his account, Shelikov provides his readers with a description of “the American islands, the people who live there, their manners, customs, and clothing, and the animals and birds to be found there” (Shelikov, *A Voyage to America*, 52). Describing the natives as a fixture of the physical environment was a hallmark of eighteenth and early nineteenth century natural science, which viewed the native population as a part of the natural habitat.

A number of visitors to Russian America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries wrote about their experiences, including several who sailed aboard the *Juno*. While the technical or scientific value of these writings varied greatly, they all point to a fascinating process: the *creation* of political, academic, and commercial experts from those that visited or lived in the colonies. The absence of qualified experts combined with the difficulties endemic to traveling to the North Pacific at the time meant that experts more often than not were *produced* in the area in reaction to the circumstances they encountered. Mirroring the process by which the *Juno* became a ship of commerce, diplomacy, and war in reaction to the needs of the colonies, these men stepped outside of social roles prescribed in the metropolises of empire.

The *Juno's* scientific, commercial, and diplomatic voyages expose this social dynamic and the conflicts it sometimes caused in the colonies during their early years. In the absence of the *soslovie* system (which classified Russian subjects as nobility, clergy, urban dwellers, or peasants based upon each group's emerging corporate identities and legal responsibilities), *promyshlenniki* and merchants in the American colonies became political *and* social leaders in ways that were unthinkable across Russia's Eurasian empire. In letters and published texts, Russian naval officers who visited the coast in the early nineteenth century frequently referred to the Russian colonists, many of whom were European Russians exiled to Siberia, as drunkards, criminals, and scoundrels. Many colonists *did* possess less-than-desirable traits, but the authors were also unsure as to where to place the Company employees in the class systems that existed in continental Russia. The blurred social lines of the overseas colonies are striking even in comparison to the ports of Okhotsk and Petropavlovsk

along the eastern coast of Siberia, which possessed Russian political and social structures despite their vast distance from St. Petersburg and Moscow.

While affording considerable social opportunities, the overseas colonies were also frequently the site of conflict between different Russian social classes. Nowhere is this more plainly seen than aboard ships like the *Juno*. Life aboard a ship, particularly one crewed by naval officers or seamen, necessitated a strict chain of command with harsh penalties for social transgression. Captains and officers bestowed with command and charged with the safety of the crew frequently disdained and ridiculed merchants, *promyshlenniki*, and non-commissioned aristocrats. The chain of command, meant to maintain order onboard the ship, was frequently used to vent hostility toward those who might possess higher rank on land. Thus, the voyages of the *Juno* also show how social status was frequently negotiated in the colonies and at sea before the consolidation of state control over colonial management.

The *Juno* in Five Acts

My work examines Russian America during the years 1799-1811, which Gwenn Miller refers to as “elusive” in the current historiography of Russian America.²⁷ The *Juno* sailed before waves of Russian exploration on the Alaskan mainland began in the 1810s and 1830s-1840s. She held the colonies together before direct Russian Imperial control was established and the colonies developed what Miller called a “full social and cultural life.” The sources I draw upon give a glimpse of Russian and American commercial, diplomatic, and scientific activities in the area before control was shifted to the Russian Navy. The authors of these memoirs and accounts offer a fascinating

²⁷ Miller, *Kodiak Kreol*, xiii.

range of thoughts and opinions upon the future success or failure of the colonial endeavor and demonstrate the impact the colonies had upon the lives of the authors.

Told in five acts, what follows is the saga of the *Juno* and those that sailed upon her. Taken together, these acts thematically reveal how ships were the lynchpin technology that drove commerce, scientific exploration, diplomacy and colonization Russian America. Between 1799 and 1811, in the absence of direct management from Europe and America, ships were used to establish the norms of international relations in the North Pacific – with the *Juno* playing crucial roles during her American and Russian service. Each act is divided into scenes that explore components of Russia’s overseas colonization effort that the *Juno* illuminates: how commercial activity shaped political, cultural, and economic life in the colonies in ways at variance with Russia’s social structure; how criticism of RAC commercial and political practices arose from natural historical and ethnographic treatises; and the role of the colonies in initiating, and at times provoking, international diplomatic relations.

The *Juno*’s history encapsulates what Stephen Haycox referred to as a period of “subsequent” Russian expeditions, after the initial exploration voyages of Dezhnev and Bering in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Haycox noted that this second wave of expeditions was “important in terms of ethnography, ethnology, and natural history.”²⁸ The *Juno*’s lifespan also coincided with what Gwenn Miller referred to as the “initial period of Russian colonization in Alaska” between the 1740s and 1818. This period was unique, she argues, because it fell between older modes of colonialism and

²⁸ Stephen Haycox, “Russian America: Studies in the English Language” *Pacific Historical Review*, 59 no. 2 (May, 1990): 248-249.

those that we understand now under the rubric of nineteenth century imperialism.²⁹

Russian historians similarly recognize this period as unique.

The period immediately following the loss of the *Juno* was a turning point in the development of Russian America. The Wars of 1812 had a profound impact on the political economy of the area. Initially, the Russian colonies and the RAC greatly benefitted from British blockades on American ports, and access to Chinese markets increased at the time. American merchants did not fully recover their position in the fur trade until the 1820s, by which time Russian colonies were well established. Russian American territorial boundaries then became a source of diplomatic contention between Washington and St. Petersburg. In the long run, the Russian imperial gaze shifted towards Europe in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. This shift brought the era of Russian expansion along the American coastline to an end. Dreams of Russian North Pacific hegemony, cherished by many aboard the *Juno*, began to fade as the Russian state consolidated control over the colonies.

In the first act, I examine Russian and American commercial activity in the Pacific Northwest. I start with the maiden voyage of the *Juno*, exploring the geographic and commercial range of “Yankee” activity in the region prior to regular contact with the Russians. I then shift focus to Russian presence in the region around Kodiak from 1791 until 1803, detailing the pressures that encouraged Alexander Baranov to expand the colonies towards Sitka and the establishment of regular contact with American merchants (primarily from Boston). Baranov was a monumental figure – a man whose guidance (and often ruthlessness) transformed failing fur trading outposts along the

²⁹ Miller, *Kodiak Kreol*, x.

Alaskan coastline into a network of Russian colonies under the administration of the RAC and the Russian state. His life and work demonstrates both the social mobility and insecurity that life in the overseas colonies offered colonists.

In act two, we meet 'Nor'west' John DeWolf, the American who captained the *Juno* on her second trip from Rhode Island to trade along the Pacific Northwest coastline. This voyage, which left Providence in August 1804, coincided with the beginning of regular contact between Yankee merchants and the RAC. Interaction between Russians and the Americans was complex, with the latter often undermining Russian attempts to pacify the regions where they hunted for sea otter furs. I also examine John DeWolf's journey from Sitka to St. Petersburg after the sale of the *Juno*, and the fascinating narrative he wrote for his family to remember his adventures. Having observed life in the Russian colonies, the condition of the natives under Russian suzerainty, and Russian social customs from Kamchatka to St. Petersburg, DeWolf gave his readers a sense of the social fabric of the Russian empire from one end to the other in the early nineteenth century.

The third act introduces Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov, Chamberlain of the Court for Alexander I, ambassador to Japan, and plenipotentiary for the Russian American colonies. Rezanov was the catalyst that bound the interests of the Russian state to the fortunes of the company founded by Grigory Shelikov. Scene one examines Rezanov's precarious position as one of the first Russian aristocrats to actively engage in international trade. Scene two explores his motives for the purchase of the *Juno* and his famed trip to San Francisco. While attempting to secure his company's financial interests in the North Pacific, Rezanov nearly caused a mutiny on the first Russian

circumnavigation of the globe, courted the daughter of a prominent family in Spanish California, and managed to initiate hostilities against the Japanese.

Act four examines the writings of Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, who served as Rezanov's physician on the latter's visit to the Russian American colonies. Langsdorff was also an amateur naturalist. While observing the flora and fauna of the North Pacific, Langsdorff investigated the manner of Russian colonization, and compared it to the Spanish colonies he observed while aboard the *Juno*. His natural historical perspective contrasted sharply with the commercial ideas that influenced European and American merchants in the area, offering a bleak outlook for the success of the Russian American colonies before political control could be fully exerted.

Act five tells the captivating tale of two Russian naval officers, Lieutenant Nikolai Aleksandrovich Khvostov and Midshipman Gavril Ivanovich Davydov, who commanded the *Juno* in 1806 and 1807. Khvostov, like Rezanov, encountered several problems adjusting to the cultural conditions of the Russian American colonies, where the young Lieutenant felt insulted by the merchants that initially ran operations along the Pacific Northwest. Davydov's *Two Voyages to Russian America, 1802-1807*, published posthumously in two parts between 1810 and 1812, offered up an ethnographic study of the native populations along the Alaskan coast. Khvostov and Davydov's time in Russian America, coupled with their heroics in military engagements in the Baltics afterwards, attracted the attention of prominent leaders in the Russian Admiralty as well as influential poets of the day.

I conclude with a look at the peculiarities of Russian America during the period 1799-1811, focusing on how and why the period was so important to both America and

Russia. I demonstrate how the American and Russian capitals began to react to events in the colonies to take a leading role in their activities. I also look at how this period influenced subsequent developments not only Russian America, but also American and Russian cultural memory. While the history of Russian America certainly does not end with the sinking of the *Juno* in November 1811, the next year would bring monumental changes both in America and Russia. The wars of 1812 on the American and European continents temporarily shifted political (and historical) attention away from the Pacific. As we will see, though, the *Juno* wound up transcending its brief history, reminding both Americans and Russians of their shared history at the other end of the world at the start of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2
ACT 1 – FROM EXPLORATION TO EXPLOITATION: RUSSIANS AND AMERICANS
IN THE PACIFIC FUR TRADE, 1799-1803

Scene 1 – A Yankee Merchant Vessel in the Pacific Northwest, 1799-1803

Wherein we learn about the construction of the *Juno*, its intended purpose, and burgeoning American participation in the Pacific Fur Trade

In 1799, shipwrights in Dighton, Massachusetts completed construction of the *Juno*. A town better known for a mysterious petroglyph-carved boulder discovered nearby in 1690, Dighton was an important port and shipbuilding center throughout much of the eighteenth century. According to ship registries in Rhode Island - where the *Juno* was registered in 1800 - she measured 82.5 feet long, 24 feet wide, and 12 feet deep, and could displace up to 295 tons fully loaded.¹ She was designed as a fast-sailing merchant vessel, with a sharp keel that was lined with copper.

A three-masted ship with two decks, the *Juno* was capable of much longer journeys than many merchant vessels that plied the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Records say that she was fitted with a female figurehead on the bow, likely a representation of the Roman goddess Juno. One of her early captains, John DeWolf, considered her a “crack ship” for her time, outfitted to embrace “all that was needed for both comfort and convenience.”² Like many merchant vessels of the day, she was armed to ward off pirates and privateers. This gave her what DeWolf called a “formidable and warlike appearance.”

The *Juno*’s very name conjures images of the Roman Empire’s maritime influence in the Mediterranean. As the queen of the Roman pantheon, Juno oversaw

¹ *Ships Registers and Enrollments of Newport, Rhode Island 1790-1939* (Providence: The National Archives Project, 1938-1941), 355.

² John DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific and a Journey through Siberia More than Half a Century Ago*. (Cambridge: Welch Bigelow, and Company, 1861), 2.

counseling the state, protection of women, fertility, and birth. Her American maritime namesake was one of many merchant vessels that were constructed for the international commerce that ran through American ports. They were the financial backbone of Thomas Jefferson's expanding Empire of Liberty.³ Yankee merchants like the DeWolfs were pioneers in a vast commercial frontier that spanned the globe. Their activities played a central role in the development of the American foreign commercial and diplomatic relations with countries like Russia.

Less than a decade after Adam Smith published *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, American ships from New England – often mastered by their owners or by family members – made their way into Baltic ports. In June 1784, Elias Hasket Derby's ship the *Light Horse* exchanged sugar for Russian shipbuilding materials.⁴ Subsequent trips by American merchants included stops in South Carolina for rice, and to the West Indies for sugar and rum, before heading for Russia's Baltic ports. Along with tobacco and cotton, these products remained the primary items of trade between America and Russia as late as 1811.⁵ The pace of Massachusetts's shipbuilding, coupled with shortages of shipbuilding materials in the US, encouraged the

³ Jefferson's phrase "Empire of Liberty" has been used to describe American political economy during the Jeffersonian period as well as Jefferson's expansionist tendencies and his seemingly incongruent political philosophy on individual liberty and limitation of state prerogatives. As President, Jefferson sought to eliminate taxes where possible, relying instead on import duties to fund the American government. See Robert W. Tucker and David C Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 35.

⁴ James Duncan Phillips, "Salem Opens American Trade with Russia." *The New England Quarterly* 14 no. 4 (Dec 1941): 685.

⁵ Levitt Harris, "Particulars of Goods passed the Sound for the Baltic Markets in American Vessels from the first of January to the first of December 1811" Dispatches From U.S. Consuls in St. Petersburg, Russia, 1803-1906. National Archives and Record Service, M81, 18:2.

growth of this trade with Russia. Between 1791 and 1800, 350-500 American ships arrived in Kronstadt to trade with the Russians.⁶ It is therefore likely that Russian materials were actually used in the construction of the *Juno*. Soon thereafter, US-Russian diplomatic relations began with the exchange of formal ambassadors. Thus, by the early nineteenth century, one historian has noted, "American officials, acting in support of the country's merchants, missed no opportunity to advance their commercial interests in both the Baltic and the Russian North Pacific."⁷

In the same year that the *Light Horse* arrived in Russia, accounts of Captain James Cook's third expedition in the Pacific became available in America. Yankee merchants learned of Cook's trade in sea otter pelts with the natives of the Pacific Northwest coast, and how he exchanged these pelts with Chinese merchants for fabulous profits. Boston companies had already established trade contacts with the Chinese, but they lacked a product the Chinese wanted.⁸ When American adventurer John Ledyard published an account of his journey across Siberia, noting the tenuous nature of Russia's colonies on the Pacific Northwest coastline, Boston merchants saw an opportunity that could not be passed up. William Sturgis, a veteran of the Pacific Northwest trade, wrote in 1822 that, "[t]he Citizens of the United States, then just recovering from the entire prostration of their commerce by the revolutionary war, and possessing more enterprise than capital, were not slow in perceiving the benefits likely

⁶ Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *The United States: An Analytical Survey of Archival Documents and Historical Studies* (London: M.E. Sharpe Publishers, 1986), 97.

⁷ David W. McFadden, "John Quincy Adams, American Commercial Diplomacy, and Russia, 1809-1825" *The New England Quarterly* 66 no. 4 (Dec 1993): 614.

⁸ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 46.

to result from the participation in a branch of trade, where industry and perseverance could be substituted for capital."⁹

In 1787, companies in Boston banded together to send two ships, the *Columbia* and the *Washington*, to retrace the profitable exchange of furs that were described in John Ledyard's memoirs and Cook's writings. John Kendrick was given command over the expedition. Kendrick's family later claimed that he was part of Cook's third voyage, but that was never verified.¹⁰ Despite Kendrick's death in the Hawaiian Islands in 1794, the financial success of the Kendrick expedition encouraged others to follow suit. By 1795, as one historian noted, the Americans replaced the British as the main competitors to Russian merchants in the Pacific Northwest.¹¹ And Boston merchants dominated this trade by 1801, with 14 of the 16 American vessels trading along the Pacific Northwest hailing from Boston.

Commerce first brought the *Juno* to the North Pacific in 1802. As a Yankee merchant vessel, she would have conducted trade with many native tribes along the Pacific Northwest coast, including the Haida, Tsimshian, and the Tlingit. At the time, the coastline between the mouth of the Columbia River and Yakutat Bay was open to trade, as the Russians could not exert any significant influence beyond the area around the Kodiak Archipelago. Few details are known about the first voyage of the *Juno* to the Pacific Northwest. In the early nineteenth century, Yankee merchants were hesitant to

⁹William Sturgis, "Examination of the Russian Claims to the Northwest Coast of America." *North American Review* 15 (1822): 370-371.

¹⁰ Briton C. Busch and Barry M. Gough, *Fur Traders from New England: The Boston Men in the North Pacific 1787-1800* (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1997): 36. Kendrick witnessed the Nootka crisis unfolding between Britain and Spain while harbored in Nootka Sound. He was reportedly the first American to visit Japan. He never made it back to America from the expedition, dying in Hawaii in a freak accident.

¹¹ Wheeler, "Empires in Conflict," 422.

share their knowledge of the trade. It wasn't until many years later, in the 1830s and 1840s that merchants began to reminisce about their experiences in the Pacific. In 1857, William Tufts compiled a chart of American vessels that plied these waters for the fur trade based, in part, upon information obtained from Captain William Sturgis.¹² Tufts listed the *Juno* sailing from Bristol, Rhode Island in 1801.

The Tufts chart also listed the owner of the ship as "De Wolf." The DeWolf family of Bristol, Rhode Island played a prominent role in the early American slave trade. The oligarch of the family, James DeWolf, plied the Atlantic slave trade as a captain in the 1790s. During the War of 1812, several of his vessels became privateers against the British. After dodging charges of murder for allegedly throwing a sick slave overboard during one of his expeditions, James DeWolf became a U.S. senator for Rhode Island between 1821 and 1825. The DeWolfs controlled many facets of the slave trade: they owned plantations in Cuba, rum distilleries in New England, and several slaving vessels. Ship registry records indicate that the DeWolfs owned at least three ships bearing the name *Juno*. The first was a schooner used for the slave trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Another *Juno* owned by the DeWolf family also used in the slave trade, but was appropriated by the American government during the War of 1812.¹³

¹² James Gilchrist Swan, *The Northwest Coast: Or, Three Years' Residence in Washington Territory* (Washington: Harper & Brothers, 1857), 423-425. Tufts listed "Kendrick" as her captain. In 1922, F.W. Howay wrote an article in which he pondered the possibility that this might have been John Kendrick Jr. - the son of the Pacific Northwest pioneer John Kendrick. But subsequent investigation shows that the voyage was actually captained by Jabez Gibbs.

¹³ *Ship Registers and Enrollments of Newport, Rhode Island 1790-1939*, (Providence: The National Archives Project, 1938-1941), 143.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, James DeWolf looked to diversify his family's commercial activities, undoubtedly due to increasingly restrictive U.S. legislation passed between 1794 and 1807 that limited the slave trade. After Boston merchants established the Pacific fur trade in the 1790s, the DeWolfs used their commercial contacts and resources to explore the trade for themselves. As historian Jean Mudge has noted, merchant families in Rhode Island were ideally situated to participate in the China trade, as they had more capital available than their New York or Massachusetts counterparts at the time.¹⁴ And the *Juno* was well suited for this journey – her double-deck design allowed for relative comfort. In addition, the ship's carrying capacity ensured a comfortable profit margin. She was also well armed, and her copper lined keel gave her the speed needed to navigate Cape Horn, and prevent the buildup of speed-sapping barnacles on her hull.

The ship registry of Newport, Rhode Island lists that the *Juno* was initially registered to “James D. Wolf, William D. Wolf, John D. Wolf, and Jeremiah Dimon (merchants) of Bristol” on January thirteenth, 1800. On March 18, 1801, the ship was re-registered, adding “George and Charles D. Wolf” as owners, with the master of the ship being a captain by the name of Jabez Gibbs.¹⁵ The Bristol-Warren ship registry

¹⁴ Jean McClure Mudge, *Chinese Export Porcelain for the American Trade, 1785-1835* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1981), 112.

¹⁵ *Ships Registers and Enrollments of Newport, Rhode Island 1790-1939* (Providence: The National Archives Project, 1938-1941), 355. James A. McMillin, an historian at Southern Methodist University, compiled a database of slaving ships for his book *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America 1783-1810*. These records show that Jabez Gibbs was Master on board a slave ship inappropriately named *Delight*. She sailed from Rhode Island to Africa, picking up 72 slaves for delivery to Savannah Georgia between 1795 and 1796. Afterwards, Gibbs sailed aboard the *Neptune* in 1800, which also left Bristol for the African slave trade. Gibbs is not again mentioned aboard a slaving vessel in McMillin's appendix until October 1804, when he sailed from Rhode

shows only one subsequent re-registration, on August 10, 1804, to John D. Wolf and George D. Wolf, with "John D Wolf 2d." listed as master.¹⁶ It was during this three-year gap that the *Juno* first sailed for the Pacific Northwest coast.

These three years saw a number of changes in America, Russia, and along the Pacific Northwest coast. In March 1801, Thomas Jefferson was elected President of the United States and Alexander I ascended to the throne as the Russian Tsar. Jefferson spearheaded the Louisiana Purchase, which made America a continental power and opened the door to a century of Western expansion. Alexander I initially embraced the Enlightenment ideals of his grandmother, Catherine the Great. Alexander's pivot away from the reactionary policies of his father, Paul I, drew Jefferson's attention. In a letter to Dr. Joseph Priestly, Jefferson noted that, "the apparition of such a man on a throne is one of the phenomena which will distinguish the present epoch so remarkable in the history of man."¹⁷

Island to Africa on the *Jane*, owned by James DeWolf. The gap of four years between slaving runs matches the time Gibbs would have spent along the Pacific Northwest coast. See James A. McMillin, *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America 1783-1810* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

¹⁶ *Ship Registers and Enrollments of Bristol-Warren Rhode Island 1773-1939* (Providence: National Archives Project, 1941), 143. In 1959, historian George Howe erroneously reported that it was sold to the DeWolfs in 1804. In his *Mount Hope*, Howe wrote that the *Juno*'s 1801 trip to the Pacific was captained by James Phillips, who also owned the vessel. In Howe's account, the *Juno* had been built for Phillips in 1799 by Caleb Carr, a Warren, Massachusetts shipwright. According to Howe, the *Juno* arrived at Canton in 1802, from whence Phillips returned to Bristol with a cargo of Chinese goods valued at \$30,000. Howe further indicated that Phillips would have made more money, had he included a trip to the Pacific Northwest. After this trip, according to Howe, James and Charles DeWolf bought the *Juno* from Phillips for \$7,600. But there is no reference to Phillips owning the *Juno* in the Bristol or Newport registries, and the ship was spotted by others along the Pacific Northwest coast at the time. See George Howe, *Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), 135.

¹⁷ Paul Leicester Ford (ed.), *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: GP Putnam's & Sons, 1892-1899), 179. "But," Jefferson continued, "he must have a

This period also marked the high point of trade between Yankee merchants and natives in the area of Vancouver Island in the Pacific. The *Juno*, like ships from Boston, traded primarily with Tlingits along a wide swath of territory between Spanish California, and the Russian settlements near Kodiak. Despite the Russian government's claim to lands as far south as the fifty-fifth parallel, the Russians seldom ventured south of Kodiak before 1799 due to a lack of resources and the hostility of the Tlingit population. The Russians found these natives, whom they called the *Kolosh*, to be far more war-like and fearsome than the Aleutian Unangas and Kodiak Alutiiq tribes they had subdued.¹⁸ As a result, Yankee merchants had little contact with the Russians between 1787 and 1801.

Ship captains, primarily Boston merchants or captains hired by family-owned merchant companies, established contact with natives along the coast to trade cheap manufactured goods, such as bolts of cloth, beads, fishing hooks, and sewing needles in exchange for furs. Sea otter pelts were particularly prized by New Englanders for their trade value in Canton.¹⁹ Many of these companies, such as the one owned by

herculean task to devise and establish the means of securing freedom and happiness to those who are not capable of taking care of themselves.”

¹⁸ Andrei Valterovich Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America 1741-1867* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 22. Originally published as *Indeitsy Tlinkity v period russkoi ameriki (1741-1867 gg)*, 1991. According to Grinev, the word *Koloshi*, derived from 'kaluzhka' - a Russianization of the word Aleutian Unangas natives used to describe the objects that Tlingit women wore as piercings below their bottom lip. "The word kaluzhka," Grinev noted, "probably originated from the Aleut word kaluga, meaning wooden vessel, which was borrowed by the Russians who lived in the Aleutian Islands."

¹⁹ While the relative value of the furs fell in Canton between Captain Cook's third expedition and the early nineteenth century, it was still exceptionally profitable. According to Hector Chevigny, Cook sold 560 sea otter furs for 5000 pounds sterling. While selling the *Juno* in 1805, John DeWolf valued 572 sea otter skins at \$13,062. See: Hector Chevigny, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture 1741-1867* (New

James and Thomas Lamb of Boston, had a truly international focus. The Lambs also had trade ties with the Dutch, the Danes, and the Russians in the Baltic.²⁰ Having partially funded the first American expedition to the Pacific Northwest and Canton in 1787, the Lambs also established business connections in China that proved invaluable in their future Pacific operations.²¹

But direct trade with indigenous populations in the area was not without risks. As Captain William Sturgis, a veteran of the Pacific fur trade later described, frequent Yankee and British mistreatment of the natives often produced animosity that spilled over into violence.²² One such episode occurred in 1803, when the Mowachaht of Vancouver Island overran a ship called the *Boston* after the captain insulted their chief, Maquinnah. James Rodgers Jewitt, one of only two crewmembers that survived the massacre, was held hostage for nearly three years before being rescued. During that time he recorded his observations of the Mowachaht in the *Boston's* ship log, which he managed to salvage from the wreckage.²³

York: The Viking Press, 1965), 48-49; and John DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 31.

²⁰ *Lamb Family Papers*, Massachusetts Historical Society. Call Number: Ms. N-1547

²¹ Mudge, *Chinese Porcelain*, 29. The Lamb family sent several large ships into the Pacific trade during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including the *Alert* in 1799 and 1802, and the *Pearl* in 1804; the latter expedition being captained by John Ebbets. One Captain that plied the trade, Captain William Phelps, said of them that, "[t]he names of Messrs. James and Thomas H. Perkins, Theodore Lyman, Esq., and James and Thomas Lamb, all of Boston, and the owners of the Kendrick expedition, will stand as the originators and most prominent merchants of the North West fur trade." See Busch and Gough, *Fur Traders*, 37.

²² William Sturgis, "Examination of the Russian Claims," 370-401

²³ John Rodgers Jewitt, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings, of John R. Jewitt; Only Survivor of the Crew of the Ship Boston, During a Captivity of Nearly Three Years Among the Savages of Nootka Sound: With an Account of the Manners, Mode of Living, and Religious Opinions of the Natives* (Middletown: Seth Richards, 1815).

A couple of days after his capture in March 1803, Jewitt spotted the *Juno* and the *Mary*, which had set out to find the *Boston* days after word reached American merchants along the coast regarding her disappearance. The ships were apparently planning a rescue, but after firing a couple of volleys from their cannons at the well-armed natives, they abandoned the plan and sailed off. In 1805, the infamous Captain Sam Hill successfully rescued Jewitt after reportedly tricking the Mowachaht, holding hostages for his release. In a May 1807 newspaper article, Captain Hill excoriated the captains of the *Juno* and *Mary* for their cowardice. According to Hill, the ships were “commanded by BOWLES and GIBBS.”²⁴ Captain Hill’s article is a fascinating read in shameless self-promotion, but his identification of the *Juno*’s captain as “Gibbs” confirms the information contained in the ship registries of Newport.

There is no evidence that the *Juno* encountered any Russians on its first voyage to the area. While American contact with the Russians became more frequent after 1800, Yankee merchants still tended to avoid contact with European powers in the region. Disputes over political boundaries established by the Spanish, British, and the Russians were impediments to Yankee merchants that sought trade directly with local populations of the Northwest coastline. American merchants also sought to protect their trade from the incursion of these powers. Accusations that the Americans (and British) merchants incited populations against the Russians in 1802 bear considerable credibility.

There were, however, several early points of contact between Americans and Russians that proved important to the history of the colonies. In August 1787, Grigory

²⁴ F.W. Howay, “An Early Account of the Loss of the *Boston* in 1803” *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 17 no. 4 (October 1926), 286.

Shelikov encountered American John Ledyard in Irkutsk, Russia. Ledyard, a well-known American adventurer, was a crewmember on Cook's third expedition to the North Pacific in 1776, and wrote about the expedition in the first book copyrighted in the United States.²⁵ He was thus familiar with the area being colonized by the Russians and the value of sea otter pelts in China before his meeting with Shelikov.²⁶ Shelikov and Ledyard both reported that the American peppered the Russian with questions about the extent and capacity of Russia's operations in the New World, with the former being evasive about the history and size of Russian merchant activity. Shelikov reported to administrators in Siberia and St. Petersburg that he lied to Ledyard, saying there were two thousand Russians in the New World, extending as far south as California. Further, he said, the Russians were extensively exploring the interior of the areas under their occupation.²⁷ He included a transcription of the conversation in his report.

In 1792, Alexander Baranov, Chief Manager of Shelikov's colonies, encountered the *Phoenix*, a British East India Company vessel in Cook's Inlet. On board was an

²⁵ Edward G. Gray, "Visions of Another Empire: John Ledyard, and American Traveler Across the Russian Empire 1787-1788" *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 358.

²⁶ After Cook's third expedition, John Ledyard returned to America. In May 1786, Ledyard wrote to Thomas Jefferson, requesting permission to approach Catherine II of Russia to travel across the Russian Empire to explore forming a trade company in cooperation with the Russians (See Paul Leicester Ford (ed.), *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol 7, 94-95). Without receiving a response from the Russian government, Ledyard set out across Russia, walking from Sweden to St. Petersburg, around the Gulf of Bothnia. He met Shelikov on his first visit to Irkutsk. After proceeding on to Yakutsk, he was arrested in February 1788, sent to Moscow, and deported through Poland. After which, he planned an expedition to explore Africa.

²⁷ Shelikov, *A Voyage to America*, 19.

Irishman that lived in America by the name of Joseph O’Cain.²⁸ O’Cain was a mate aboard the ship, and was present when the British captain spoke with Baranov in halting German. O’Cain learned of the hardships that the Russians endured in a claim to the Pacific Northwest coastline. In 1801, he returned to Russian America aboard the *Enterprise*, a vessel out of New York. O’Cain visited Sitka and Kodiak on this voyage, and learned of the specific needs of the colonies. This information would serve him well in the future. In 1803, O’Cain contracted with the Winship family of Boston to take a ship directly to the Russian settlements to trade goods for furs. It was hoped that this would simplify the process by cutting out the difficulty and danger of haggling with natives along the coast. With so many American vessels now trading along the coastline near Sitka, O’Cain sought an edge by partnering with the Russians.

At the same time that O’Cain’s vessel was departing for Russian America, the *Juno* was headed home. She returned to Rhode Island following a successful expedition to the Northwest Pacific coast and China. An 1886 history of Providence, Rhode Island noted that, “[i]n 1804 the ship *Juno* arrived from Canton, laden with cargo of teas, silks, etc., valued at about \$80,000. Duties paid on this cargo amounting to \$26,124.”²⁹ As we will see, O’Cain’s expedition marked a turning point in trade along the Pacific Northwest coastline. As the Russians began expanding southward, it was

²⁸ O’Cain arrived along the Northwest coast aboard an American vessel named the *Jefferson*. He apparently abandoned the *Jefferson* in favor of the *Phoenix*. There is also evidence that O’Cain lent his services to the Spanish temporarily, before returning to the United States to raise the capital for his own journey to the Pacific Northwest. See Elton Engstrom, “The Saga of Joseph O’Cain,” in John Dust Kidd, ed., *Over the Near Horizon: Proceedings of the 2010 International Conference on Russian America*, (Sitka: Sitka Historical Society, 2013), 17.

²⁹ Welcome Arnold Greene et al., *The Providence Plantations for Two Hundred and Fifty Years...* (Providence: J.A. & R.A. Reid Publishers and Printers, 1886).

impossible to avoid contact with the Russian colonies, as the areas freely available for trade were quickly shrinking.

Scene 2 – Left on an Island: Alexander Baranov, Russian Consolidation, and the Demands of Overseas Colonies, 1791-1804

Wherein we meet Alexander Baranov, examine his impact on Russian America, and glean insight into the fragility of Russia's overseas colonies

By 1799, the Russians could no longer ignore the rich hunting grounds American ships like the *Juno* were exploiting to the southeast of Kodiak. Thirty years of Russian fur hunting along the Aleutian Island chain, the Kodiak Archipelago, and the nearby Alaskan coastline greatly diminished accessible sea otter populations. New hunting grounds had to be found. The presence of the interloping American and British vessels trading along the coast and the Spaniards to the south meant that the window was closing for enforcing Russian claims to the fifty-fifth parallel based upon the eighteenth century Chirikov expedition. Worse, Yankee merchants from Boston began trading muskets, ammunition, and powder to the Tlingit natives, who neighbored the Russians south of Yakutat Bay. The Tlingit began rejecting linen, glass beads, and other trinkets after years of contact with Europeans. While the firearms traded by the Americans and British were primitive by American and European standards, the Russians were alarmed to see them in the hands of a native population that vastly outnumbered them.

Weighing these concerns, the Chief Manager of Shelikov's company and its manager from Kodiak, Alexander Andreevich Baranov, established Fort Mikhailovsk on Sitka Island during the winter of 1799-1800. Venturing more than 700 miles from his base of operations at Kodiak, Baranov hoped a settlement at Sitka would corner the fur trade in the area, making the trade in firearms unprofitable for the Americans. The plan was ambitious. Baranov's hold on existing Shelikov trade operations was tenuous.

With very few Russian employees, Baranov had to maintain control over 11 outposts on the Kodiak Archipelago and 15 *artels* elsewhere along the Alaskan coastline. He had no idea at the time that Tsar Paul I had inaugurated the RAC, combining all private Russian merchant activity under Baranov's control – including the formerly independent Prybilov and Unalaska outposts.³⁰

By the time that Baranov decided to establish an outpost at Sitka, the Kiks.ádi Tlingits that inhabited the island had been trading furs for firearms with the Americans and British for more than a decade. Contact with European and Yankee merchants gave the Tlingits an advantage in dealing with the Russians that the Unangas and Alutiit did not possess when the Russians established themselves in the Aleutians and on Kodiak in the eighteenth century. They were evenly matched against Baranov, considering the technology and men at the latter's disposal in 1799. Well armed, and said to be expert shots, the Tlingit population, which extended from Yakutat Bay in the north to the lands around the Alexander Archipelago in the south, significantly impeded Russian expansion along the Alaskan coast.³¹

³⁰ *Anooshi Lintig Aani Ka Russians in Tlingit America: The Battles of Sitka 1802 and 1804* (Juneau: Sealaska Heritage Institute, 2008), xxxvi.

³¹ S.B. Okun, *The Russian-American Company*, 54. Soviet historian Simeon Okun noted that Russian penetration of the interior of Alaska deemed unimportant at the time, with "emphasis was on coastal positions for trade and defense." Upon reaching Sitka, Okun noted, the Russians were delayed in moving further south, "as it met with resistance from English, who supplied local Tlinkets (Russians called them Koliuzhams) with weapons and training to take Russian fortified positions. In addition, Okun referenced an 1808 memorandum in which the RAC reported that it was unable to expand beyond Sitka due to, "time, lack of opportunity, and especially because of the scarcity of Russian people who know something about the business; for, though there are more than 600 of them, it is still incumbent upon them to secure the island of Sitka as well as everything lying beyond it along the islands and the coast of the mainland."

Portrait of a Russian Merchant

Were it not for Baranov's presence in the Russian colonies, it is unlikely that they would have established an outpost at Sitka. It is equally unlikely that the colonies have survived the disastrous decision to expand towards the southeast without him. The Chief Manager was born into the merchant class of Kargopol in 1746. He was the first and only Chief Manager (and later Governor) of the Russian American colonies that was not a naval officer and member of the aristocracy. Baranov headed to Moscow in 1762, gaining employment with a German merchant. This "on-the-job" education gave Baranov the skills he would need to become a merchant in the Russian empire. At some point after 1780, Baranov moved to Irkutsk, where he found a modicum of success in a variety of businesses, including glass blowing, vodka distilling, and finally the sable fur trade.

The story of Russian America, and Baranov's critical role in its survival, has been told and retold by historians and historical fiction writers alike. As mentioned earlier, Kyrill Khlebnikov, an accountant who worked under Baranov in Russian America and greatly admired him, wrote the first biography of the Chief Manager in 1835. Hubert Bancroft, the nineteenth century historian whose name adorns the University of California, Berkeley Library, devoted considerable attention to Baranov in his historical work on the Pacific Northwest. In 1943, author Hector Chevigny published a biography of Baranov called *Lord of Alaska*. Using a variety of primary and secondary sources, Chevigny told Baranov's story at a time of great historical, social, and military interest in Alaska. *Lord of Alaska*, the second of three books Chevigny wrote about Russian America, highlighted the dramatic decisions Baranov made from 1791 until his death in 1819. Subsequent historians excoriated Chevigny's work for its lack of footnotes and

incorrect transliterations of Russian phrases. Chevigny made no apologies for his triumphalist narrative, which focused in part on how the white man conquered the Pacific Northwest.³²

Baranov's story, and that of Russian America, also proved irresistible to authors of historical fiction. In 1986, Kyra Petrovskaya Wayne wrote *Quest for Empire: The Saga of Russian America*. Wayne's narrative of Russian America cast Baranov, Tsar Alexander I, Nikolai Rumiantsev, and the peasant-merchant-explorer Timofei Tarakanov as protagonists. She frequently refers to what these men were thinking and saying at critical moments in the early history of Russian America.³³ Such entertaining and imaginative portrayals are rife with historical inaccuracies and fall victim to the particular point of view of their authors. But they also indicate a desire among writers and readers to connect with the history of the Alaskan frontier and Alaska's Russian past – a desire that persists to this day.

Chevigny and Wayne both wrote narratives that were at times sensational; departing from what might be considered standard historical methodology. But they both picked up on a key factor in the tale of Russian America: At the fringe of the

³² Chevigny also had a very misogynistic view of the native women in Russia's American colonies. He viewed the native women that took up with Russian men in terms of "domestic economy," describing a woman that was offered as a bride to Baranov as "a comely wench, modest and shy." Hector Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska: Baranov and the Russian Adventure*, (Portland: Binsford & Mort Publishers, 1970), 55

³³ Wayne's account ends in 1807, with an epilogue lamenting what Russian America could have been. Wayne was a fascinating woman. She was born in 1918 in the Crimea to a noble family. Wayne was a concert singer before World War II. During the war, she became a sharpshooter in the Red Army before becoming a nurse when she was wounded by shrapnel. During the siege of Leningrad, she tended the sick and wounded. After marrying a U.S. diplomat, Wayne emigrated to the United States, where she became an entertainer and writer. Her lament for the lost potential of Russian America might just have well been a lament for her loss of Russia.

Russian Empire, at the frontier *beyond* the continental frontier, Baranov had to forge the colonies together in the absence of the traditional Russian class system, transforming disparate hunting outposts into Russian colonies. Russian America required a leader that possessed the qualities of a merchant, a noble, a military leader, and a governor. Such a person did not exist in Russia - he was *created* in the colonies.

Baranov was born into the lower ranks of the merchant class, the *kupechestvo*. Baranov belonged to a new class of merchants, created by Peter the Great. The Tsar urged the creation of such an entrepreneurial group of merchant-manufacturers that would better support his demand for high-quality and high-quantities of goods for Russia's planned military and naval build-up.³⁴ In contrast to Muscovy's old merchant elite, these merchants established commercial networks throughout Russia, with manufacturers in the provinces, rather than centered around Moscow.

But while Peter and subsequent Tsars wanted the economic advantages the middle-merchants brought to the State, they had no interest in changing Russia's complex social system.³⁵ Within the confines of Russian society, these merchants bore little resemblance to their Western European counterparts. They frequently sought to close off their trade and industries from small-scale peasant competition. Their almost immediate retreat from the entrepreneurial spirit Peter sought was the result of their precarious position in Russian society. As historian Alfred Reiber has pointed out, they had virtually no political influence and thus could not adequately defend their economic

³⁴ Daniel Wallace, "Entrepreneurship and the Russian Textile Industry: From Peter the Great to Catherine the Great." *Russian Review*, 54 no. 1 (Jan. 1995): 1-25.

³⁵ Daniel Wallace, "The Merchantry and the Problem of Social Order in the Russian State: Catherine II's Commission on Commerce." *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 55 no. 2 (April 1977): 185-203.

interests. Even merchants that did gain a modicum of social or economic influence had little bearing on Russian society, as "very few of their own kind, that is, other merchants and industrialists, and virtually none of the rest of the population accepted their leadership."³⁶ Thus, merchants great and small, like Shelikov and Baranov, were vulnerable to the loss of their status if and when their fortunes changed.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century merchants in Russia received their privileges in the Russian legal system based upon the amount they paid in taxes. Economic ruin meant a loss of such privileges. As a result, Russian merchants tended to be conservative. They had a patriarchal view of their employees, and preserved traditional attitudes toward family, church, and the state. Merchants often looked and acted differently than their gentry counterparts, despite the yearning among many of them for the stability a noble rank ensured. German was more common than French as a second language among merchants at the time. In addition, Russian merchants tended to dress in traditional Russian fashion, as opposed to the French fashions adorning the well-to-do gentry.

But merchants were active in Russian social and public life. By the eighteenth century, there were indications that they began to identify as a corporate group in Russian society. A recent examination of portraits from eighteenth and nineteenth century Russian merchants revealed that while they sought to be portrayed as traditional Russian subjects, they also sought to highlight their literacy, cosmopolitan commercial contacts, and sophistication through the objects they included in their

³⁶ Alfred Rieber, "Businessmen and Business Culture in Imperial Russia." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 128 no. 3 (Sept 1984): 239.

portraits.³⁷ Indeed, the very fact that portraiture became so popular among the merchants suggested, in Lina Bernstein's words, "a level of sophistication on the part of the patrons, namely, a recognition of the significance of leaving a statement of their human worth and social status in a form other than their own wealth. In that, a portrait can be compared to a diary. These creative forms are engendered by a desire on the part of the model or diarist to establish a persona that can be presented to the world and preserved for all time."³⁸

Baranov's portrait, painted in the colonies shortly before he died, similarly shows him leaning on a desk, writing a letter with a feather-quill-pen. Wearing his Order of St. Vladimir medal as a symbol of his authority, Baranov displays a slight smile. His tired but alert eyes invite the viewer to consider his life and accomplishments. Written descriptions of Baranov abound in literature on Russian America, lending support to his larger-than-life reputation. Gavril Ivanovich Davydov, a midshipman in the Russian Navy, first traveled to Russian America in November, 1802. He recalled that Baranov was, "shorter than average, fair-haired, well-built with very prominent features erased neither by his labors nor by his age..." Davydov found that the Chief Manager of the Russian American colonies was aloof from all but his friends and foreign visitors, upon whom he lavished all that he had. Nevertheless, Davydov wrote, he could not but "look with respect on a man like this who had devoted his life to the improvement of trade in its various forms." Baranov, Davydov continued,

had already been in America for twelve years, in the company of wild and primitive people, surrounded by constant danger. He had been struggling

³⁷ Lina Bernstein, "Russian Eighteenth-Century Merchant Portraits in Words and in Oil." *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 49 no. 3 (Fall 2005): 407-429.

³⁸ Bernstein, "Russian Eighteenth-Century Merchant Portraits," 411.

with the deep-rooted depravity of the Russians living here, working constantly, in need of many things, often hungry, and at the same time almost without anyone who could work with him with the same energy. He was deprived not only of means of spreading trade here, but even of resisting the vengeance of some peoples, alleviating the lot of others enslaved by the Russian-American Company. It seemed as though he had been left completely alone to find within himself the means to make his lot better, and to support the settlements of America. All this work, these obstacles, sorrows, deprivation, and failures had not blighted the spirit of this rare man, although it had naturally had an influence on him and thereby made him rather somber in manner... He is not interested merely in amassing wealth at other peoples' expense, but will willingly share his own just salary with absent friends who are in need. His firmness of spirit and constant presence of mind are the reason why the savages respect him without loving him, and the fame of the name of Baranov resounds amongst all the savage peoples who live on the northwest coast of America, even as far as the Strait of San Juan de Fuca.³⁹

Another Russian, Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov, Chamberlain to the Court of Tsar Alexander I and the son-in-law of Grigory Shelikov, was a guest of Baranov's in 1805. In a letter to the Directors of the Russian American Company, he noted that, "Baranov is quite a unique and happy creation of nature. His name is heard all along the west coast as far as California. The Bostonians respect and honor him, and the natives, even in the most distant places, fear him and offer him their friendship... I have to confess that I am studying this man with great interest."⁴⁰ In a later letter, Rezanov lamented that Baranov was not better appreciated back in Russia. Despite his occasional moroseness, Rezanov concluded that the loss of Baranov would be "painful for the colonies."

As indicated by his Russian contemporaries, Baranov was also well regarded by non-Russians. Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, a German naturalist who visited the

³⁹Gavril Ivanovich Davydov, *Two Voyages to Russian America, 1802-1807* (Ontario: The Limestone Press, 1977), 104. Originally published as *Dvukratnoe puteshestvie v ameriku morskikh ofitserov Khvostova i Davydova, pisannoe sim poslednim*, 1810-1812.

⁴⁰ Peter A. Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company, Volume II* (Kingston, Ontario: The Limestone Press, 1979), 154-155.

Russian American colonies as Rezanov's personal physician recalled that Baranov had "a most extensive local knowledge of the countries under his jurisdiction, and since the greater part of the Promyshlenniki and inferior officers of the different settlements are Siberian criminals, malefactors, and adventurers of various kinds, not a little credit is due to his vigilance and address, that he has been able in any degree to put a bridle on them."⁴¹ Langsdorff was amazed that Baranov was able to erect settlements, enlarge Russian territory, and garner profits for the RAC despite often being on the verge of starvation. American captains had mixed reactions towards Baranov. John DeWolf was "pleasantly surprised" by Baranov. After being told that the Russians had little evolved from a savage state, the Rhode Island merchant found Baranov charming and very hospitable. More religious Yankee captains found his hard-drinking, hard-bargaining demeanor off-putting.⁴² As Margaret Wheeler has noted, "It did not take the Bostonians long to discover that it was as difficult to outwit this small unprepossessing merchant as it was to out drink him... Aleksandr Baranov was soon well known in Boston as a man whose word was as good as his bond. It was a rare ship from Boston bound for the coast without a cask of Madeira or Port to be presented to the Russian merchant in the name of the ship's owner."⁴³

Chief Manager of the Russian American Colonies 1790-1801

Within the context of Russian society, both in the European heartland and in the provinces as far as Irkutsk and Okhotsk, most merchants in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remained within their prescribed social milieu. But beyond

⁴¹ Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World, During the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, and 1807* (Carlisle, PA: George Phillips, 1817), 360.

⁴² Briton and Gough, *Fur Traders*, 25.

⁴³ Wheeler, "Empires in Conflict," 424.

the continental frontier, Russia's only overseas colonies required political, social, and economic leadership. When Baranov accepted Shelikov's offer to become Chief Manager of the colony at Kodiak, there were no political leaders in the Pacific Northwest, no army or naval officers of significant rank, no one of noble status, and few members of the *kupechestvo*. Beyond leadership of the colonies, Baranov also had to become a one-man diplomatic service. As historian Lydia Black noted, "from the outset of his career in Alaska, Baranov had to deal in some ways on behalf of the Russian government with foreign shipping and foreign nationals and also had to concern himself with safeguarding Russian sovereignty."⁴⁴ It fell on Baranov's unique shoulders to at least temporarily bear the responsibility of *all* of these roles on behalf of the Russian state.

Baranov arrived in Russian America as a result of financial ruin. When his sable fur trade was wiped out in central Siberia, Shelikov approached him to coordinate efforts for the Shelikov-Golikov Company in the American wilderness. In 1790, Baranov agreed to travel to Kodiak to oversee operations in the new colonies. Leaving his wife and children in Kargopol, Baranov set off for the colonies on August 19, 1790. The journey was perilous - and on September 30, his vessel was thrown about in a violent storm off of Unalaska and ran aground. Abandoning most of the cargo intended for Kodiak, the crew managed to make it to shore on the central Aleutian island.

Baranov described his experience being marooned on Unalaska during the winter of 1790 as one of great boredom. "Sometimes," he recounted, "storms would set

⁴⁴ Lydia Black, *Russians in Alaska, 1732-1867* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2004), 126.

in for two whole months and it would be impossible to go out anywhere.”⁴⁵ According to Khlebnikov, this time was passed getting to know the natives that traveled with the crew or lived nearby. As spring broke, baidarkas were prepared for the 500-mile journey to Kodiak, since the ship was destroyed beyond repair. Baranov ordered two of them to be used in exploring the Alaskan coast, while the third would take him to Kodiak. After two months of travel, the party reached Kodiak on June 27, 1791, but not before Baranov fell ill with a fever.

If Baranov expected a thriving community at Kodiak, he was sorely disappointed. Initially, the Chief Manager was not well received by the *promyshlenniki* that coordinated fur hunting operations. But Baranov soon began to impose his vision upon the colonies under his management. According to a number of his biographers, the Chief Manager began to regulate relations between Russians and native women to gain the respect of the indigenous population of the Kodiak Archipelago and Cook’s Inlet. Chevigny wrote that he forbade prostitution; even while tacitly accepting Russian men taking native “wives.” Baranov also imposed a rule that Russian men must stay with the Alutiiq woman they courted. Siding with Alutiiq mothers, he forbade taking any half-Russian children back to Russia. These rules, in addition to what Chevigny described as “[t]he Russian warmth of heart toward children,” bound many Russians to the colony, despite being lured there on five year contracts.⁴⁶

Despite the policies that Baranov implemented during this time, the Alutiiq population had already been made into a permanently indentured servant class shortly

⁴⁵ Khlebnikov, *Baranov: Chief Manager*, 3.

⁴⁶ Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 83.

after the Russians arrived.⁴⁷ While biographic depictions of Baranov having a paternal, guiding influence on the native populations of Russian America, the Chief Manager oversaw the ruthless exploitation of Alutiiq labor in the procurement of sea otter furs and other natural resources required for the survival of the colonies. This labor, coordinated by Russian *promyshlenniki* living in the native villages and supervised by their *artel* bosses, had disastrous consequences for the natives under Russian control. Baranov frequently took hostages between 1791 and 1799 to earn the cooperation of the native populations during negotiations or to ensure the safety of Russians and native fur hunters aligned with the Shelikov Company.⁴⁸ Baranov's biographers heaped praise upon him for his shrewdness in relations with the natives. Khlebnikov extolled Baranov for his desire to Christianize the population. Chevigny fawned over Baranov's way with the natives. Nevertheless, multiple sources confirm that he was respected – or in most cases, feared – by the various indigenous populations of the Alaskan coast. Baranov reportedly learned several of their dialects, and many sources corroborate that he was nicknamed “Nanook” by the Unangas and Kodiak natives.⁴⁹

During the first decade of Baranov's residence along the Pacific Northwest, he was charged by the Shelikov-Golikov Company with expanding its interests along the

⁴⁷ Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov ed., *Istoriya russkoi ameriki, 1732-1867: tom II deiatel'nost' rossiisko-amerikanskoi kompanii 1799-1825* (Moscow, 1999), 26-27.

⁴⁸ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 106. Davydov refers to the process of hostage taking as “*amanatay*.” The Russians learned to use this process to great effect in its conquest of the steppe region of Central Asia. While the word *amanat* derives from Arabic, the Great Soviet Encyclopedia noted that the word was used in Muscovy as it began to expand, suggesting long familiarity with the concept. According to Grinev, the process was separately familiar to natives of the Pacific Northwest coast, who held hostages, referred to as “deer,” until negotiations were completed. See Grinev, *Tlingits in Russian America*, 68.

⁴⁹ “Nanook” is possibly a reference to the mythological bear in Inuit and Yupik society that decided whether or not hunters would be successful.

Pacific Northwest coastline. Before the 1799 inauguration of the RAC, he had virtually no influence over hunters from rival Russian companies, and still less over anyone of noble birth or official standing with the government. As Chevigny reported, shortly after Baranov's arrival, one of Shelikov's outposts along Cook Inlet was embroiled in a conflict with hunters from the rival Lebedev-Lastotchkin Company from Irkutsk. Fearing that Shelikov would take over the entire fur trade, the merchants sent a ship with 30 men to set up an outpost near Fort Alexander. Soon after, the Lebedev-Lastochkin men began to threaten Shelikov's employees. Baranov was paralyzed by the conflict, as he did not want the natives to see Russians fire upon one another, and the men of the rival company intimated that they had imperial sanction to conduct trade in the area.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, by the summer of 1792, Baranov set his sights upon expanding the company's influence on the coast. He first moved the colony on Kodiak to the northwest side of the island after a devastating tsunami wiped out the previous settlement. While fortifications were being built in St. Paul Harbor, Baranov explored Prince William Sound (named by Cook after the Englishman's third expedition to the area in the late 1770s), to the north of Kodiak Island along the Alaskan mainland. But Baranov knew that his best chance of finding virgin hunting grounds was to explore further south and east along the coastline. The natives in the area of Prince William Sound, mostly Chugash and Kenaitze, were familiar with Europeans by this time, having encountered the Spanish, English, and Russians previously. According to Chevigny, the natives were initially apprehensive about a sustained Russian presence, but

⁵⁰ Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 61.

Baranov's acceptance of a Kenaitze chief's daughter for his native bride and successful defense against a Tlingit raid sealed a lasting connection to the Alutiiq of the area.⁵¹

Later in 1792, Baranov also received his first visit by a foreign ship - the English vessel *Phoenix*. He quickly befriended the captain, Hugh Moore and his first mate, the American Joseph O'Cain.⁵² Captain Moore noted the deplorable conditions Baranov faced in the Russian American colonies. But Baranov did have the advantage of being able to offer assistance to the captain in making repairs to his ship. According to Khlebnikov and Chevigny, Captain Moore gave Baranov his English-speaking servant; a teenaged native of Bengal named Richard. Baranov learned about the market for furs in Canton from Moore, as well as Spain's refusal to trade with foreign powers. Richard proved invaluable to Baranov in the coming years, as he learned Russian and served as a translator when American ships began to arrive.⁵³

⁵¹ Baranov's sympathetic biographers glossed over the Chief Manager's bigamy. Recognizing that Baranov took a mistress shortly after arriving at Kodiak, Chevigny tells an elaborate tale of how Baranov got married to the Kenaitze chief's daughter, who be recognized in 1806 as Anna Grigoreevna Baranova after the death of Baranov's legal wife in Russia. Khlebnikov does not mention Baranov's wives at all in his biography. It is clear, however, that Russian "bride taking" in Russian America was a sore point between RAC employees and the clergy that arrived in Russian America in the late eighteenth century. See Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 65.

⁵² Richard A. Pierce, *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary* (Fairbanks: The Limestone Press, 1990), 388-389. Joseph O'Cain traveled to the Pacific Northwest twice aboard the *Phoenix*: once in 1792 and again in 1795. After a brief stint in the service of the Spanish in California, O'Cain returned to Boston, and was hired as a captain by the Winships. He returned to the Pacific Northwest twice more, in 1803 and 1806. On the first voyage, he witnessed the re-taking of Sitka by the Russians. Conflicting accounts indicate that he died during the latter voyages.

⁵³ Baranov was clearly conscious of the advantages technologically advanced ships such as the *Phoenix* offered foreign visitors. Following his encounter with the British, he actively sought to build a fleet of ships. He ordered construction of a ship similar to the English vessel at tremendous expense for the colonies, and even named it the *Phoenix* (completed in 1794).

The years that followed Moore's visit proved difficult for Baranov and the Russian settlement at Kodiak. Faced with chronic shortages and infrequent contact with the Russian mainland, the Chief Manager was increasingly frustrated with the unmet promises Shelikov made for supplying the colonies. When Archimandrite Iosef arrived in 1794 to establish an official Orthodox presence in Russian America, he could not believe the conditions in the colonies were so bad, and accused Baranov of theft. While Khlebnikov painted the relationship between the two men as cordial, Iosef was *not* impressed with Baranov's cruel treatment of the Alutiiq under his authority. From the Archimandrite perspective, too many Russians had not married their "native brides" and little was done to convert the Alutiiq to the Orthodox faith.

Further complicating Baranov's duties, Iosef arrived with serfs sent by Catherine II at Shelikov's request to establish agriculture in the colonies.⁵⁴ Despite the precarious position of the area under Baranov's control and the lack of supplies to establish a new settlement, Baranov planned to settle the serfs in Yakutat Bay in 1795. Ever looking to expand Russian influence along the coast, Baranov hoped that a colony at Yakutat Bay would be a toehold to expand further south and east in the future. According to Andrei Grinev, Baranov used the 1794 hunt to explore good sites for the colony, and to inform weary Tlingits in the area of the new settlement under Russian protection.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ There exists in the historiography of Russian America a near unanimous consensus that Shelikov pulled the wool over everyone's eyes on the precarious nature of Russia's holdings in the new world. He repeatedly exaggerated the bounty Russian America offered, and often failed to deliver on his promises for supplies. Shelikov spun yarns to business partners like Baranov, his son-in-law Nikolai Rezanov, and even to Catherine II, who granted the serfs and a retinue of Orthodox clergy in the expectation of building permanent settlements along the Pacific Northwest coastline and Christianizing the natives under Russian sovereignty.

⁵⁵ Grinev, *Tlingits in Russian America*, 105.

Archimandrite Iosef's accusations rankled at Baranov, who continuously faced difficulties because of his social standing. In 1795, the Chief Manager asked to be relieved. His request was received after Shelikov's death. Natalia Shelikova, who took over running the company after the death of her husband, initially agreed to find a replacement. But Baranov wound up staying put with the birth of a son in 1797, despite a desire to leave the colonies due to the difficulties he routinely faced. In the same year, a low-ranking navigator in the Russian Navy by the name of Gavril Terentevich Talin arrived at Kodiak. From the outset, Talin caused problems for Baranov. Coming from the capital, Talin lorded his rank and minor noble status over the *promyshlenniki* and Baranov alike. Talin began undermining many of the Chief Manager's decisions, particularly by using his authority while piloting the RAC's vessels. Talin allegedly spread rumors that the Russian Navy would soon take over the colonies. He even led the Orthodox priests in condemning Baranov's administration.⁵⁶ But worse of all, according to Baranov, Talin's incompetence (along with that of other careless navigators) caused the sinking or disabling of several of the meager vessels available for company business.

Baranov pushed on with the plans for expansion. Two years after settling the Yakutat Bay colony, he took a census of the natives on Kodiak Island. He found the native population to stand at 3,221 males and 2,985 females with approximately 700 baidarkas.⁵⁷ In 1798, father Iosef returned to Russia to become a bishop in recognition of the Church's growing interest in the American colonies. Unfortunately, the ship he

⁵⁶ Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 147, 155. Talin apparently left the colony in 1802, after failing to dislodge Baranov from his post. See Pierce, *Russian America: a Biographical Dictionary*, 497.

⁵⁷ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 18.

was on, the first large vessel built in Russian America, sank on its return voyage, depriving Baranov of spiritual leadership and much needed supplies.⁵⁸ Despite this, Baranov set his sights on Sitka in 1799. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Chevigny indicated that Baranov bought the rights to build a Russian fort from the Sitka Tlingits.

But Russian authors in the nineteenth century had a different view. Khlebnikov, who worked with the Chief Manager during the latter part of his career, indicated Baranov sought to subdue the fierce “Kolosh” natives by force. According to Khlebnikov, Baranov believed that settling the lands near the Tlingit was necessary to “bring honor to the Fatherland.”⁵⁹ Tikhmenev also wrote that Baranov firmly resolved to build the fort in spite of Tlingit harassment.⁶⁰ While the initial hunting party that was ordered south near Sitka suffered heavy losses due to eating shellfish with a deadly neurotoxin, the sea otter catch convinced Baranov that southerly expansion was necessary for the survival of the Russian colonies.

Towards the end of 1799, as the *Juno* was being built in Massachusetts, Baranov fortified a new settlement he created at Sitka, populated it with about 200 Russians and a number of Unangan and Alutiiq hunters. He christened it Fort Mikhailovsk.⁶¹ According to Tikhmenev, the colony gave the Russians a direct view of the haggling that the Americans and English conducted with the Tlingits.⁶² Between 1799 and April 1800,

⁵⁸ The ship was Baranov’s *Phoenix*, built three years before. She was, at the time, the finest vessel in the RAC fleet.

⁵⁹ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 17.

⁶⁰ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company*, Vol. 1, 61-62.

⁶¹ Okun, *The Russian American Company*, 54.

⁶² Chevigny colorfully retells that while Baranov was at Sitka in 1800, he encountered five American ships that were in the vicinity trading with the Tlingits: the *Jenny*, the *Rover*, the *Alexander*, the *Hazard* and the *Alert*. In describing the American captains, Chevigny wrote that, “[t]raders the world over recognized their kind... sober, granite

Baranov saw no fewer than five American vessels arrive to trade arms, ammunition, and rum for furs.⁶³ Worse, the Americans made it clear to Baranov that they had no interest in discontinuing such trade.

In 1802, three years after the Shelikov-Golikov Company was consolidated into the Russian American Company by Paul I's *ukaz*, the RAC's Board of Directors urged Baranov to avoid contact with such foreigners. They were particularly fearful of the British challenging Russia's sphere of influence along the coast. Not yet knowing that Baranov had established and lost Fort Mikhailovsk on Sitka Island, the Board wrote secret directives in April 1802, urging Baranov to,

...try to establish the right of Russia not only up as far as 55 degrees, but further, basing your [claim] on the voyages of Captains Bering and [Aleksei] Chirikov and others... Try to use these same arguments to extend our claims also into Nootka Sound, so that the claims of the English court will be set [only as far as] 50 degrees, or halfway between 50 and 55 degrees... You should strive, as much and as quickly as possible, to establish settlements near 55 degrees, and a permanent fort, since you now have enough people to do this. If possible, you should settle that region with Russianized [native] Americans.⁶⁴

Further, the Company's leadership counseled him to receive foreign ships "with great caution," and to "avoid discussing with them delineation of frontiers," as the political

faced and business like." In Chevigny's estimation, however, Baranov must have felt kindred to them, as he "realized that he and these men were the spearheads of forces both reaching out desperately for economic life." Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 168-170.

⁶³ Chevigny, *Russian America*, 97.

⁶⁴ "Secret Instructions from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company in Irkutsk to Chief Administrator Aleksandr A. Baranov in Alaska" in *The Russian American Colonies: to Siberia and Russian America 1798-1867, Volume 3* (Oregon: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1989): 27. The idea that a new colony could be populated with "Russianized Americans" speaks to both the relative comfort the RAC Board of Directors had with exploiting the native population, and a growing knowledge of intermarriage and the creation of a *Kreol* class at Kodiak that Gwenn Miller studies in her *Kodiak Kreol*.

situation in continental Europe meant that Russia might be enemies with the British, French, or the Spanish in the future.

This concern over the tenuous position of Russian interests in America would haunt the Company in the coming years. It was similarly shared by the Russian government. In July 1803, Count Nikolai Rumiantsev, the Russian Minister of Commerce and later Foreign Affairs, wrote instructions for Nikolai Rezanov on Russia's first diplomatic round-the-world expedition. In these instructions, Rumiantsev gave the following order:

As regards the possessions of the Russian Empire, you have as a boundary the last discovery made by Captain Chirikov in 1741 at 55 degrees north latitude. Give the Chief Manager of America [Baranov] the order that no Russian by any means is to go beyond this boundary into areas occupied by other maritime powers. Impress upon them that this should be strictly observed, because it will remove forever all troubles with maritime powers allied with us, and because the company, by confining itself to acquisitions that indisputably belong to Russia, and by securing only its own property for itself, will establish more friendly relations with places frequented by outsiders, and will attain proper respect and universal trust more quickly.⁶⁵

Yankee Merchants and the Attack on Fort Mikhailovsk

Shortly after Baranov returned to Kodiak from establishing Fort Mikhailovsk at Sitka, he received an unexpected visit from an American vessel. The aptly named *Enterprise*, hailing from New York, arrived at Kodiak on April 24, 1801. Her boatswain was Joseph O'Cain, who previously met Baranov while serving aboard the British vessel *Phoenix*. According to Khlebnikov, trade was relatively light due to the prices

⁶⁵ "Instructions of Nikolai Petrovich Rumiantsev to Representative of the Russian-American Company, Nikolai P. Rezanov, July, 1803" in Nina N. Bashkina, Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, et al. eds., *The United States and Russia. The Beginning of Relations 1765-1815* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1980), 372.

demanded by the New York captain.⁶⁶ But the visit was a valuable experience for O’Cain, who learned of Russian shortages, and would return three years later as captain of his own vessel.

As previously mentioned, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, direct trade along the Pacific Northwest coastline was becoming more expensive and hazardous for the Americans. With more ships arriving, the Tlingit and other indigenous populations began demanding higher prices for their furs, squeezing American profit margins. The Russians, on the other hand, procured furs directly by exploiting the labor of the Unangas and Alutiit, supervised by Russian *promyshlenniki*. What they lacked was the means to regularly and safely deliver furs to Chinese markets due to poor ships and Chinese restrictions on where Russians could trade in China. The colonies often had a surplus of furs. By 1802, they were in desperate need of basic supplies. Between 1801 and 1802, the Chief Manager was shifting men and resources from colony to colony to stave off starvation and potential uprisings from the Alutiiq. American merchants like Joseph O’Cain thus began to plan future expeditions to include stops in the Russian colonies.

But the Russians had plenty of reasons to be wary of the Yankee merchants. In July 1802, Baranov received news that Fort Mikhailovsk had been overrun by Tlingit forces from the area around Sitka Island. Ivan Kuskov, a long-time Russian *artel* leader in the colonies, informed Baranov that Tlingit from islands surrounding Sitka assembled to discuss the Russian presence. They agreed to attack the Fort Mikhailovsk as soon

⁶⁶ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 35.

as the Russian hunting parties were sent out in the spring.⁶⁷ The plan was enacted with only a few Russian and Alutiiq hostages taken. The Fort was burned to the ground. The chief instigators of this attack, according to Kuskov, “received all the arms and ammunition from the English or from the Republican Americans who settled on the island of Tykin.”

Kuskov alleged that he learned this from Tlingit he spoke to after the attack. They intimidated to Kuskov that the Americans further incited the inhabitants around Sitka, telling them that if they did not destroy the Russians, the Tlingit would suffer under their suzerainty.⁶⁸ Kuskov also reported that two Boston ships waited nearby while the attack took place. After trading arms and ammunition with the natives, these unscrupulous Yankees also allegedly stole furs from the Tlingit after the massacre of the Russians.⁶⁹ Even more damning was Kuskov’s accusation that,

[m]en from an American vessel that wintered at Khutsnov village told the inhabitants that they would not call there again because they do not have enough sea otter skins for trading. They told the natives straight out that unless they destroy our New Archangel fort and our hunting party they themselves, the Koliuzh, would be the losers. Whether this is true or perhaps their own invention, I do not know. It might be true, however, because these traders are very greedy when it comes to profit. It is

⁶⁷ Tlingit oral tradition offers a completely different justification for the destruction of Fort Mikhailovsk. According to Andrew P. Johnson, a Kiks.ádi Tlingit entrusted with the oral history of his clan, the Kiks.ádi were driven to attack the Russians because of pressures from other Tlingit clans and because Russian men assaulted Tlingit women. See Nora Marks Dauenhauer et al., eds., *Anooshi Lintig Aani Ka Russians in Tlingit America: The Battles of Sitka 1802 and 1804* (Juneau: Sealaska Heritage Institute, 2008), 115-122.

⁶⁸ “Letter, Kuskov to Baranov, July 1, 1802” in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company, Vol II*, 140. Several sources, including the American captain William Sturgis, confirm that there were a few Americans at Sitka at the time of the attack. They apparently left the ship *Jenny* to enter service with the Russians in 1800. There is a great deal of disagreement over their actual role in inciting the Tlingits to attack the Russians.

⁶⁹ Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian American Relations 1775-1815* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 172.

rumored that in Chilkhat and other places they barter black men, either from the African coast or from the Wine Islands the natives do not know from where.⁷⁰

Lieutenant Yuri Lisiansky, who aided in Sitka's capture in 1804, was more explicit about Yankee interference. In 1814, Lisiansky published his account of the first Russian circumnavigation of the globe.⁷¹ While he was not present in the colonies during the 1802 attack, his second-hand analysis expanded upon Kuskov's accusations: "[a]mong the assailants were three seamen belonging to the United States, who, having deserted from their ship [the *Jenny*], had entered into the service of the Russians, and then took part against them. These double traitors were among the most active in the plot. They contrived combustible wads, which they lighted, and threw upon the buildings where they knew the gunpowder was kept, which took fire and were blown up."⁷²

What is certain is that the few survivors of the Sitka massacre were ransomed back to the Russians after being brought to Kodiak on an English vessel, the *Unicorn*. Aided by the American captain John Ebbets aboard the *Alert*, the British crew of the *Unicorn* took the 23 survivors by force from the Tlingit. Captain Barber aboard the *Unicorn* demanded a 50,000 ruble ransom from Baranov for his efforts lest he turn his cannons on the Russian settlement. Barber allegedly settled with Baranov for 10,000 rubles paid in furs.⁷³ In 1822, American captain William Sturgis published an article entitled "Examination of the Russian Claims to the Northwest Coast of America." In it,

⁷⁰ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company, Vol II*, 140.

⁷¹ Yuri Lisiansky, *A Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1803, 4, 5, & 6; Performed, By Order of His Imperial Majesty Alexander the First, Emperor of Russia, in the ship Neva* (London, 1814).

⁷² Lisiansky, *A Voyage Round the World*, 219-220.

⁷³ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 38. It is unclear if Ebbets was involved in ransoming the survivors back to the Russians, but American sources tend to exonerate him. This, coupled with the fact that Ebbets continued to trade with the Russians until the War of 1812, lends credence to the idea that he was not involved.

he disputed Kuskov and Lisiansky's version of events, arguing that while the Americans in the region at the time were runaways from the American vessel *Jenny*, they were hidden by the Russians from the captain of their ship and did not betray the Russian outpost.

Sturgis argued that the Americans refused to take part in the uprising. And, despite the derogatory and often ruthless attitudes of the Boston merchants towards the natives with whom they traded, the Sitka Tlingits protected them and many of the women of the settlement.⁷⁴ Like Kuskov, Sturgis claimed to hear this from natives he spoke to after the attacks while trading along the coast.⁷⁵ Sturgis also wrote that the Americans turned around and helped in obtaining the release of the "Aleutian women and children the Sitkans took as slaves."⁷⁶ According to him, the Sitka natives behaved proudly in the face of the Russian counter-attacks of 1804, believing they were, "a people more sinned against than sinning."

For the most part, authors and historians have tended to agree that US merchants had a pernicious influence on Russian relations with indigenous populations of the Northwest coastline. Historian Mary E. Wheeler argued that the Americans that came to Pacific Northwest were best described as "merchant adventurers" due to their

⁷⁴ Sturgis, "Examination of the Russian Claims," 370-401

⁷⁵ Grinev *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 117. Grinev wrote that, "[T]he reasons for the Indian revolt of 1802, the alignment of the opposing forces, the extent of the parties' losses, and the ultimate consequences of this for the fate of Russian America have, to this day, not been revealed in full measure... The immediate cause of the revolt was the 1801 murder of the chief of the Kuiu kwaan, his wife, and his children by members of the "Sitka" party, as well as the fact that the Russians had kept the chief of the Kootznahoo kwaan's nephew in chains for a small offense. According to Tlingit legends, the cause of the revolt was the Russians' imprisonment of the influential shaman, Stunuku, of the Sitka Kaagwaantaan lineage."

⁷⁶ Sturgis, "Examination of the Russian Claims," 396.

practices.⁷⁷ Mary Malloy's *Devil on the Deep Blue Sea* recorded the exploits of the notorious Captain Sam Hill, who was ruthless in his dealings with the Pacific Northwest natives during his second voyage.⁷⁸ Russian historians had a particularly long memory of the negative influence of Yankee merchants on the native population. Post-Soviet Russian historians like Nikolai Bolkhovitinov and Andrei Grinev, continue to argue that the Americans in the area of Sitka fomented anti-Russian sentiment in 1802.⁷⁹ What is certain is that the destruction of Fort Mikhailovsk allowed direct trade between Yankee merchants and natives to continue unimpeded for another two years.

Russians and Yankees: Trade Established

After having to plead with Russian fur hunters not to abandon their positions with the RAC, Baranov's luck began to change in 1803.⁸⁰ And while he faced setbacks due to attacks on fur hunting parties and the loss of Sitka, ships began to arrive from Okhotsk. In September, the *Aleksandr* arrived at Kodiak. The *Elizaveta* showed up two months later, commanded by Lieutenant Nikolai Khvostov on his first trip to Russian America with Midshipman Gavril Davydov. In the autumn of 1803, Joseph O'Cain returned for the third time to area on an eponymously named vessel. Financed by the

⁷⁷ Wheeler, "Empires in Conflict," 423.

⁷⁸ Mary Malloy, *Devil on the Deep Blue Sea: The Notorious Career of Captain Samuel Hill of Boston* (Jersey Shore: Bullbrier Press, 2006): 148-149.

⁷⁹ Bolkhovitinov, *Istoria russkoi ameriki, tom II*, 55 and Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations*, 187-188.

⁸⁰ Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, The Gennadii V. Yudin Collection of Russian-American Company Papers: Copy of Instructions from Alexander Baranov, Manager of the Kodiak Company, to Hunters, 2.15.1803, Reports by Fedor I. Shemelin from St. Catherine's Island NOTE II, #35 *Alaska Historic Documents*, v. 3: 254-255 In these instructions Baranov appeals to the Russian fur hunters in Alaska not to abandon their service to the company following the disastrous Tlingit uprising and the loss of men and furs at sea during the previous year. To those men who were willing to remain in service, Baranov even held out the possibility of new conditions in their contracts that would permit them to become shareholders in the company.

Winship family of Boston, O’Cain had the novel proposal to trade directly with the Russians.⁸¹ From his previous two visits to the Northwest Coast in 1792 and 1801, O’Cain learned that Baranov sorely lacked munitions and supplies. But negotiations hit a snag early on, when it was discovered that Baranov had no means to pay for the supplies O’Cain brought. The furs that Baranov had on hand were being shipped back to Russia upon one of the arriving Russian vessels.

O’Cain had a solution: he would exchange his supplies for the contracted labor of Baranov’s Alutiiq fur hunters. The American would transport the hunters, along with their baidarkas, to richer hunting grounds in the south. Despite the RAC’s concerns about trade with foreign merchants, Baranov saw an opportunity to get involved in fur hunts beyond his current capabilities. Better still, O’Cain offered to trade the Russian share of furs directly in Canton, mitigating any transportation or trade impediments for the Russians. Baranov thus agreed to lend O’Cain 40 hunters and their equipment - with the provision that a few Russian *promyshlenniki* would go along to look after the natives (and, presumably, to make sure that the shares were divided evenly). O’Cain’s return with the Russian share guaranteed that such transactions would continue. Between 1806 and 1813, the Winships and other Boston merchants sent several ships to engage in similar transactions. At least fifteen such American-led voyages ventured into the waters south of Sitka as far as Spanish California (usually without the consent of the Spanish authorities).

Through a combination of ruthless exploitation, shrewd business maneuvering, and diplomacy with natives and foreign merchants, Baranov solidified Russia’s

⁸¹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Alaska: 1730-1885* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Company, 1886), 319.

presence on the Alaskan coastline. Between 1800 and 1804, he managed to send 2 million rubles worth of pelts back to Russia.⁸² On April 4, 1804, Baranov received word from Unalaska that Tsar Alexander I had conferred on the Chief Manager the Order of St. Vladimir and made him a Collegiate Councilor in the Civil Service. Such a position on the table of ranks made Baranov the equivalent of a colonel in the army, or a first rank captain in the navy.⁸³ He was also named Governor of the Russian American colonies, giving him official authority over the colonies he and other Russian merchants had managed since 1791.

In 1803, Baranov expended his scarce resources on the construction of two ships at the Yakutat colony he founded several years earlier. With the resources he obtained from the *Elizaveta*, *Aleksandr*, and the O’Cain cargo, Baranov shored up communication and supplies with the colonies surrounding Kodiak. He stabilized the RAC’s finances by sending furs he collected back to Okhotsk on the *Elizaveta*. In addition to the furs Baranov collected through the annual hunts, he was also sent back 1,000 furs from O’Cain’s first joint-expedition. With ships, men, supplies, and official social standing and authority granted by the Tsar, Baranov began to plan a return to Sitka.

Denouement –Commerce, Conquest, and Finding the Native Voice

There is a very important voice that fails to break through the primary and secondary sources that detail Russian and American interest in the Pacific Northwest at the turn of the nineteenth century: that of the indigenous population. While they were frequently written *about*, few recorded their perspective on colonization by the Russians.

⁸² Wheeler, *Empires in Conflict*, 431.

⁸³ Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 213.

Scholars like Bancroft and Chevigny glossed over the treatment of indigenous populations. Even latter-day scholars of Russian-America like Lydia Black, who was highly critical of Shelikov's brutal storming and occupation of Kodiak Island, have underemphasized Russian subjugation of the Alutiiq and Unangan populations.⁸⁴ But in the last twenty-five years, the Alutiiq population of Kodiak and Prince William Sound has begun to piece together their history before and after the dislocations caused by Russian and later American colonization.⁸⁵ Their perspective is instructive regarding how the Russians were able to subdue the much larger population of the area, and put them to work for the Russian American Company.

Some scholars point to the land claims movement of the 1960s and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 as seminal moments in the process of reclaiming Alutiiq identity.⁸⁶ Archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, and history all played crucial roles in this process, but it has not been an exclusively academic endeavor. The Alutiiq population has been involved in all aspects of this process. They are leading archaeological research of pre-Alutiiq speaking populations in the Kodiak Archipelago; listening to and recording the stories and language of Alutiiq elders to revitalize

⁸⁴ Black, *Russians in Alaska*, xii. Black contrasted the Russian presence in the colonies, which never exceeded approximately 500 Russians, with colonial and military occupation policies of the Americans towards indigenous populations during the nineteenth century. From her perspective, the Russians sought "continuous, uninterrupted trade" rather than the subjugation of indigenous populations. While it is true that Russian contact with the Yupik, Athabaskans, and Tlingits was often marked by reciprocal trade relations, such was not the case with the populations of the Aleutian Islands, and the area surrounding Kodiak.

⁸⁵ Russians used "Aleut" to describe the population of Kodiak - hence the origin of the word Alutiiq. The preference in modern usage of "Alutiiq" or "Sugpiat" is tied to how the different communities identify themselves in relation to Russian occupation of the area.

⁸⁶ Aron Crowell et al., eds., *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2001), 88.

language training; mining anthropological, linguistic, and historical records to piece together Alutiiq cultural practices before and after Russian and American settlement; and relearning Alutiiq craft techniques lost in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Using funds from the Exxon *Valdez* legal settlement, the Kodiak Area Native Association opened the Alutiiq Museum in 1995. The museum displays the fruits of the revitalization efforts mentioned above, and chronicles 7,500 years of Kodiak inhabitation. Many of the artifacts and exhibits tell the story of how Alutiiq culture adapted and survived during the Russian colonial period before being nearly destroyed again by American policies after Alaska was acquired in 1867.

This museum and the Baranov Museum, which focuses on Kodiak from the Russian period through to the present, demonstrate how Kodiak was shaped by the technology and practices that the Russians brought to bear on the land and its inhabitants. As one scholar noted, "[t]he arrival of the Russian fur traders in the latter half of the eighteenth century brought tragedy and almost overwhelming social change. Defeated by Russian force, Alutiiq men and women were forced to work for Grigory Shelikov's fur company. Along with systematic exploitation came the loss of political sovereignty, hunger, epidemics of new diseases, and drastic population decline."⁸⁷ Especially disastrous, according to Alutiiq scholar Alice Olsen Dawson was the loss of, "elders, stories, songs, ceremonies, and our identity."⁸⁸

In her analysis of Alutiiq settlements during the nineteenth century, Sonja Luehrmann reviewed the work of historians like Andrei Grinev and Lydia Black. Luehrmann argues, in agreement with Grinev, that the Russians were able to control

⁸⁷ Aron Crowell, *Looking Both Ways*, 54.

⁸⁸ Aron Crowell, *Looking Both Ways*, 89.

the Alutiiq population in a very short time by interrupting Alutiiq subsistence by forcing men to hunt during the gathering season. In addition, the Russians compelled Alutiiq women, children and the infirmed in the settlements to create clothing and gather food for RAC distribution.⁸⁹ This food and clothing would then be charged against any payments the Alutiiq men were to receive for their hunt, permanently indebting the population to the Company.

The process that led to this indentured servitude was not a peaceful one. Prior to Grigory Shelikov's arrival at Kodiak in 1784, the Alutiiq were able to fend off previous Russian expeditions to the area in 1763 and 1783. Lydia Black noted that the primary difference between these expeditions, and Shelikov's were that (1) Shelikov's expedition of 130 Russians was heavily armed, (2) they intended to build a settlement, and (3) Shelikov was able to successfully exploit the differences that existed between various Alutiiq settlements, ingratiating himself with some Alutiiq leaders through gift-giving, and becoming a valuable ally to settle old scores.⁹⁰

Alutiiq oral history records the arrival of Shelikov as a moment of great suffering for them. It recalls that after putting up fierce resistance to Shelikov's invasion on Sitkalidak Island, near Shelikov's proposed settlement site of Three Saints Bay, where over 300 Alutiiq died in resisting the Russians. Shelikov's struggle to settle Kodiak was much bloodier than nineteenth century biographers and historians indicated. He captured several leaders as hostages to ensure tranquility while a settlement was built. The place of this defeat became known in Alutiiq as *awa'uq*, which according to

⁸⁹ Sonja Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages under Russian and U.S. Rule* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2008), 69.

⁹⁰ Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages*, 73-74.

Luehrmann means “to become numb” – the Russians called the location *Razbitoi Kekur* (Broken or Defeated Rock). In English, it is also commonly referred to as Refuge Rock.⁹¹ One member of the Shelikov party later wrote damningly about Shelikov’s brutality in the suppression of Alutiiq resistance to the Russian settlement at Kodiak, but this charge was largely ignored in Russia.⁹² Shelikov’s company men continued to rely on the threat of brutality or corporal punishment - viewed as a great dishonor among the Alutiiq - to ensure compliance. After Baranov’s arrival, heavily armed *artel* leaders would routinely collect Alutiiq by force men for the annual sea otter hunts.

One additional factor that should be added to this list of Russian activities is the confiscation of Alutiiq baidara. Gavril Davydov, who visited Kodiak in 1802, recalled that one of the first things the Russians did when they appropriated a settlement in the Aleutians or near Kodiak was to take away these vessels.⁹³ This process ensured that the Alutiiq population was unable to flee, enforcing dependence upon the Russians. It also meant that the technology of hunting, navigation, transportation, and communication was under the control of the Company. Hieromonk Gideon, who arrived in the colonies in 1804, recorded the importance of this loss in the mournful songs the Alutiiq would sing, which recalled their former wealth by way of ownership of baidaras and sea otter skins.

⁹¹ While in Kodiak, I heard a version of the story from an Alutiiq woman that indicated the Alutiiq knew a secret way onto the island, preventing the Russians from abducting them. But they were betrayed by one inhabitant, who told the Russians how to access the island from a specific location at low tide. As the tragic events unfolded, she said, many of the women jumped off the cliffs to their death with their children to prevent their enslavement to the Russians.

⁹² Shelikov, *A Voyage to America*, 11.

⁹³ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 86.

When Baranov took over Shelikov Company operations at Kodiak, he ruthlessly employed all of these means to exert control over the Alutiit, turning them into the principle labor force for the colonies. In the initial absence of direct competition from Yankee and British merchant vessels, Baranov was able to build Russia's fur hunting enterprise on the backs of the Alutiiq people. Nineteenth and twentieth century commentators heaped praises upon Baranov for his efforts. But a growing number of scholars are reassessing Baranov's activities through the eyes of his principle detractors: the clergy that arrived between 1794 and 1818 to convert the Alutiiq to Russian Orthodoxy and minister to the Russian population.

Prior to the 1970s, the complaints raised by the clergy against Baranov were frequently viewed as obstructions to Baranov's heroic mission to tame the Alaskan coastline. The clergy were variously portrayed as jealous, petty, and at times deceived by Baranov's enemies. As the Russian and Alutiiq populations began to adjust to life under the Company's control, the clergy began voicing concerns about spiritual life in the colonies and the treatment of the indigenous population by Russian fur hunters. Missionaries that arrived in 1794 were outraged by Russian men, married and single, who were living with Alutiiq women out of Orthodox wedlock and adopting native cultural practices.⁹⁴ They accused Baranov of creating this permissive atmosphere.

The Russian Orthodox priests definitely hit a nerve. Proselytizing among the Alutiiq population and making them take the oath of allegiance to Tsar Alexander I in 1803 infuriated Baranov. Hieromonk Gideon reported to his superiors in the Holy Synod

⁹⁴ This accusation of "going native" is born out in archaeological evidence, which demonstrates that Russian cohabitation with the Alutiiq did not significantly change the artifacts located in Alutiiq settlements before and after Russian settlement. See Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages*, 68.

that Baranov was furious. When asked to calmly explain his concerns, Baranov allegedly said, “You have corrupted the Americans!” When they suggested that these concerns be submitted to the government in accordance with the law, Baranov exploded with “What law?” – implying that the colonies operated *outside* the laws of the Empire.⁹⁵

The five clergy members in the colonies between 1794 and 1807 advocated strongly on behalf of the Alutiiq population. Gideon in particular sent reports back to the Synod observing that while the native population settled into a new pattern of life under Russian dependence, the Company practices were having a disastrous impact upon their numbers and health. He was outraged by routine RAC violence and the practice of sending Alutiiq hunters ever farther from their shores to hunt sea otters.

The clergy were careful to couch their criticism in terms of observable phenomena. Unlike the RAC employees, they attempted to plant gardens, experimenting to find out which crops grew best on Kodiak with differing fertilizers. They studied the Alutiiq language and culture, recording pre-and post-Russian practices that might otherwise have been lost. It is believed that Hieromonk Gideon actually composed the Alutiiq dictionary that Rezanov claimed as his own.⁹⁶ They did not fail to note the disastrous impact of RAC practices on the Alutiiq, reporting that the size of hunting parties sharply decreased over just a five year period: with 800 baidarkas employed in 1799, 500 in 1804, and finally 300 in 1804.⁹⁷ Gideon wrote that,

⁹⁵ Hieromonk Gideon, *The Round the World Voyage of Hieromonk Gideon* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1989), 77.

⁹⁶ Gideon, *Round the World Voyage*, 101.

⁹⁷ Gideon, *Round the World Voyage*, 63.

[d]ue to the onerous tasks imposed by the company, which have been described above, Aleuts in all settlements in wintertime suffer great hunger; when shellfish and kelp become unavailable as the tideflats are covered with ice, they consume even seal bladders in which they store oil and fermented roe and of red salmon, processed seal skins, thongs, and other items made of sinew... A compassionate human being can hardly restrain his tears observing the situation of these unhappy people who resemble the dead more than the living.⁹⁸

There were powerful forces operating against the clergy. Baranov took every opportunity to undermine the clergy's advocacy on behalf of the Alutiiq population. Even Nikolai Rezanov, who was befriended Hieromonk Gideon during their voyage to the colonies, attempted to restrain Gideon's interference in Company practices. In a letter he wrote from Sitka, Rezanov implored Gideon to reject "all secular concerns" in his spiritual mission to "enlighten and educate ignorant humanity."⁹⁹ To the RAC main office, Rezanov reported that the clergy were doing a poor job; baptizing Alutiiq without explaining the meaning, and making themselves available to restless officers that would cause trouble for Baranov.¹⁰⁰ But the clergy were correct about the rapid depopulation of Kodiak and the unsustainability of Russian practices. Along with the Russian clergy, scientists, military officers, and outside observers all noted the disastrous environmental and social consequences of RAC hunting practices. However, they persisted until Baranov's retirement in 1818. For the Chief Manager to exploit the riches that were found in Russian America during Russia's eighteenth century voyages of exploration, it was critical for him to exploit Alutiiq labor and silence criticism of his practices. He did

⁹⁸ Gideon, *Round the World Voyage*, 70.

⁹⁹ Gideon, *Round the World Voyage*, 86

¹⁰⁰ "A Letter from Nikolai P. Rezanov to the Directors of the Russian American Company Regarding Russian Orthodox Missionaries in Alaska, November 6, 1805" in *Russian American Colonies*, 102-104.

both as best he could, even after he moved the company's headquarters to Sitka in 1808.

As Baranov began to plan the conquest of Sitka in 1804, he must have had some sense that things in the colonies needed to change. Hunters were depopulating the coastline of sea otters all the way to the Alexander Archipelago. The company was also suffering severe losses of Alutiiq and Russian personnel during the hunting season because of the distances the hunters had to travel. What was needed was a significant increase in the technology available to him to secure fortifications at Sitka, defend hunting parties, and to potentially deal with the problematic Americans. For this, he needed better ships.

CHAPTER 3
ACT 2 – A RHODE ISLAND YANKEE IN RUSSIAN AMERICA, 1804-1808

Scene 1 – The Pacific Northwest from the Bow of the *Juno*

Wherein we follow John DeWolf on the final voyage of the *Juno* from Rhode Island to the Pacific
Northwest

On August 13, 1804, the *Juno* weighed anchor in Rhode Island and left on its second expedition to the Pacific Northwest. Unlike the previous voyage, this trip was well documented. John DeWolf, the 24 year-old nephew of the ship's owners, was named captain. Having just completed a long voyage around the Cape of Good Hope (quite possibly on a slaving vessel), DeWolf agreed to serve as captain and supercargo with a crew of twenty-six men and boys. He was scheduled to leave fresh on the heels of the first expedition, and yet DeWolf mentions the first voyage of the *Juno* only once in his narrative.

Stranger still, Nor'west John (as he was known by family and friend after what would become a four year voyage) recalled that his relatives, "Messrs. Charles, James, and George DeWolf, purchased a fine ship, called the *Juno*... and projected a voyage to the Northwest Coast of America to collect furs for the China market." But ship registry records show that the DeWolf family owned the ship since shortly after its construction in 1799.¹ It is likely that DeWolf was referring to the fact that the *Juno* was re-registered from Newport to Bristol three days before she set sail, with George DeWolf and the young captain being listed as the primary owners.

¹ *Ships Registers and Enrollments of Newport, Rhode Island 1790-1939* (Providence: The National Archives Project, 1938-1941), 355; and *Ship Registers and Enrollments of Bristol-Warren, Rhode Island 1773-1939* (Providence: The National Archives Project, 1941), 143. When the ship was initially registered in Newport, the owners were James DeWolf, William DeWolf, John DeWolf Sr., and Jeremiah Dimon. George DeWolf and Charles DeWolf were added as owners just before the 1801-1803 expedition.

It wasn't until 1861 that the captain wrote about his adventures along the Pacific Northwest Coastline, which ultimately led him through Siberia to St. Petersburg and then back to Rhode Island across the Atlantic. As mentioned before, American merchant captains were keen to keep their journals and logs private. As one historian has noted, their trade was a secretive business: "[L]ogs were lent to mariners outward bound on new ventures - as guides for business and advice for navigation... History of these endeavors thus did not emerge from the logs until the trade became unprofitable."² This is one possible reason why DeWolf waited fifty years to write about his journey.

In the opening pages of *A Voyage to the North Pacific and a Journey through Siberia More than Half a Century Ago*, DeWolf explains that he reconstructed his voyage through memoranda and reminiscences. He regretted, "that I did not make any note of what I saw, and that I had not the requisite qualifications to write an extended account of it; but business called my thoughts in other directions." Nor'west John became the story-teller of the DeWolf family, having lived to the age of ninety-three. He was motivated, in part, to write the narrative in order to leave "some slight record of that voyage in my family." The gap of nearly 60 years also possibly explains why DeWolf comments so little on the *Juno's* first voyage under Jabez Gibbs.

One family member that apparently never tired of Nor'west John's stories was Herman Melville. In 1814, John DeWolf married Mary Melville, Herman's aunt. In his youth, the future author spent the summer of 1828 in Bristol with the DeWolfs.³ He

² Busch and Gough, *Fur Traders*, 11-12.

³ Sidney Kaplan, "Towards Pip and Daggoo: Footnote on Melville's Youth." *Phylon* vol. 29 no. 3 (1968): 294.

must have paid close attention to his uncle's exciting stories. Melville later included references to events that occurred during DeWolf's voyage in *Moby Dick*. He quoted the travel writings of Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff in the novel. Langsdorff befriended DeWolf during their mutual stay in the Russian American colonies during the fall and winter of 1805-1806. While Melville also drew upon his own extensive whaling experiences in the Pacific, DeWolf's tales clearly left a lasting impression.

John DeWolf's recollections of his journey reveal how Yankee merchants not only witnessed the consolidation of Russia's colonies at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they also played a role in the process. Americans interacted with both the native populations and the Russians at the time, occasionally mediating disputes; but more often causing them. DeWolf personally witnessed a pivotal moment in the development of commerce in the Pacific Northwest, as American merchants became ever more dependent upon working with the Russians. But DeWolf's description of his journey first to Russian America, then to European Russia, also reveals how Russian America existed as a frontier beyond Russia's continental frontier. He described the tapestry of Russian imperial society, from its frayed edges all the way to its center. While he did not think much about what he observed, DeWolf's reminiscences reveal how social roles were more rigid as he moved ever closer to the Russian metropole.

Voyage to the Northwest Coast

In the early nineteenth century, ships leaving New England for a Pacific crossing would pass within eyesight of the Cape Verde Islands near the coast of Africa. On November 9, 1804 the *Juno* crossed the equator in longitude 24 degrees west, a little more than a month after she departed. A somewhat curmudgeonly DeWolf noted that this southeasterly course and the amount of time it took to reach the equator, while

strange to the standards of 1861, was a normal route for the time. The fifty years between his voyage and his narrative, he noted, brought improvements “in the sciences of navigation and naval architecture” that the *Juno* simply did not have.⁴ On November 12, 1804, approximately 200 miles northwest of the present day Falkland Islands by Captain DeWolf’s coordinates, the *Juno* “fell in” with the *Mary* out of Boston. The *Mary* was also on a return voyage to the Pacific Northwest under the command of a new captain by the name of Trescott. Both captains must have been relieved to have another ship close by during the voyage around the treacherous Cape. DeWolf may not have known, or failed to mention, that this was the second time the ships met. These were the same vessels involved in the aborted rescue attempt of James Jewitt from Maquinnah under Captains Gibbs (*Juno*) and Bowles (*Mary*).

The passage between South America and Antarctica was a dangerous endeavor at that time. Fierce west-to-east winds, rocks, icebergs and treacherous currents conspired to make rounding the Cape a challenging rite of passage for sailors well into the nineteenth century. A week after meeting up with the *Mary*, DeWolf recorded that the ships collided. Due to negligence on the part of officers on the watch for both ships, DeWolf recalled that, “our whole broadsides came into contact with a crash that made every timber quake.” For nearly fifteen minutes, the ships faced a perilous entanglement. When they finally parted, there was some damage to the rigging, but no apparent structural problems.⁵

After disentangling, the *Mary* and the *Juno* parted company. As the *Juno* reached 56 degrees south on November 24, she was rocked by severe gales. For ten

⁴ John DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 4.

⁵ John DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 7-8.

days the ship battled headwinds, and it was not until December 10 that the crew successfully completed navigating around the Cape. DeWolf again encountered the *Mary* three days later, and they sailed together for another two weeks. While cruising along the coast of Chile, DeWolf and his officers decided to put in to a port for repairs. Here, DeWolf makes his only mention of the previous voyage, noting that it was advisable to put into a Spanish port: “on account of the damage sustained during our boisterous passage of one hundred and thirty-eight days. The copper on the ship’s bottom, which had been worn as thin as paper during a previous long voyage of three years, had now become full of holes, and was torn off in many places by whole sheets.”

Towards evening on New Year’s Day, 1805, DeWolf attempted to put in to port near Concepcion, Chile. As night fell, the crew tried to tack against wind and currents. But by morning, they discovered that they were some distance from the port, a surprisingly common problem for sailing vessels at the time. They instead headed for Valparaiso, a larger port, where DeWolf also hoped for a better reception than he might have received at Concepcion, and avoid exciting “unjust suspicions of unlawful trade” – an accusation against Yankee merchants in the Pacific that was not entirely unjust. American merchants did not have the best reputation among the Spanish, as more unscrupulous captains were known to poach sea otters from Spanish waters in California. After an initial icy reception, DeWolf was able to take on supplies in Valparaiso. On January 20, 1805, they sailed on to Coquimbo, a port better suited to making the repairs. There they stayed for a week before heading on.

A month later, the *Juno* crossed the equator approximately 1100 miles west of the Galapagos Islands. In late March, she crossed the Tropic of Cancer. Finally, on

April 7, 1805, the ship and crew reached their first intended destination: Vancouver Island. In the evening, the ship arrived at a favored port for Boston merchants, Newettee harbor, on Hope Island near Vancouver's northwest coast. As they approached, DeWolf noted that the *Pearl* and the *Mary* were already in the harbor. The captain of the *Pearl*, John Ebbets, came out to help the *Juno* navigate into the harbor. This was the same captain that sailed with the British Captain Barber three years before to ransom Sitka survivors back to Baranov.

Yankee Trade along the Coast

Newettee harbor was popular with the American merchants because Haida, Tsimshian, and Tlingit traders from the surrounding area would arrive to trade with them. It was not, however, the most advantageous trading venue, as the local populations became accustomed to regular interaction with American merchants (and their wares), driving fur prices to steadily increase. DeWolf noted that the native populations in the area were "exceedingly sharp in all their intercourse." So confident were the Tsimshian, Haida, and Tlingits in dealings with Yankee merchants, DeWolf wrote, that they were at times insulting to the Americans. Despite this, he had to forbear, as "policy induced us to put up with the insults, in the hopes of driving a bargain."⁶ These contacts left DeWolf with mixed feelings regarding the indigenous populations along the Northwest coast. He recalled that they were, "great beggars, withal... [T]hey were ready to grasp at everything they saw." But they were also "very stout and robust people, and in some things not destitute of skill." By 1805, dwindling sea otter populations in the area, plus the increasing savvy of the natives, meant that more profit was to be had in sailing from village to village along the coast between

⁶ John DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 18.

Vancouver Island and Sitka. Thus, on April 20, the *Juno* weighed anchor and headed northwest for a harbor on present day Queen Charlotte Island. Here DeWolf hoped to get a better exchange rate for furs for that year.

The *Juno*'s cargo included goods for presents and trade. The captain noted that perishables such as rum, tobacco, molasses, sugar, rice, woodenware, duffels, etc. were goods that "the Indians will take only as presents." In addition, they also had food, such as beef, pork, flour, and bread. Items for trade included, blankets, muskets, gunpowder, and ammunition.⁷ By this time, trading firearms and equipment was the primary means American merchants had to procure precious sea otter furs for the Chinese market, and DeWolf appeared quite comfortable with such trade. He recalled that "[f]rom long intercourse with American traders, the natives had become extremely expert in the use of the musket..."

Arriving in late April at Queen Charlotte Island with the *Pearl*, DeWolf spotted two other ships – the *Vancouver* and the *Caroline* – the latter under the command of Captain William Sturgis. From the 1820s through the 1840s, Sturgis was the *de facto* historian of American trade on the Northwest coast. While replacing a damaged mizzenmast, the *Juno* received daily visits from Haida settlements. DeWolf recalled that even this far north, prices were so extravagant that it was impossible to trade. The high prices sought in that year were also reported by other boat captains, including captain Sam Hill, who had his second run-in with the *Juno*. "Not being likely to receive

⁷ John DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 19-20.

much benefit from a longer stay,” DeWolf wrote, “we resolved at once to proceed to the settlement of the Russians on Norfolk Sound.”⁸

In May 1805, the *Juno* arrived at Novo-Arkhangelsk, the site of the present day city of Sitka. DeWolf was surprised to be greeted by a fellow American by the name of Abraham Jones, who signed up for RAC service with Baranov during O’Cain’s 1803 visit to Kodiak. Jones arranged for DeWolf to meet Baranov – who was still in Sitka after driving the Kiks.ádi Tlingit from their ancestral settlement. Upon being introduced, DeWolf was “received with every mark of friendship and hospitality.” Well pleased with the introduction, DeWolf returned to the *Juno*. He was surprised by how things went, as he “had been led to believe from various reports that we should find the Russians little advanced from the savage state.”

The Battle of Sitka - 1804

As it turned out, the Russians had only recently returned to Sitka Island after Fort Mikhailovsk was destroyed in 1802. In April 1804, Chief Manager Baranov planned to permanently conquer the island for Russia. Even with a noble title recently conferred upon him, Baranov contended with considerable opposition to his plans.⁹ Yet he sailed to Yakutat Bay with the *Ekaterina* (80 tons) and the *Aleksandr* (100 tons), intend upon raising an armada of ships and approximately 250 baidarkas. The Chief Manager took command of two additional vessels built at Yakutat: the *Ermak* (60 tons) and the

⁸ John DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 19.

⁹ “Letter, Baranov to the Emperor, August 24, 1805” in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company, Vol II*, 144. Baranov thanked the emperor for elevating him in the table of ranks after being “born in the merchant class and educated almost by nature alone.” Despite his new status, Baranov asked to be relieved from duty, as he was growing tired from over ten years in the colonies.

Rostislav (42 tons).¹⁰ Baranov transferred to the *Ermak* after installing small cannons from supplies provided by O’Cain in exchange for the use of native fur hunters. He then set off for Sitka with a flotilla of native baidarkas, sending the *Ekaterina* and the *Aleksandr* ahead. The Russians and natives under their control hunted fur seals and sea otters near Tlingit villages along the way from Yakutat to Sitka. The inhabitants of Sitka must have known of the approaching flotilla. Khlebnikov described Baranov’s voyage to Sitka as a heroic struggle against the sea and weather, which threatened to sink the *Ermak* on one occasion.

As the flotilla approached Krestov Harbor, they spotted a Russian Naval frigate, the *Neva*, at anchor with the *Aleksandr* and *Ekaterina*. The *Neva*, a 450-ton ship, was on the middle leg of Russia’s first diplomatic and scientific circumnavigation of the globe at the behest of the Russian court. Ivan Fedorovich Kruzenstern, captain of the expedition aboard the flagship *Nadezhda*, ordered the *Neva*, under the command of Lieutenant Yuri Fedorovich Lisiansky, to proceed to Kodiak to assess conditions in the Russian colonies. Upon arriving at Kodiak in July 1804, Lisiansky found out about Baranov’s planned attack on Sitka, and hastened to meet up with the Chief Manager.

What followed was called by many the Battle of Sitka. Russian sources indicate that Baranov at first negotiated for the surrender of Sitka Island and the release of any Unangan, Alutiit, or Russian captives still held from 1802.¹¹ Joseph O’Cain, who accompanied the Russians aboard a Yankee merchant vessel, attempted to open

¹⁰ The *Ermak* was doubtlessly named for Cossack leader Ermak Timofiev, who conquered much of Siberia for Ivan the Terrible in exchange for clemency for the past crimes committed by Cossack outlaws. As Chevigny noted, Ermak died in 1584, but his men continued all the way to the Pacific, and founded Okhotsk in 1636 - which laid the foundations for Russian exploration of the North Pacific.

¹¹ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company, Vol I, 74.*

negotiations as a neutral trading party. He was fired upon as he approached the shore. The Sitkan Tlingits flatly refused Baranov's offers. In an imaginative and unsubstantiated passage, Hector Chevigny recounted that the Tlingits stated, "Since the Kolosh nation first was... this has been the home of the Sitka kwan, our totems are here and our spirits. What you ask is impossible."

As the Russians took up position for hostilities, the Sitkan Tlingits abandoned their indefensible settlement near the sound in mid-September, 1804.¹² They retired to a more secure location on what is now known as the Indian River. Langsdorff recalled that they heard that "Nanook" was leading the expedition and "fled in fear to fortifications," which seems very unlikely given the skirmishes that followed.¹³ As the Tlingit moved further up the sound, Baranov claimed the hill overlooking the Harbor – now known as Castle Hill. He christened the promontory Novo-Arkhangelsk (New Archangel).

While building a simple fort at the location, the *Neva's* guns protected the Russians. Military historians have noted that while the Russians enjoyed an advantage in firepower, the Sitka Tlingit were still heavily armed, well positioned in terms of terrain, and more than capable of resistance. Langsdorff recalled that, "[f]rom the intercourse of trade carried on to these parts by the United States of America, and from the destruction of the original Russian Settlement, the Kaluschians [sic] were in possession of fire-arms powder, and shot."

In 2010, John Dusty Kidd presented a military analysis of the Battle of Sitka, the six days of conflict that started in October, 1804. The actual magnitude of combat

¹² Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 134.

¹³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 372-373.

constituted the equivalent of a modern skirmish between infantry battalions. Such fighting, according to Kidd is typified by “localized, tactical outcomes.”¹⁴ But Kidd noted several interesting factors that escaped most historiography of the encounter. First, the forces were relatively evenly matched. Were it not for the fortuitous arrival of the *Neva*, the scales could easily have tilted away from the Russians. Second, military analysis of the engagements reveals that Baranov made a number of mistakes, while the Tlingits made the most of surroundings, capabilities, and opportunities.

As September wore on, it became clear that conflict was on the horizon. Shortly after Baranov took Castle Hill, the Sitkans attempted to recover gunpowder that was hidden on a nearby island. Russian sources indicate that sailors from the *Neva* intercepted the Tlingit, and blew up the gunpowder. Shortly thereafter, the Tlingit sent representatives to make peace. Negotiations again proved unsuccessful. At that meeting, Baranov repeated his demand that the natives abandon Sitka Island entirely, and turn over any hostages taken in 1802. Chevigny’s account depicts Baranov’s actions as heroic. Using unabashed prose to praise the white man’s conquest of the Pacific Northwest, Chevigny depicted Baranov as the victim of Tlingit aggression. “Once we asked only to live at peace with you,” answered Baranov. “We lived in one narrow place and asked for no more. We did you no harm. We always paid you for what you brought us...”¹⁵ But that time was past, and the Sitkans had to leave. In late September, the Tlingit seized a baidarka, killing two Alutiiq hunters and escalating hostilities.

¹⁴ John Dusty Kidd, “The Battle of Sitka: Generals and Soldiers,” in *Over the Near Horizon*, 114.

¹⁵ Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 219-220.

By October 1, 1804, Baranov's patience had expired. Transferring small cannons to the *Ekaterina*, Baranov positioned the ship to pound the Sitkan fortifications. After a brief barrage, Baranov planned an amphibious attack with 150 Russian, Alutiiq and Unangan men divided into two parties. He led one of the factions personally. Kidd noted that this assault was foolhardy for several reasons. First, he was assaulting a defensive position with fewer men than were in the Tlingit fort (about 150 Russians to 700 Tlingits). Second, Baranov's position was vulnerable to a counter-attack made by the Kiks.ádi war leader, Katlian. Finally, he began the assault in the evening, when sunlight was waning. Bravely but brashly charging uphill through dense vegetation, Baranov's men ran headlong towards the waiting Sitkans. With the aid of the above-mentioned counter-attack, the Sitkans drove back the Russians, injuring Baranov and killing three sailors from the *Neva* in the process.¹⁶

On the second and third days of the attack, Lisiansky had the *Neva* towed into position by over 100 baidarkas, and brought her cannons to bear upon the Tlingit settlement. In the absence of reinforcements from surrounding clans and without the gunpowder needed to resist, the Sitkans attempted again to negotiate a settlement that would allow them to stay near the ancestral home. After this failed and the *Neva*'s cannons again struck the fort, the Sitka Tlingit agreed to leave. But the next day there was no activity, so the bombardment resumed. Towards evening, an elderly Sitkan native brought a number of children to the shoreline. After negotiating with the

¹⁶ In a letter recounting the events, Baranov wrote that, "[m]y arm was out of commission for five months and even now it bothers me when I have to do clerical work, of which there is and always will be plenty..." See "Letter, Baranov to Demid Il'ich Kuliakov, Commander of the Andreianov, Rat, and Near Islands, April 29, 1805" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company, Vol II*, 142-143.

Russians for a ceasefire so the Sitkans could leave, the old man returned to the settlement. During the night, the Sitkans abandoned the settlement. Russian sources claimed that the Tlingit killed many of their young, rather than seeing them fall into the hands of their enemies. But such accounts are strongly contested in Tlingit oral histories of the battle. What is clear is that the Sitkan Tlingits quickly and silently abandoned their fort. They set out on what became known as the Survival March, and settled 150 miles north of Sitka Sound at the Chatham Straits. There they waited until 1821, when the Russians allowed them to again live close to the Russians on the Sound.

The Kiks.ádi clan's oral tradition confirms much of this story, but adds crucial pieces. The Tlingit of Sitka prepared carefully for the return of the Russians after they destroyed Fort Mikhailovsk in 1802. The fortification on Indian River was prepared well before 1804, and arrangements were made with surrounding Tlingit settlements to come to the aid of the Sitkans. But this assistance failed to materialize. The Kiks.ádi oral tradition also indicates that, while they were beaten at the Battle of Sitka, the Tlingit were not defeated. Subsequent Tlingit hostility towards Russian and Alutiiq hunters in the years following the Battle of Sitka, including periodic blockades of Sitka Harbor and the destruction of the Yakutat Bay colony in 1805, indicate that the Tlingit settlements had the capacity to continue resistance to the Russians.¹⁷ At Sitka, the Kiks.ádi war leader, Katlian, proved to be a skilled adversary. He planned the 1802 sacking of Fort Mikhailovsk and coordinated the counter-attack on Russian forces in 1804. His military leadership ensured that any settlement with the Russians at Sitka would not mean total

¹⁷ Dauenhauer, *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 283.

subjugation. And this brings about, perhaps, the most crucial part of the Battle of Sitka that is underemphasized in Russian, American, and European sources: Baranov had to sue for peace with the Kiks.ádi if he was to keep control of the area.¹⁸

The months that followed the Battle of Sitka were tense. Lisiansky stayed through the autumn to protect Baranov and his men as they worked to build the settlement of New Archangel (present day Sitka). According to Kiks.ádi oral tradition, the Sitkan Tlingits eventually recognized Baranov's right to rule and tax the area. They never gave up their ownership claims for the Alexander Archipelago, with the exception of Castle Hill.¹⁹ But the economic and political significance of Baranov's political control of the area was not lost on Georg Langsdorff, who arrived later that year:

Formally these people carried on a free trade with the United States of America, who made annual voyages to their shores, bringing rice, linen and woolen cloth, knives, axes, hatchets, kettles, kitchen utensils, etc. to exchange for sea otter skins. But no such trade can now be carried on. As the Russians take all the sea otters that are to be found, the ships of the United States will have no further motive for visiting the Kaluschians, and the latter, deprived of this trade, will have no means of procuring the clothing, food and other conveniences to which they have been for 15 or 20 years accustomed. Many ships from the United States come now come to the Russian settlement, and the Russians are glad to exchange their sea otter skins for various items of the first necessity brought by them.²⁰

With populations of sea otters dwindling and the indigenous populations asking ever higher prices in areas not under the control of the Russians, Yankee merchants found that Baranov's good graces were increasingly important to make a profit along the Pacific Northwest coast. Such was the case when the *Juno* arrived in May, 1805.

¹⁸ Dauenhauer, *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*, 270.

¹⁹ Indeed, when the Americans purchased Alaska from the Russians in 1867, the Tlingit argued that the Russians only really owned Castle Hill, and not the lands around it.

²⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 375.

The Final American Voyage of the *Juno*

After trading some goods successfully to the Russians, DeWolf decided to head out on another expedition to trade with the Tlingit in the areas around Sitka. Sailing around the Alexander Archipelago, DeWolf recalled “touching as many of the intermediate harbors as we found it practicable, and making some trade.” The *Juno* sailed back to Newettee on Vancouver Island in late June, where the *Pearl* and the *Mary* were in the harbor. In addition, the *Lydia*, *Vancouver*, and *Atahualpa*- all owned by the Lyman family of Boston - were there. DeWolf learned that the *Atahualpa* was attacked during a trade expedition. With her captain and several crew killed, the ship barely made it to Newettee, where the American merchant vessels were attempting to repair her for a voyage home.²¹

At the time, the *Lydia* was under the command of Captain Hill, who rescued John Rodgers Jewitt during the *Juno*'s first expedition along the Pacific Northwest coast. According to American scholar Molly Malloy, Hill accused John DeWolf of deliberately buying furs at high prices in exchange for the cargo on the *Juno* because of the Rhode Islander's intent to sell the *Juno* to the Russians, thus depriving other captains of their fur quotas.²² But this accusation seems unlikely, as the Russians had not retaken Sitka until *after* the *Juno* left Rhode Island. Further, it is unlikely that Baranov alone would have been authorized to purchase the *Juno* were it not for the serendipitous arrival of

²¹ The *Atahualpa* has a history as fascinating as the *Juno*'s. After returning to Boston, she made more journeys to the Pacific Northwest coast. During the War of 1812, she was in Hawaiian Islands. Like the *Juno* before her, she was eventually sold to the Russians in 1813 and renamed the *Bering*. The Russians were able to purchase American vessels during the War of 1812, as vessels stuck outside the British blockade were unlikely to return home.

²² Malloy, *Devil on the Deep Blue Sea*, 36-37.

Count Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov, Chamberlain to the Russian court and plenipotentiary of the RAC, in August, 1805. Finally, the dearth of quality ships among the Russians for a return voyage to the United States must have given DeWolf significant pause during the negotiations for sale of the ship.

In mid-July 1805, the *Juno* again got underway to trade along the coast. DeWolf concedes to his reader, "I shall not attempt a detail of the occurrences, or give a description of the harbors and inlets we visited in our voyage from Norfolk Sound." He did recall heading for the southern extremity of Sitka Island, touching at several points before arriving on July 27, 1805 at the Chatham Straits, where the Sitkan Tlingits settled after the Battle of Sitka. It was here that DeWolf had his first brush with danger. He grew suspicious of Tlingit men who were inviting the *Juno* to anchor for trade. During one such exchange he readied his crew for "commerce or battle." Seeing this, DeWolf recalled, the Tlingit seemed less inclined to trade.

By early August, the *Juno* was anchored in Chatham Straits, east of Sitka and close to the new settlement of Sitkan Tlingits. Light winds kept DeWolf in the area until August 10. While getting underway, the ship was caught in an ebbing tide, which can run quite strongly between the islands of the Alexander Archipelago. The tide dragged the *Juno* towards a small island, and in the evening the ship's keel struck rocks. As the tide fell, she was left stranded. DeWolf wrote that the only option was to "secure her in the best manner possible before she began to keel over, and to prepare ourselves for defense in case of an attack from the savages." Securing the rigging and cannons, DeWolf ordered three of the boats on board to be supplied with arms, ammunition, and provisions in case the ship fell and became unsalvageable. Fortunately, the receding

tide revealed that the ship was miraculously supported by a tripod of three sharp rocks, which prevented capsizing.

By sunrise, according to DeWolf's account, Tlingit began to gather along the coast. "At first," he recalled, "they kept aloof, and seemed to entertain some suspicions as to our movements; but after going around the ship and examining her situation very carefully, we prevailed upon some of them to come alongside." DeWolf pretended that they brought the boat onto the rocks intentionally for repairs. While part of the crew worked on the ship, whose underside needed repairs anyways, another group of the crew was assigned to trade with the Tlingit. Interestingly, DeWolf recounted that he took a hostage during the negotiations to ward off any "hostile intentions." It is unknown if he learned this technique from the Russians or from other American merchants.

Repair crews had to caulk and stopper the holes caused by the rocks, and to clear the bilge. While pumping, they discovered that some of the cargo was damaged. To the crew's joy, however, the *Juno* was seaworthy with the incoming tide. After concluding trade, DeWolf released his hostage with "a very liberal present for his detention." Having examined the deteriorating condition of the copper on the ship's bottom, the captain decided to head immediately for Sitka to make more substantial repairs. Along the way, DeWolf again encountered the *Mary* and the two ships sailed into Sitka together on August 14, 1805. Baranov welcomed DeWolf "with that kind of obliging hospitality which made him loved and respected by every visitor." Bringing the *Juno* on shore, the crew began repairs immediately. By this time, DeWolf and his crew had collected approximately 1,000 sea otter pelts. DeWolf sent them for trade in Canton aboard the *Mary*, which left on August 20. Having to repair twenty floor timbers

and replace copper along the hull, the *Juno* was not brought back into the water until September 6, 1805.

After completing all of the repairs that were possible, DeWolf noted that they would have to carry on, “knowing no other alternative than to make the best of our crippled ship, and endeavor to prosecute the remainder of our voyage with more caution.” Apparently learning of O’Cain’s arrangement for requisitioning native help from Baranov in fur hunts further to the south, DeWolf proposed an expedition to the California coast with Alutiiq. The plan called for “fifty or sixty Kodiak Indians... for the purpose of catching sea otter,” with the *Juno* set to depart at the beginning of October. The voyage, however, did not take place due to the serendipitous arrival of the Russian brig *Maria*.

Scene 2 - John DeWolf: Yankee Merchant and Explorer

Wherein DeWolf travels across the Russian American colonies and Siberia, observing Russian society on his way to St. Petersburg

The *Maria* arrived at Sitka on August 26, 1805, after a nearly two-month journey from the port of Okhotsk. Under the command of Andrei Vasilevich Mashin, the *Maria* was typical of Russian vessels plying the routes between Okhotsk, Petropavlovsk, and the Pacific Northwest. Langsdorff, who was on the ship at the time of her arrival, described the *Maria* as “a heavy sailing two-masted vessel, of a hundred fifty tons, built at Ochotsk [sic].”²³ In addition to Langsdorff, the *Maria* also carried Lieutenant Nikolai Aleksandrovich Khvostov and Midshipman Gavril Davydov of the Imperial Russian Navy (both on their second voyage to Russian America), and Russia’s ambassador to Japan, the plenipotentiary of the RAC, Count Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov. DeWolf recalled that

²³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 315.

Rezanov was, “a nobleman who, after an unsuccessful embassy to Japan, returned to Kamchatka, en route to the posts on the Northwest Coast belonging to the Russian American Company, in which he was himself a large proprietor.” The Russians also brought two ship carpenters, who were charged with building new vessels for the company at Sitka.²⁴

With Novo-Arkhangelsk still under construction, and with supplies dwindling in the face of the coming winter, Baranov was hardly in a position to comfortably shelter the Russian delegation from the *Maria*, and the Americans aboard the *Juno* without making some arrangements. DeWolf noted that Sitka at the time was populated by 150 Russians and 250 Alutiiq and Unungan hunters, all of whom were “actively preparing for the coming winter, building log-houses, workshops and barracks.”²⁵ During a soiree hosted by Baranov, DeWolf recalled that he “jocosely” mentioned to Langsdorff that he would sell the *Juno* outright to the RAC for the right price. Given the difficulties inherent to building a vessel in Russian America without adequate materials, Rezanov promptly took DeWolf up on the offer.

By DeWolf’s account, he was not fully prepared for the earnestness of Rezanov’s offer, but after some deliberations the men arranged for the *Juno* to become a Russian vessel. The price was set at \$68,000, payable with (1) bills of exchange on the Directors of Russian American Company for \$54,638 in St. Petersburg, (2) 572 sea otter skins valued at \$13,062, (3) \$300 in cash, and (4) a small Russian vessel so that

²⁴ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 30.

²⁵ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 40.

DeWolf's crew could sail to China to sell the pelts from the agreement.²⁶ The *Ermak*, which was built shortly before the Battle of Sitka, was delivered to DeWolf and his crew. On October 5, 1805, the American flag was transferred to the *Ermak*, and the *Juno* became the *Yunona*. At Rezanov's suggestion, the *Ermak* set sail on October 27 for Hawaii before heading on to Canton with one of DeWolf's officers, George Stetson, in command.²⁷ Confirming the low quality of ships in the RAC's service, Rezanov wrote, "May God help them, so that they will not have to pay too high a price for their adventurousness."²⁸ DeWolf agreed to stay at the settlement until spring, 1806. From there, he would head to St. Petersburg with Rezanov overland to complete the sale of the *Juno*.

Wintering in Sitka

Having completed his transaction with Rezanov, and sending his furs on to China, DeWolf had little to do. Rezanov inventoried supplies in Sitka, and decided to risk a trip to Kodiak Island to obtain additional provisions. This trip probably would not have been made with the Russian vessels in port at the time, due to the approaching winter weather. But with the recently purchased *Juno*, Rezanov felt confident in a successful voyage. He placed Lieutenant Khvostov in command of the expedition, with Davydov serving as first officer.

²⁶ *Rossiisko-amerikanskaia kompaniya i izuchenie tikhookeanskogo severa (1799-1815)*. (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1994): 136-137.

²⁷ According to Chevigny, the *Ermak* successfully made a voyage to Hawaii before she was given to DeWolf. See Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 222. Rezanov reported to the company that *Ermak* made it to Hawaii under American ownership with no problems – and continued to Canton. See "A Confidential report from Nikolai P. Rezanov to Minister of Commerce Nikolai P. Rumiantsev, Concerning Trade and Other Relations between Russian America, Spanish California and Hawaii" in *Russian American Colonies*, 147.

²⁸ "Letter, Rezanov to the Directors of the Russian-American Company, from New Archangel, November 6, 1805" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 158.

DeWolf's memory of his experiences was remarkable, considering he wrote about them fifty years afterwards. With significant downtime after the sale of the *Juno*, he was keenly observant in his travels through Russian America and later in Siberia. The captain-without-a-ship quickly befriended Georg Langsdorff, who traveled to the Russian American colonies ostensibly as Rezanov's doctor. A native of Frankfurt, Germany, Langsdorff accompanied Rezanov on the same round-the-world expedition that brought Hieromonk Gideon to Kodiak, the *Neva* to Sitka, and Rezanov to Japan. Langsdorff's interest in coming to Russian America was not medicine, which DeWolf called his "profession," but rather because of his "taste" for natural history. The German's scientific interests extended from collection of biological specimens to study of the populations that lived along the coast of the Pacific Northwest. While Langsdorff was predictably more verbose in his descriptions of the events they both witnessed, DeWolf's narrative is fascinating because of his perspective as an early nineteenth century American merchant-explorer.

DeWolf regularly joined Langsdorff on hunts for game and specimens to study. With not much else to do, he familiarized himself with the area and learned to navigate with baidarkas. In November, Langsdorff approached DeWolf with the possibility of visiting the Tlingit who were displaced in the re-conquest of Sitka. Baranov was against the expedition, fearing for their safety. But since neither man was Russian, and since DeWolf had traded among them earlier in the year, Baranov reluctantly agreed to let them go with several Alutiiq men and a translator from the Tlingit settlement - the daughter of one of the clan leaders they intended to visit.

In the evening, three days after departing from Sitka, the expedition arrived near the Tlingit settlement. They were greeted by loud shouts from the men on shore, who rushed the party. “Suddenly,” DeWolf recounted, “some hundred naked Indians, armed with muskets, and holding firebrands in their hands, thronged to the water’s edge. No sooner had we made it known who we were, and approached the shore, than we were surrounded in a tumultuous manner by the Kaluschians [sic], who dragged us towards their fortress...”²⁹ Expecting that he would be put to death, DeWolf and the party had their personal items stripped from them, as the natives gesticulated wildly. But, as it turned out, these acts were actually “well intentioned offices of friendship.”

The expedition was housed with the father of their Tlingit interpreter. DeWolf was relieved to find that all of the items taken from them were returned with “not the smallest trifle being withheld, although there were undoubtedly many articles among them which the bearers must have coveted.” DeWolf recalled that the Russians called the natives “Kaluschians,” but that they called themselves “Schitchachon.” Their fortress, he noted, was built upon a cliff several feet above water’s edge. They protected themselves via an uphill path with double palisades, much like the fort that was built for the Battle of Sitka.

After visiting the “most distinguished of the chiefs,” DeWolf was relieved to receive good food in their host’s house. He also enjoyed a “lively and pleasing melody, sung by a number of men seated around the fire, which had been piled up to a great height.” He was not overly impressed with their houses, which he described as having, “filthy smoky interiors.” Perhaps panning to the voyeuristic curiosity of his readers,

²⁹ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 43.

DeWolf wrote that the men had painted faces, while the women wore discs of wood in their lips, which rendered women unable to “enjoy the luxury of a kiss.” The Sitka natives had no organized government, he recalled, and their sole source of wealth was determined by success in fishing and hunting. “In feuds between different families,” he continued, “the right of the strongest prevails, and they are only banded together against common enemies.”³⁰ DeWolf and Langsdorff stayed in the village for two days before heading back. On the way, they stayed with a chief who had been friendly towards the Russians, and was subsequently outcast from the rest of the Sitka natives.

Arriving at the Russian settlement about the same time as the *Juno* returned from Kodiak, the inhabitants of Novo-Arkhangelsk prepared for winter. One of the tasks Rezanov set for the fort was the construction of a new vessel. DeWolf recalled that the carpenter laid the keel of the vessel in December, with the *Juno* safely anchored in the harbor. In addition, the Russian vessels *Maria* and *Rostislav* were hauled on shore for repairs. Initially, things went well. Some Tlingit visited to trade, work proceeded in earnest, and the officers and guests enjoyed dances and social functions while receiving the lion’s share of the provisions brought by DeWolf aboard the *Juno*. By January, work on the new vessel, dubbed the *Avos*, began to wane as the wet and snow combined with the arduous work and took its toll on the workers.

At this point, DeWolf witnessed severe social disparities in Sitka, with the Governor’s guests and officers living in relative comfort while the laborers suffered from exhaustion and malnutrition. But the dances continued. DeWolf remembered that several under-officers “had their wives with them” at these parties. These were

³⁰ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 48-49.

doubtlessly Alutiiq women. He recalled that there were also Kodiak women available for dancing. "When dressed in their finery," he recalled, "they appeared quite respectable."

Without any cake for the rest of the settlement to eat, the colony began to suffer. The Russians, according to DeWolf, may have been able to sustain themselves with the abundance of fish in the area, but Russians and Alutiiq alike were employed in tasks that took them away from fishing. As scurvy set in, an expedition to California aboard the *Juno* was planned to procure provisions, and to hopefully establish trade relations between the Spanish religious settlements near San Francisco and the Russian America Company. Rezanov took charge of the expedition. DeWolf felt uneasy with these arrangements, as this trip would delay the planned journey to Siberia on the *Juno*. Rezanov assured the captain that, even if the *Juno* did not return in time, Lieutenant Mashin would take DeWolf to Siberia aboard the *Maria*. Rezanov and Langsdorff set sail on March 8, 1806, with Lieutenant Khvostov and Midshipman Davydov in command of the *Juno*.

April came with the *Maria* still on shore. Mashin indicated that there was too much work to do and too few men to put her back in the water. In May 1806 the American vessel *O'Cain* arrived visited Baranov again, but this time under the command of Jonathan Winship Jr. Winship sought to replicate the successful expedition of his employee, Captain Joseph O'Cain, by recruiting natives from the Russian colonies to hunt off the California coast and splitting the profits.³¹ After making arrangements with Baranov, Winship's ship, the *O'Cain*, left in mid-May.

³¹ After Joseph O'Cain's successful expedition trading American supplies for the use of the RAC's native population in hunting fur seals, the *O'Cain* returned to Boston in July, 1805. O'Cain next set sail aboard the *Eclipse* in January, 1806. Jonathan Winship Jr.,

With boredom creeping in, DeWolf helped Baranov clear a couple of acres to start experimenting with agriculture in the area. Finally, on June 21, the *Juno* returned from Spanish California, loaded with provisions, but no promise of future exchange from the Spanish. DeWolf increasingly worried about the prospects of heading to Siberia before unfavorable weather prevented his departure for another season. Rezanov did not want to send the *Juno* further west until the *Avos* was completed. The only ship available was the *Rostislav*, still onshore from the winter. DeWolf requested to captain the ship to Siberia himself. Langsdorff was excited by the idea, having tired of Russian America by the time he returned from California with Rezanov. On June 30, 1806, less than a week after making his request, DeWolf had the ship put into harbor, and made ready to sail with a ten-man crew.

After putting to sea, DeWolf had reason to worry. The *Rostislav* was seaworthy, but she was also sluggish. With the light summer winds, DeWolf feared that he would not reach Siberia before autumn, meaning he would have to wait out another winter before journeying to St. Petersburg. Following the Aleutian Islands towards Siberia, right whales frequently surrounded the vessel. Keeping close to the mainland, they sailed onward to Kodiak, arriving on July 13. DeWolf noted that while in the area, they visited several villages, where the Unangas and Alutiiq men were away in the employ of the Russians.

The ship reached Unalaska on August 12. Here they learned of the death of the superintendent of company affairs on the island. After some negotiations, they took the former supervisor's widow and daughter on board to bring them back to Russia.

who accompanied Captain O'Cain on the previous expedition, sailed the *O'Cain* back to Russian America, leaving Boston in October, 1805.

Departing on August 16, the *Rostislav* sailed for the Kurile Islands, which form a barrier between the Pacific and the Sea of Okhotsk. But as they approached on September 6, 1806, heavy winds prevented the ship from entering the sea. With Okhotsk – the first point of the overland route to St. Petersburg – unreachable, DeWolf was forced to head to Petropavlovsk on the Pacific coast of Kamchatka for the winter. They made port on September 22, 1806.

DeWolf in Siberia

DeWolf's account of his time in Siberia is revealing in a number of aspects. He was most likely the first American to cross Russia, a feat John Ledyard attempted unsuccessfully almost 20 years earlier. Even though he was pressing hard to arrive in St. Petersburg, DeWolf's remembrances bear a resemblance to the exploration narratives left by Cook and Vancouver on their maritime expeditions to the Pacific Northwest. Some of the cultural practices he observed were alien to him. But perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this portion of his narrative was the fact that DeWolf faithfully recorded his increasing social anxiety and the decreasing regard in which he was held as he moved closer to European Russia. This apprehension became particularly acute in Moscow. Like the great Pacific explorers, DeWolf was often left to his own devices as he traversed the Asian portions of Russia. His sojourns in Sitka and Kamchatka gave him what he referred to as a childish grasp of the Russian language, but the crafty merchant also used a letter of recommendation from Count Rezanov and pantomime to get him to St. Petersburg. Unlike the European explorers, DeWolf noted how often he found *himself* an exotic object from the perspective of the Russians he stayed with along the way.

Resigned to spending a winter on the Kamchatka peninsula, DeWolf was pleasantly surprised to see Midshipman Davydov in early November 1806 commanding the *Avos*. Khvostov arrived a couple of weeks later aboard the *Juno*, after dropping Rezanov in Okhotsk. Under orders from the Chamberlain, the Russian officers had just conducted a raid against Japanese settlers on Sakhalin Island and along a couple of the Kurile Islands. They took four Japanese prisoners, and were going to conduct further expeditions after the winter. DeWolf found it “especially agreeable” to see his friends and his old ship again. In March, as he recalled, the officers were headed for the northern Japanese Islands, where “they intended to land their passengers, and make some further attempts to establish an intercourse with the people.”

While in Petropavlovsk, DeWolf learned to ride the dog sleds that were the basis of transport during the winter in Kamchatka. Before Khvostov and Davydov departed for another trip to the Kuriles in March, they joined Langsdorff and DeWolf, going “out on excursions to the neighboring villages, from ten to twenty miles distant.”³² As DeWolf gained confidence in his abilities, he began venturing further afield; heading to the south of the peninsula while Langsdorff explored the north for specimens of natural history.

With significant downtime, he also had time to note the customs that the Russians practiced. DeWolf wrote that he admired “the rigid adherence of the Russians to their forms and ceremonies,” even though he found some of them strange. While in Petropavlovsk, the American was invited to be a godfather at an Orthodox christening. After participating in circling the baptismal font three times while crossing the child with

³² DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 79.

the priest, two godmothers, and another godfather, he recalled: "I thought this, or the greater part of it, a nonsensical ceremony, and a piece of rigmarole; but it was not my part to find fault or object to it, and I willingly conformed to the custom."³³ He also made note that a bottle of "real ardent spirits" found their way to the table after the ceremony, despite the shortages of winter. The Russians, he noted, "were very fond of celebrating birthdays, christenings, and as many holidays as they could make an excuse for."

DeWolf and Langsdorff had to wait until May 26, 1807 to leave, as their destination was Okhotsk and ice in the Sea of Okhotsk breaks up slowly. On May 30, the *Rostislav* encountered a large whale. As DeWolf recalled, they ran up onto the back of the animal, raising the vessel 2-3 feet out of the water. "It was like striking a rock, and brought us to a complete stand-still."³⁴ Langsdorff similarly recalled the incident, reporting that they ran into the whale, which "could have been disastrous if the boat listed or was shaken too hard by the impact, but Captain DWolf [sic] acted quite competently."³⁵ Herman Melville was riveted by this story as told by his uncle, for he quotes Langsdorff's account of the whale in *Moby Dick*.

On June 14, 1807, while sailing northward into the Sea of Okhotsk, DeWolf spotted thick ice in the Sea of Okhotsk ahead of the vessel. Unable to break through it, they had to sail around for several days. They finally anchored in Okhotsk on June 27. Upon arrival, they learned with sadness that Count Rezanov had become ill and died after a fall from his horse near Krasnoyarsk while enroute to St. Petersburg. After presenting his credentials to officials in Okhotsk, DeWolf made immediate preparations

³³ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 84-85.

³⁴ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 88.

³⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 572.

for a departure across Siberia. Langsdorff decided to stay in Okhotsk a little longer for “the promotion of his favorite object” - collecting specimens of natural history. On July 3, with eleven horses and a Yakut guide, DeWolf set off for the Siberian city of Yakutsk.

DeWolf charted a course across the Eurasian landmass that was relatively well-known to Russians involved in Siberian commerce. It was a difficult slog between Okhotsk and Yakutsk, with no regular post stations for changing horses. At this point in DeWolf’s tale, his descriptions read like brief diary entries. Many of these entries noted little more than the distance traveled that day, and the difficulties faced. As many Russian travelers noted, the route from Okhotsk to Yakutsk was slow going due to marshy conditions, often inclement weather, and insects. After crossing the White River, almost two-thirds of the way to Yakutsk, the expedition arrived at the principal change station on the Yakutsk-Okhotsk route, entering what was at the time considered the furthest reaches of travel in the Russian empire. DeWolf euphemistically reminisced that, despite his initial excitement at the prospect of overland travel, “the spray of the sea was far preferable to a mud bath.”

After arriving at Yakutsk on July 26, DeWolf made quick preparations to continue his journey along the Lena River towards Irkutsk. Compared to the rough slog of his initial leg, travel along the Lena was much more comfortable. In eleven days, he traveled over 400 miles by water. At various rest stops, DeWolf noted that the provincial population showed great deference to him and the Cossack that began traveling with him at Yakutsk, particularly when the Cossack was berating the locals for laziness while hitching horses in the presence of “an American captain” who was proceeding to St. Petersburg “on government business.”

At one stop, DeWolf helped inoculate a local population where smallpox had broken out. Using a technique he learned about in America, the captain ran a threaded needle through the lesion of one of the afflicted villagers. After cutting the thread into smaller “maggots,” DeWolf used his knife to cut several villagers’ arms, packing the thread in the wounds to immunize them. He also passed along diet advice - requesting that the villagers avoid fat and salted meat while they recuperated. Shortly after this episode, on August 28, 1807, DeWolf and his retinue arrived in Irkutsk.

Repeating a pattern that he set throughout Siberia, DeWolf searched out an RAC official in the city. As luck would have it, he also met up with Langsdorff. The German was intent upon crossing Lake Baikal enroute to Kiakhta, the principle outpost for trade between the Russians and the Chinese. The friends parted company again, and on September 10, the DeWolf reached Tomsk. After borrowing 200 rubles from the local Company official, he met up with a Greek merchant with whom he planned to travel via carriage to Moscow. Before departing from Tomsk, DeWolf was invited to dine with the Governor and “a great many gentlemen.” None of them knew English, but DeWolf was pressed to answer many questions about American political institutions and “form of government.” Explaining the best he could through his broken Russian and pantomime, DeWolf noted that the guests “appeared to understand, for they praised our institutions highly. If I was able, under the circumstances, to form a correct opinion, there was a good deal of the spirit of reform among them.”³⁶

Reaching Kazan on September 30, DeWolf was again invited to dinner with a government official. By this time, DeWolf sought to avoid such spectacles, as he felt

³⁶ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 125.

ashamed of his threadbare clothes after three years of travel. Another reason for his discomfort was that being a merchant hardly deserved such honor in Russia. "I felt a little uncomfortable," he wrote, "lest I should be questioned with regard to my official grade, as it might not have been good policy to have explained my claim to a captaincy." He nevertheless attended to avoid giving offense. As in Siberia, DeWolf found eager curiosity among the upper echelon of Kazan, where, "[t]he ladies questioned me about our country, and to show that they had some knowledge of American history, they spoke of Washington and Franklin in high terms."³⁷

On the way to St. Petersburg, DeWolf was surprised to note that, particularly in Western Siberia and in the steppe, "[a]ll kinds of provisions were so cheap, that the poorest inhabitant never need suffer for food; and I could see here, as throughout Siberia, the kindest feelings manifested towards the lower orders of society." However, as he crossed into European Russia, DeWolf noted that he and the Greek merchant with whom he was traveling received far less respect from the change stations along the route to Moscow. Despite this, he reached Moscow on October 8. Hoping to travel onward to St. Petersburg before the Baltic froze over, DeWolf stayed in Moscow only for one week. After replenishing his wardrobe in the "finest European fashions," DeWolf briefly toured the major districts of Moscow, seeing the city as it was "before Napoleon's fire, nearly 50 years ago."

Leaving his Greek companion behind, DeWolf left for St. Petersburg on October 17. He arrived in the capital four days later – driving directly to the RAC headquarters. He was introduced to the Director of the company, Mikhail Matveevich Buldakov. Like

³⁷ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 132.

Rezanov, Buldakov was Shelikov's son-in-law, having married one of the merchant's daughters. A member of the *kupechestvo* himself from Veliki Ustiuir in the Vologda oblast, Buldakov became one of the largest shareholders of the Company. When the RAC headquarters was moved to St. Petersburg by an imperial *ukaz* in 1800, Buldakov became the chairman of the board of directors with the active support of Natalya Shelikova.

DeWolf initially ran into a language barrier, unable to understand what Buldakov was saying about the *Juno's* bill of sale and the funds he was supposed to receive. A short time later, however, the American captain was greeted by Benedict Cramer, a fellow American that worked with the RAC. Cramer was a partner in the Banking firm Cramer, Smith, and Co., as well as a member of the RAC's Board of Directors.³⁸ The banker informed DeWolf that his partner had been to America, seen the duplicates of bills of exchange sent on from Russian America. On the basis of the agreement, the bills of exchange were honored in Spanish dollars, and paid with a 15% advance due to the premium Spanish dollars commanded. The proceeds were then invested in hemp, iron and other manufactures and sent to America. As a result, there was nothing for DeWolf to do but enjoy himself in Russia's capital.

After hearing this happy news, DeWolf was brought to meet Levitt Harris, the American Consul General in St. Petersburg. Staying with Buldakov, DeWolf had the opportunity to see the city and meet important figures like Count Nikolai Petrovich Rumiantsev, the Minister of Commerce future Minister of Foreign Affairs, and principal

³⁸ Cramer served on the RAC board of directors until being blamed for the company's fiscal woes in the early 1820s, when the Russian Navy completed its takeover of the Russian American colonies.

financier of the expedition that brought Rezanov and Langsdorff to the Russian American colonies. While DeWolf initially planned to leave in late November, the outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Britain hastened his departure. Rushing to the harbor, DeWolf was able to find transport to Denmark on a small Dutch ship. After hasty goodbyes, he set sail, arriving in Elsinore on November 13, 1807.

Soon after arriving near Copenhagen, DeWolf had the good fortune of meeting Captain David Gray, a merchant from Portland, Maine. Gray agreed to take DeWolf back to America. However, Gray's ship was forced to winter in Liverpool for needed repairs. They set sail from England on February 7, 1808, reaching Portland on March 25. From there, DeWolf was able to return to his home port of Bristol on April 1, 1808. After almost four years away, John DeWolf's expedition netted his family over \$100,000; at the time a considerable profit for his efforts. DeWolf's experiences led him to continue to trade with the Russians into the 1820s. But his subsequent trips were made via the Atlantic into the Baltic Sea. Nor'west John's exploits had a profound impact on the rest of his life. They made him a living legend among those he knew. DeWolf even named his son Langsdorff in honor of the friend he found in the Pacific Northwest. And he apparently never tired of telling about his adventures traveling around the globe.

Denouement – Russian America after the Battle of Sitka

The *Juno's* second trip to the Pacific Northwest coincided with significant changes in the Russian American colonies. Chief among these were the altered relations that Russians initiated with the Tlingit population. As previously mentioned, the Tlingit at Sitka were defeated in battle, but not conquered. In October 1805, Tlingits located near Yakutat Bay raised the Russian shipyard and colony that was established there in 1794. The clans that surrounded Sitka continued hostile acts, such as periodic

embargoes of the harbor. Thus, from 1804 until his retirement in 1818, Baranov was forced to continuously negotiate and barter with the Tlingit to secure their passivity to the Russian presence in their territory. According to Lydia Black, these interactions meant that, “The Tlingit people remained politically independent... [t]hey not only tolerated the Russians' presence and traded with them, but in later years supplied Novo-Arkhangelsk with food and even grew potatoes in quantity specifically for sale to the Russian colony.” The Russians, in turn, stayed out of Tlingit “internal affairs.”³⁹

As political activity shifted towards the southeast, Kodiak became the supply house for the colonies. In addition to being the home for the bulk of the RAC's labor force, Kodiak was a key stopping point and communications hub for Russian activities that extended along the southern Alaskan coast, the Aleutian Islands, and even operations further north. And yet, the more things changed, the more they remained the same. In October 1805, Rezanov sent the *Juno* to Kodiak to procure supplies for Sitka. According to Black, the ship was sent to essentially “raid” supplies from Three Saints Bay, so as to not disturb operations at the main port of St. Paul.⁴⁰ Langsdorff noted that the ship returned on a month later, bringing “70,000 dried fish, a quantity of whale-fat, train-oil, berries, saranna roots, and other productions of Kodiak.” In addition, they brought back a number of Alutiiq women, “under the strength of an order which they carried for the purpose to the Governor of Kodiak, M. Bander.”⁴¹ Such reprehensible actions demonstrate that while Sitka eventually became the capital of the colonies,

³⁹ Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 162.

⁴⁰ Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 175.

⁴¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 379.

Kodiak was the linchpin upon which the colonies depended. Indeed, Kyrill Khlebnikov even proposed moving the capital of the colonies back to Kodiak in the 1820s.

In the diplomatic sphere, many historians of Russian America have noted significant changes in trade after the Russians established themselves at Sitka. Most importantly, they point to the growing interdependence of Yankee and Russian operations in the area. Americans continued to trade weapons for sea otter pelts with the RAC's neighbors after 1804, predominantly the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian. But they also began stopping at Sitka as a safe place to repair their ships, and to strike up deals with Baranov's men that would often shorten the time they needed to spend on the Northwest coast. The Russians were certainly more hospitable than the Spanish in terms of trade, as they depended upon these contacts for supplies. Russia was never able to adequately provision its colonies, even after Atlantic circumnavigations began.⁴² Russian contact with Yankee merchants in the Pacific Northwest also facilitated the opening of official diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Kyrill Khlebnikov reported that after O'Cain's successful 1803 hunt with Alutiiq contracted from Baranov, several American ship captains followed suit.⁴³ Baranov and these ship captains soon began drawing up contracts. One such contract, drawn up in May 1808 between Baranov and Captain George Washington Ayres, reveals the complex, and often international, character of these interactions. It called for Baranov to supply, from Kodiak, 25 baidarkas and fully-provisioned hunters for "joint hunting on the distant shores of Northwest America and hunting grounds that only I, Ayres, know

⁴² Ilya Vinkovetsky, "The Voyages between Sitka and St. Petersburg and the Ethnic Policies of the Russian-American Company" in Kidd, *Over the Near Horizon*, 90.

⁴³ K.t. Khlebnikov, *Notes on Russian America, Part I: Novo-Arkhangel'sk* (Fairbanks: The Limestone Press, 1994), 9-10.

sufficiently well.”⁴⁴ Captain Ayres took pains to include secrecy as the *first* condition of the contract; as such knowledge was highly valuable. “At present,” the contract continues, “I am keeping these places secret, but will accurately reveal them after this matter of common interest is concluded and the agreement is renewed, or when a company vessel under the command of a Russian officer arrives.” Later in the contract, Ayres specifies that if, in the future, Russian vessels should arrive at the location while Ayres is there, neither would interfere with the other’s activities, and Ayres would be permitted to “seek profits in other places.”

Baranov was to provide two record keepers to make sure the catch was fairly divided. They were to be treated equally to officers aboard the ship. The contract also called for several “wives” of the *promyshlenniki* to accompany the expedition, as their services were needed for mending the baidarkas and clothing the Alutiiq employed. Recognizing the potential for discord between the Russian and American crews, the contract recognized the Russian agents had the right to protect the women on board from harassment if complaints to the captain are not appropriately addressed. Equally important for Ayres, the contract stipulated that “The company agents are not to interfere with ship’s orders, and are not to be involved or take sides in disagreements among the crew, especially against the captain, whose authority they must always defend.”⁴⁵

Ayres was not *overly* coy about the area in which they would be hunting. The fifth provision of the contract indicated that should the captain require provisions “or

⁴⁴ “Contract between Aleksandr A. Baranov and Captain George Washington Ayres, May 19, 1808” in Bashkina, *The United States and Russia*, 512.

⁴⁵ Bashkina, *The United States and Russia*, 515

other goods for his own use along the coasts of New and Old California, which belong to Spain, with which Russia has broken her alliance because of French ambitions in Europe, and is therefore an enemy, the Spaniards should not get the opportunity to know of our ties with the American *promyshlenniki* [those under Russian suzerainty] from here.” However, should conflict with the Spaniard arise, and Alutiiq were lost, “250 dollars are to be paid to the [Russian American] company in compensation for the surviving family and relatives, and the right of satisfaction to be reserved to the command of this place.” Should trade opportunities open between the Spanish and Ayres, the contract recognized his right to conduct such intercourse. Any provisions so gained, if needed by the Russians, might then be traded for a portion of Baranov’s share of furs. Recognizing the growing international implications of the fur trade along the Northwest coast, the contract concludes by noting, “mutual assurances are given to maintain these articles holy and inviolable and to observe the honor, fame, and respect of the Russian State and the United States of America in order to maintain in the future between ourselves and our fellow-countrymen mutual ties and advantages based on good faith in the profitable commerce of these remote areas.”

The establishment of the New Archangel colony after the Battle of Sitka solidified the RAC’s position in the North Pacific fur trade. But, as we have seen, Baranov’s interaction with foreign merchants was not popular with the Board of Directors in St. Petersburg. The Chief Manager was fortunate that Rezanov arrived in August, 1805. As we will see, Rezanov validated many of Baranov’s decisions. He proved to be instrumental in the procurement of the *Juno*, which meant that the colonies were not at the mercy of Yankee merchants, but could negotiate favorable conditions for trade. The

Juno was more than capable of routinely transporting goods to and from the colonies and Siberian outposts, and was used to protect fur hunting parties in 1810.

The colonies also underwent a number of social changes between 1804 and 1806. John DeWolf's East to West journey across Eurasian Russia demonstrated how the social fabric of the empire changed as one traveled toward (or away from) the metropole. But the colonies were not just the furthest outlier from the Russian cultural and political capital. As mentioned previously, it was the only administrative unit of the empire governed by a joint stock company and placed under the leadership of a merchant. Life in the colonies was therefore organized around the profitable extraction of natural resources. During the early nineteenth century, this meant that the Alutiiq became the principle labor force for all of the colonies. When DeWolf visited Kodiak on his way to Siberia, he reported that he visited several Alutiiq villages populated by women, the elderly, and children. The men were away in various parts of the colonies hunting for the company. The American reported that the inhabitants of the village "happily" went out the business of making clothing and taking care of the villages in the absence of the men.⁴⁶ While this may have been wishful remembrance, there can be no doubt from his account that, by 1804, the Alutiiq had to some degree adjusted to their role as the labor force of the colonies.

But social relations between Russians that lived in the colonies, and those that arrived from the metropole were still difficult. As we will see, the arrival of the *Maria* in August 1805 rekindled tensions between the company men who led the colonies and low ranking Russian naval officers that frequently captained vessels on behalf of the

⁴⁶ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 66.

RAC. The *Juno* under Russian ownership was often a locus of such tension. As international contacts increased following the Battle of Sitka and the arrival of the *Juno*, this discord had the potential to damage the colonies under Baranov's control. Rezanov sought to settle these differences, but the Chamberlain of Tsar Alexander I's court brought his own biases with him to the colonies. And difficulties for Rezanov began as soon as he stepped aboard the ship that would take him around the world for his visit to Russia's American colonies.

CHAPTER 4
ACT 3 – THE METROPOLE MEETS THE PERIPHERY: NAVIGATING SOCIAL
STANDING, DIPLOMACY, AND EMPIRE OVERSEAS, 1799-1807

Scene 1 - Nikolai Rezanov: Aristocrat, Merchant, Diplomat

Wherein we learn about Rezanov's life, his diplomatic expedition to Japan, and the journey to Russian
America

Two years before John DeWolf set out from Rhode Island on his journey across the globe, Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov commenced his own voyage to Russian America from St. Petersburg. The Chamberlain of the Court to Alexander I has fascinated writers, poets, and historians since his death in 1807. Born in St. Petersburg in March 1764 to a noble family of Tatar origin, Nikolai's branch of the Rezanov family was not overly wealthy, but well connected. His father, Petr Gavrilovich, was a judge at the time of the Pugachev rebellion. In 1778, young Rezanov entered military service in the Izmailovsky Guard. Officers in the Guard were among Petersburg's well-to-do, and all but one of the leaders of the Guard were members of the royal family. Rezanov made a number of important friends at this time, but retired in 1784 without earning an officer's rank. He transferred from military to civil service and was given a rank of Captain on the Russian table of ranks. While his military career was unspectacular, Rezanov was able to parlay his contacts with notables like Gavril Derzhavin into a successful career in the government. He began his civilian career working for the judiciary in Pskov, and later worked in the Treasury in St. Petersburg. Finally, with the assistance of Derzhavin, Rezanov became a clerk in the Senate.¹

He benefited greatly from the enlightened attitude of Catherine's court. Rezanov was well educated, and had a liberal outlook with regards to the role aristocrats could

¹ Pierce, *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*, 418.

play in commerce. But these notions were blended with strong aristocratic proclivities. Unlike previous generations of the Russian aristocracy, men like Rezanov had fewer qualms entering into commercial endeavors. Aristocrats that came of age during the reign of Catherine II, particularly those without significant wealth, coveted the increasing prosperity enjoyed by some merchants. As the political economy began to shift away from traditional agricultural models in Russia, new economic theories began to circulate. Rezanov grew up in an environment that was steeped in the ideas of both Adam Smith and French mercantilism.²

In 1794, Rezanov was sent to Irkutsk to oversee the transfer of Russian priests and serfs to the supervision of Grigory Shelikov, who petitioned to receive these recruits for his new colonies near Kodiak. These serfs would later be sent by Baranov to settle at Yakutat Bay. While staying with the Shelikov family, Rezanov became acquainted with one of the merchant's daughter, Anna Grigoreevna. He also learned about the business of the Pacific fur trade. Shelikov and Rezanov escorted the priests and serfs to Okhotsk during the summer of 1794. Shelikov used the journey to persuade Rezanov that the Shelikov Company had enormous potential. His descriptions apparently had a profound impact on Rezanov. Ten years later, even after encountering the harsh realities in the colonies that Shelikov neglected to mention, Rezanov continued to defend the RAC and its potential. Shortly after returning from Okhotsk in the winter of 1794, Rezanov and Anna Shelikova were married. Marrying into the Shelikov family tied Rezanov's fate to the Company's success.³ Anna's dowry included substantial shares in Shelikov's company, but due to prohibitions barring

² Okun, *The Russian-American Company*, 12.

³ Chevigny, *Russian America*, 69-70.

nobles from participating in merchant activities at the time, Rezanov was unable to claim them.

Returning with his wife to St. Petersburg in 1795, Rezanov became a passionate advocate for Shelikov's company. Almost as soon as he left Irkutsk, fur merchants aligned against Shelikov and began clamoring for the dismantling of the Shelikov venture. Despite the fact that Shelikov's company had operated in the North Pacific since 1784, his influence in St. Petersburg to this point had been was tenuous at best. Shelikov's partner, Ivan Golikov, unsuccessfully petitioned Catherine II for monopoly commercial powers in the North Pacific after her famous tour of the Crimea. Rival merchants in Irkutsk blanched at the thought of Shelikov cornering the market from his permanent colony at Kodiak, especially as fur hunting dried up along the Siberian coast. Catherine was not disposed to grant a monopoly, and the Irkutsk merchant feuds went unresolved during Catherine's reign. Upon Shelikov's death in 1795, rivals sought to ruin the company through the courts. Shelikov's wife, Natalia Shelikova, enlisted Rezanov's help in St. Petersburg to put the company on firmer footing.⁴

Rezanov worked feverishly to defend and advance the interests of the company. Under the guidance of Count Pahlen, Rezanov deftly rose to become an advisor for Tsar Paul I. The short reign of the latter began 1796 after the death of Catherine. Symbolic of the favor he enjoyed, Rezanov was appointed Procurator General of the Senate. He convinced the volatile Tsar to form the Russian American Company by combining several private fur companies that operated out of Irkutsk, and putting their operations under the control of those aligned with Shelikov. The Tsar granted the new

⁴ Chevigny, *Russian America*, 72-73.

company monopoly powers that Catherine II had resisted. Such authority was necessary, Rezanov insisted, to prevent the American territories from becoming a hotbed of republicanism under the influence of American and British merchants.⁵

After Paul's untimely death at the hands of palace conspirators, the pendulum initially swung back towards Catherinesque liberalism with the coronation of Alexander I in March 1801. Rezanov was one of the few advisors from Paul's reign to also enjoy a close relationship with the new Tsar. He touted the advantages of Russia's first joint stock company to the young, idealistic Alexander. As a result, the Tsar encouraged members of the nobility to buy stock in the RAC, eschewing the former aristocratic repugnance at participating in commercial activity. In addition, Alexander issued an *ukaz* permitting naval officers to enter company service without relinquishing their commissions. Under this ruling, Rezanov dispatched Midshipman Gavril Davydov and Lieutenant Nikolai Khvostov to the colonies in April 1802 to assist in maritime navigation and to organize protection of Russian colonies. Plans were also drawn up for a circumnavigation of the globe that would include diplomatic and scientific expeditions throughout the Pacific.

For many that have written about Russian America, Rezanov was the *embodiment* of Empire and the Enlightenment. As Owen Matthews pointed out in his recent biography of the Chamberlain, Rezanov was raised in St. Petersburg, a city that displaced Paris after the Revolution as an opulent, aristocratic capital. Indeed, the city itself demonstrated "a sense of the supremacy of man over nature" due to its rapid

⁵ Okun, *The Russian-American Company*, 42; and Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations*, 167-168.

construction from the swamp land near the mouth of the Neva River.⁶ Rezanov was a new type of Russian aristocrat. His panegyric letters from Russian America to the RAC Board of Directors, Count Rumiantsev, and the Tsar were filled with aristocratic love of country. They also vocalized a vision of Russian Imperial expansion with a keen eye on commercial activity. He sincerely believed that Russia could control the Northern Pacific if only a modicum of attention were paid to the area. He wrote,

Your Excellency will laugh perhaps at my far reaching plans, but I definitely insist that their execution is feasible and that if we had men and means, without great sacrifice on the part of the treasury, all this country could be brought permanently under Russian influence, and when you consider the conditions you will agree with my opinion that our trade would make notable and even gigantic strides. All very extensive plans appear visionary on paper, but when they are calculated correctly, their execution compels admiration. It is not through petty enterprises, but by great undertakings that the mighty commercial bodies achieve their greatness. If the Russian Government had thought earlier of this part of the world, and estimated adequately its potentialities, and if it had pursued continuously the far reaching plans of Peter the Great, who, with the insignificant resources then available, dispatched the expedition commanded by Bering, it is safe to say that New California would never have been a Spanish possession, for only in 1760 did the Spanish turn their attention towards it and they strengthened their hold on the incomparable territory solely through the activity of the missionaries.⁷

Despite the difficulties Rezanov faced, he was determined to shift the gaze of Alexander I towards the Pacific. His personal and professional connection to the creation and success of the RAC shaped an imperial vision for the area. And he knew that state support would be critical for his plans. But once Rezanov arrived in the colonies, he was prepared to advance his plans in the absence of direct orders or oversight from St. Petersburg.

⁶ Owen Matthews, *Glorious Misadventures: Nikolai Rezanov and the Dream of a Russian America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 12.

⁷ "Letter, Rezanov to Minister of Commerce, from New Archangel, June 17, 1806" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol. II*, 212-213.

Russia's First Round-the-World Expedition

In October 1802, tragedy struck Rezanov's family. His wife Anna died twelve days after giving birth to their second child. In April 1803, Alexander I and court officials persuaded the despondent Rezanov to take part in the scientific and commercial journey that the crown was planning. From the beginning, the expedition had multiple overlapping purposes. The Tsar sought the international prestige of circumnavigating the globe. Alexander I had special medals cast for the voyage for distribution upon its return. Count Nikolai Rumiantsev - who served as minister of commerce and later as minister of foreign affairs under Alexander I - partially funded the expedition because of its potential benefits for science and natural history. As RAC employee and historian Petr Tikhmenev noted, the mission was also to investigate resupplying Russia's American possessions directly from the Baltics.⁸

Ivan Fedorovich Kruzenstern was selected to serve as captain of the expedition. Two vessels were to depart from Kronstadt, a naval installation located on an island close to St. Petersburg. Kruzenstern's experience sailing with the British Navy in the East Indies made him an ideal choice. The captain also expressed interest in expanding Russian trade with China via ship rather than from the single, confined, continental outpost of Kiakhta near Lake Baikal. While the voyage would boost the prestige of the Russian government and the Imperial Navy through diplomatic visits, there is little doubt that trade was also at the heart of the expedition. The difficulties caused by the wars in Europe had an impact on Russia's economy.⁹ Count Rumiantsev

⁸ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol I*, 69. Captain Ivan Kruzenstern also verified this rationale in the introduction to his chronicle of the voyage.

⁹ Viktor Lopatnikov, "Yunona i Avos" *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn'* no. 12 (December 2006).

hoped that a slight pivot towards the East might offset the economic hardships Russia faced because of the Napoleonic wars.

During the planning of the expedition, it was decided that Rezanov should lead an ambassadorial mission to Japan. At the time, there was reason to be hopeful that diplomatic and trade relations might be established, shoring up Russia's economic interests in the North Pacific. During the reign of Catherine II, Russian officials returned Japanese subjects that were marooned on the coast of Siberia. The Japanese sent back a letter, granting permission for a Russian ship to visit the port of Nagasaki. To increase the odds of success for the follow-up visit, it was decided to send back several more Japanese subjects that had been shipwrecked in Siberia. Tsar Alexander bestowed the title Chamberlain of the Court upon Rezanov, conveying the importance of the mission in general, and the ambassadorship in particular. The RAC also made Rezanov a plenipotentiary, charging him with assessing the Russian American colonies during the voyage.

The relatively late addition of Rezanov proved difficult for the expedition. Petr Tikhmenev, who penned the first history of the company in the 1860s, noted that the powers that were conferred upon Rezanov "completely changed the nature of the original instructions and made Kruzenstern immediately subordinate to Rezanov."¹⁰ The voyage reveals a fascinating difference between the social dynamics of continental versus overseas empires and the limitations of the continental limitations of the *soslovie* system that was solidifying in Russian society during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Private and public accounts of the expedition also show that it

¹⁰ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol I*, 72.

was marred by tensions between the crew, the officers, and the aristocrats of the ambassadorial mission.

Indeed, the ship was a microcosm of the changing social fabric within Russia. Before departing Kronstadt, the officers sent the RAC directors a list of demands aptly named, “A contract for service to the Russian American Company Involving the Russian Navy and the Kruzenstern-Lisiansky Expedition.”¹¹ After learning that the voyage would include a trip to the Russian American colonies, the officers sought assurances that they would not be put under the capricious command of merchants. They requested notification of duties and duration of stay upon arrival in Russian America. In addition, they demanded pay, room and board, promotions, and treatment of injured sailors similar to higher officers. The list concluded diplomatically by noting that, in exchange for such clarifications, “each of us swears on his honor as an officer in the service in His Imperial Majesty that... [w]hile on this voyage each of us promises to do everything within his power to benefit the Company and bring glory to Russia.”

The officers, also members of the aristocracy, feared the influence a merchant company and its aristocratic shareholder might have over the expedition. In addition, they feared that the ambassadorial suite would steal the glory of the mission away from the Navy. What they did not count on was that members of the expedition, represented first and foremost by Rezanov, would attempt to subvert the chain of command on board the ship by claiming that the Tsar entrusted Rezanov with sole leadership on behalf of the throne and the RAC. This conflict between factions of the aristocracy

¹¹ “A Contract for Service to the Russian American Company Involving the Russian Navy and the Krusenstern-Lisianskii Expedition, October 28, 1802” in *The Russian American Colonies*, 34.

aboard the *Nadezhda*, between naval officers and non-commissioned aristocrats that worked for and with merchants, reflected the unease that some members of the aristocracy felt about the blurring of social lines. Confined on a ship for extended periods of time, conflict quickly arose that called into question the efficacy of *soslovie* system once they ventured beyond the Eurasian landmass.

In late July 1803, the expedition set sail aboard the *Nadezhda* and the *Neva*, two ships purchased from the English. After a stop in Denmark, where the German naturalist Georg Langsdorff joined with Rezanov's suite, the ships set sail for England in September. Following stops there and the Canary Islands, Kruzenstern charted a course for Brazil at the end of October. Langsdorff recalled that as they crossed the equator (the first Russian naval vessels to do so), a great patriotic feeling welled up in the sailors. With much celebration, they toasted the health of the Tsar and Count Rumiantsev.¹² On December 20, 1803, after weathering a storm that kept them from port, the *Nadezhda* and *Neva* dropped anchor at St. Catherine Island, Brazil. Due to required repairs for the *Neva*, the Russians stayed in Brazil until the early February, 1804.

Kruzenstern then set out to round Cape Horn, but the *Nadezhda* and the *Neva* encountered contrary winds that prevented them from crossing into the Pacific Ocean for almost a month. On the March 24, 1804, the ships were separated in a storm while sailing in the South Pacific. Burdened with concerns about reaching Petropavlovsk to unload RAC supplies and heading to Japan before the next winter set in, Kruzenstern decided to sail with all haste for Kamchatka. The *Neva* was spotted again as they

¹² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 38.

approached the Marquesas Islands. After taking on additional supplies, the ships departed in mid-June. A month later, the crews caught their first sight of the Siberian coastline.¹³

Published Accounts of the Japanese Ambassadorial Mission

There are several published and unpublished accounts of the round-the-world expedition and Rezanov's ambassadorial mission to Japan. Sources that were published shortly after the voyages, such as those of Georg Langsdorff and Captain Kruzenstern, agree on the key facts and moments. Langsdorff provides much more detail of the Japanese ambassadorship, as he accompanied Rezanov during most of the mission. As he reported, the *Nadezhda* departed Petropavlovsk on September 7, 1804; the *Neva* having been sent ahead to inspect and resupply the Russian American colonies (arriving in time to take part in the Battle of Sitka). On October 8, after encountering two severe storms, the *Nadezhda* limped to the entrance of Nagasaki Harbor.¹⁴

¹³ Kruzenstern had an opportunity to observe the Polynesian natives of the Marquesas Islands. The women, he wrote, lost no opportunity to offer themselves to the crew. Kruzenstern believed that, contrary to earlier descriptions of their ungovernable lust, the women were sent out to the ship by their men in the hopes of securing various trinkets. He reported on the practice of cannibalism, salaciously informing his readers that, "in times of famine the men butcher their wives and children, and their aged parents; they bake and stew their flesh, and devour it with great satisfaction." A.J. Kruzenstern, *Voyage Round the World in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806, By Order of His Imperial Majesty Alexander the First, On Board the Ships Nadezhda and Neva, under the Command of Captain A.J. von Kruzenstern, of the Imperial Navy* (London: C. Roworth, Bell-yard, Temple-bar, 1813): 181.

¹⁴ The second storm, encountered on October first, 1804, was likely a typhoon. Langsdorff described dramatically falling barometric pressure, which was quickly followed by violent wave and wind fronts. Further, the ship sailed into a reprieve for about five minutes before the winds and waves shifted directions (likely the eye of the storm). The next day, as the nearly flooded ship rode out the storm to cries of "Great and Glorious are Thy works, Oh Lord!" they found significant damage. Much of the cargo was soaked or damaged.

Upon arrival, the Japanese sent representatives to the ship to ascertain who they were, and what they wanted. The Japanese harbor representatives were particularly interested in knowing what armaments the *Nadezhda* carried, and what permission they had to visit Nagasaki. Upon producing the official permission to visit Japan, the Japanese were curious as to why it had taken so long to redeem. Rezanov immediately indicated that he was sent as plenipotentiary from the Emperor of Russia, and required an audience with the governor in order to convey the Tsar's message to the Emperor of Japan.

Japanese officials in Nagasaki had the *Nadezhda* surrounded by smaller vessels, forbidding the Russians from further approaching the harbor until official permission from the governor was granted. Over the next two days, Rezanov was visited by a succession of Japanese officials and translators, who often asked the same questions, with slight variations. Rezanov later learned that this was a standard practice - ensuring that Japanese government officials would hear the same information from multiple sources, and to make sure that foreigners did not get personally acquainted with particular Japanese liaisons. When they were finally allowed into the harbor, the Russians were ordered to surrender the gunpowder on board.

By Captain Kruzenstern and Langsdorff's published recollections, Rezanov handled these initial encounters well. While politely answering their questions, he steadfastly refused to turn over the official documents he brought with him until he could meet with the governor. He also reportedly defended the dignity of the officers, crew, and ambassadorial team. Both Kruzenstern and Langsdorff indicated that Rezanov's behavior was exemplary by European standards; in contradistinction to the Dutch - who

frequently kowtowed before Japanese officials in exchange for their favored trading relationship.

Rezanov sought to meet with the governor not only to exchange diplomatic greetings, but also to arrange a trip to Edo to treat directly with the Japanese court. He was surprised to discover that there were actually two governors at Nagasaki, as the official in charge of the port changed every six months. Unfortunately, the Japanese indicated, the city was undergoing a transition of leadership. Thus, Rezanov encountered *two* governors who would not meet with him. Nevertheless, the Russian continued to invite a discussion with Japanese officials. According to Langsdorff, Rezanov pushed every opportunity possible to discuss trade in particular. The Tsar's letter to the Emperor, Langsdorff recalled, sought a "lasting friendship," particularly for "those in the neighborhood of Japan – North America, Kamchatka, Aleutians, and Kuriles, wishing to establish an intercourse of trade with Japanese."¹⁵

While local observers gawked at the Russian flagship, the Japanese officials continued to stall for over a month. They even refused to allow the *Nadezhda* to move closer to land for repairs on the grounds that they had not received authorization from Edo. Unbeknownst to Rezanov, the Russians' arrival could not have come at a worse time, as the shogunate was going through a particularly xenophobic period. Despite this, there were still several Japanese officials that advocated receiving the Russian embassy. Each day the Russians were assured that dispatches were sent to Edo, and word was expected back as any time. Yet the entire embassy was still confined to the ship.

¹⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 202.

Finally, on November 5, Rezanov complained of his ill health. Not wishing to risk the consequences of an ambassador falling ill, Japanese officials in Nagasaki hastily constructed a small space where the ambassador, his retinue, and the officers of the ship could come ashore for walks and rest. Surrounded by bamboo privacy walls, select members of the crew were able to spend short periods on land. By November 24, 1804, as winter began to set in, the governors decided that they could no longer delay Rezanov on the ship. Despite receiving no official word, the Japanese at Nagasaki took “great risks” in allowing Rezanov to take up residence in a small, well-guarded house outside of the city. Once Rezanov situated himself on shore, the *Nadezhda* was allowed to come further into the harbor for repairs. Over the next two months, the Japanese took increasing interest in the state of these repairs. But Rezanov’s patience and health appeared to be wearing thin. By the end of January, the Chamberlain heard through an interpreter that the Russians’ appearance had caused quite a stir at the court, and the delay was likely due to ongoing debate about foreign entanglements.

It was not until the spring that an emissary from the capital finally arrived. A meeting was promptly scheduled for April 4, 1805. Rezanov again refused to bow before the emissary and governors, insisting instead that he would greet the dignitaries as he would his own emperor. In this first brief encounter, the Japanese spelled out their displeasure over the visit by re-questioning Rezanov about the twelve year delay since the last invitation was written, and the Tsar’s insistence on writing directly to the Japanese emperor despite prohibitions on the practice. At a second meeting, Rezanov received a message from the emissary of the court, which Langsdorff described in some

detail. The Japanese government could not, it said, return the sincere offer of friendship, as they were in an inferior position politically and therefore risked subjugation to a greater power. Further, it was prohibited for Japanese subjects to leave their homeland, even to reciprocate the embassy. The gifts intended for the Japanese Emperor were therefore rejected. The Emperor (represented by the shogunate) requested that the Russians take several gifts in compensation for their delay, and indicated that any further correspondence with the Japanese government should be conveyed only through the Dutch.

After this final rebuff, the Russians made ready to depart on April 16, 1805. Bitter and disappointed over his treatment, Rezanov stewed as the *Nadezhda* sailed back to Kamchatka along Japan's western coasts. On the way, they encountered the Ainu inhabitants of the northern Japanese Islands, learning among other things that there were Japanese inhabitants in the Kurile Islands and on Sakhalin Island. After briefly visiting Sakhalin's southern Aniwa Bay and speaking with the Japanese who were there, the Russians headed to Petropavlovsk. Rezanov expressed a desire to then immediately depart from the expedition and visit the Russian American colonies.

Soslovie at Sea

Kruzenstern's account of the round-the-world voyage, first published in German in 1810, does not directly mention any conflicts between Rezanov's ambassadorial staff and members of the crew. As Germanist Victoria Joan Moessner has noted, published memoirs such as Kruzenstern's tend to be less reliable on such issues, because they

had to pass through official government censors.¹⁶ Despite taking the high road in his narrative (by choice or by censor), Kruzenstern hinted at a rift in his memoirs, published after Rezanov's death. Before the voyage set out, the captain was upset that so much space on the ship, which had been reserved for scientific gear, would have to be used for the ambassadorial mission and supplies for the Russian American colonies. In England, Kruzenstern was forced to wait "impatiently" to depart due to Rezanov's excursion to London.¹⁷ While en route to the Pacific, Kruzenstern noted that he was unable to evenly divide watches on board due to several individuals on board, presumably the ambassadorial staff, being unable to do the work required.

Rezanov's private letters back to St. Petersburg indicate that a series of incidents occurred on board the ships. In a letter written from Brazil to the Assistant Minister of the Navy, Rezanov requested an investigation of "my circumstances which are causing me anguish and constraint."¹⁸ According to the Chamberlain, the voyage was in disarray even before it left. While he gave no particular testimony in the letter, it is clear that disagreements between the court officials and the officers and crew were the problem. Rezanov hoped, at least, that "beneficial consequences of this disorder might result in the future in the realization that without respect for rank nothing can be accomplished."

The memoirs of Herman Ludwig von Lowenstern, a Lieutenant and ship's cartographer aboard the *Kruzenstern*, paint a very unflattering picture of Rezanov's

¹⁶ Hermann Ludwig von Lowenstern, *The First Russian Voyage Around the World: The Journal of Hermann Ludwig von Lowenstern* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2003): x.

¹⁷ Kruzenstern, *Voyage Round the World*, 37.

¹⁸ "Letter, Rezanov to Chichagov, the Assistant Minister of the Navy, from Brazil, May 17, 1804" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 144.

activities during the expedition. Lowenstern's observations remained unpublished until after World War II. Victoria Moessner, who translated them in 2003 from earlier transcriptions, has argued his thoughts and opinions about Rezanov deserve special attention, and should change historical perceptions of the Chamberlain.¹⁹ Lowenstern reported on the almost daily problems that Rezanov caused for the crew of the *Nadezhda*. Shortly after their departure from Tenerife, the Chamberlain began to quarrel with Kruzenstern about command of the expedition, often telling Kruzenstern that the captain was in charge of nothing but the sails. Kruzenstern rebuffed Rezanov's challenge to his authority.

On December 8, 1803, while on the way to Brazil, Lowenstern noted a particularly telling exchange between Rezanov and several members of the crew. The Chamberlain feared that, "the further we are from Europe, the more our proper respect that he [Resanoff] (sic) deserves is lost." In the *same* entry, Lowenstern felt it important to analyze the social composition of the crew. He wrote, "[o]ur society can be divided into three groups: 1. The intriguers Resanoff, Ratmanoff, Fosse, the painter Kurlandzoff, and Friderici against his will, 2. The workers: Kruzenstern, Horner, Bellinghausen, Espenberg, and my own little self and Romberg, 3. The phlegmatics Count Tolstoi, Golovatscheff, Brinkin, Tilesius, and Langsdorff. The ones of no consequence are

¹⁹ Moessner argues that the Baltic German's memoir should be relied upon because he did not harbor any particular bias against the Russians. Moessner summarized the history of the Baltic German nobility in her introduction, praising their "multilingual abilities," and the proud service of many of them in the Russian Navy. But despite her description of them as "tight-knit," Moessner fails to consider this as a possible motivation for Lowenstern's unquestionable loyalty to Captain Kruzenstern, and enmity towards Rezanov. Nevertheless, Lowenstern's report of events, despite his low opinion of Rezanov, is not inconsistent with the general picture other sources paint.

Schemelin, the two Kotzebues, and Kamentschikoff.”²⁰ It is evident from these passages that social order, essential on long excursions by sea, was quickly breaking down. Neither the Russian class system, nor naval command structure suited the crew and expedition members. Perhaps sensing this, Lowenstern wrote a defense of Kruzenstern three days later as “the originator of this whole expedition.” Without Kruzenstern, Lowenstern argued, the whole Japanese expedition would not have been possible. Further, he wrote, should Rezanov attempt to exert the “full authority” he believed he had under the Emperor’s instructions, it would make conditions worse on the ship as the crew would side with Kruzenstern.

Like Rezanov, Lowenstern also observed the power struggle between Rezanov and Kruzenstern in relation to their proximity to land. In Tenerife, Rezanov made up with Kruzenstern after their first row, “groveling” for forgiveness. But Lowenstern suspected Rezanov of duplicity, claiming fault in public, and then writing complaints to the Emperor. In Brazil, Rezanov wrote to Kruzenstern over their conflict to force a response. Lowenstern suspected the Chamberlain was baiting the captain into writing something that Rezanov could send to St. Petersburg. In the same entry, he noted that Rezanov boasted about how things would change once they reached Japan. There, Rezanov allegedly said, “the proud captain will take orders from me every day, which he will have to carry out and which I will force him to obey.” The crew, however, allegedly assured Kruzenstern that they would, “not react to Resanoff’s baseness and absurdness and not obey any of the ambassador’s orders that were not to the advantage or service of the emperor, the expedition, or the American Company.”

²⁰ Lowenstern, *The First Russian Voyage Around the World*, 37.

At sea, according to Lowenstern, Rezanov acted out as the distance from land increased. He wrote, "Resanoff does like all of those whose conscience is not pure. He chooses the night to forge intrigues and slander others." According to Lowenstern, the pattern of intrigues at sea and attempts at rapprochement on land continued into July 1804, when the expedition first reached Kamchatka. There, Rezanov again attempted to mend fences. But this time, according to Lowenstern, the officers on board made several demands. They included: "1. That Resanoff in a letter to the emperor state that he is at fault and report our having made peace with one another, 2. That Resanoff names the tattletales, 3. That since he has threatened us with Japan, he clarify our relationship with him as ambassador before our departure, 4. Since Resanoff maintains that the duty of the captain is only to look after the sails, we demand a clarification of his instructions. In addition, he has to show us all the papers that he might have in petto [be contemplating]."

Arriving at Petropavlovsk on July 13, 1804, the crew of the expedition unloaded the supplies intended for Russian America. Rezanov then replaced three members of the ambassadorial mission, including the dismissal of the infamous Count Fyodor Ivanovich Tolstoy for the trouble he caused during the voyage.²¹ It is unknown if these changes were the result of the officers' demands. In September 1804, Rezanov sent a letter to the emperor updating him on the progress of the mission. He apologized for his earlier complaints against the naval officers of the ships, implying that Count Tolstoy's ambitions and jealousy combined with youthful exuberance to create many of the

²¹ Fyodor Tolstoy's exploits before, during, and after this voyage are the fodder of historians and fictional writers alike. A cousin of Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor had a mischievous reputation. He was allegedly involved in a number of duels - narrowly avoiding one with Pushkin over some slanderous rumors Tolstoy spread about the poet.

problems the ambassadorial mission encountered on board. Rezanov begged the emperor to pardon the Count for the actions that led to discord among the crew.²² Thus, it *seemed* that the difficulties Rezanov faced with the officers of the ships were resolved as the *Nadezhda* departed for Japan.

But Rezanov's letter back to St. Petersburg *after* the Japanese embassy reveals his perspective on the events that occurred up to that point. Heavily tainted by the Chamberlain's anger about how the embassy was treated in Japan, the letter to Tsar Alexander I detailed the feud between Rezanov and the officers of the expedition. Rezanov described the daily harassment that he purportedly endured on board the *Nadezhda*.²³ With a genuflecting tone, Rezanov implored the Tsar to believe that he had only the best interests of Russia at heart. Despite the great obstacles the Russian officers overcame in carrying out the voyage, they treated Rezanov, the designated leader of the expedition and plenipotentiary of the RAC, as an "outsider." And their malice and envy led to further injustices.

After leaving Brazil, Rezanov noted that the officers stopped telling him about the itinerary, making him the victim of their jokes and ridicule. There is no doubt that the officers had a low opinion of him. Lowenstern wrote that Rezanov was known in St. Petersburg as the "Russian Pinetti," an Italian illusionist who was popular at the time.²⁴ Rezanov further wrote that some officers tried to kill him in his cabin, and may have succeeded but for the intervention of the ship's crew. When Rezanov allegedly

²² "Report, Rezanov to the Emperor, from Petropavlovsk, August 16, 1804" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 148.

²³ "A Report from Nikolai P. Rezanov to Emperor Alexander I Concerning Insubordination During His Expedition, and the Present Condition of Affairs in Kamchatka" in *The Russian American Colonies*, 95.

²⁴ Lowenstern, *The First Russian Voyage Around the World*, 37.

confronted Kruzenstern about this behavior, the Captain scoffed at the accusations. A shouting match came to a head with Rezanov exclaiming, "I dare say even more, as your superior!" to which Kruzenstern answered interrogatively, "you, superior?" Turning Rezanov's authority on its head due to being at sea, Kruzenstern then purportedly threatened to put Rezanov on trial - with Lisiansky serving as a second judge.

According to Rezanov, Kruzenstern demanded that the Chamberlain turn over all *ukazes* issued by the emperor. When Rezanov produced them, he allegedly refused to believe their authenticity. The officers, including Lisiansky, sided with Kruzenstern with one shouting that Rezanov was no more than a "runaway public procurator." While Rezanov may have exaggerated some of the details in his letter, there is no question that the structure of authority grew increasingly strained as the ship sailed further from St. Petersburg. As we have seen, Rezanov incurred the dislike of a number of officers on board. According to Owen Matthews, a journalist and historian who wrote a biography of Rezanov and the circumnavigation voyage, "[Rezanov] had spent much of the voyage furiously bickering, scheming, and denouncing his colleagues, and his shipmates returned the favor by devoting pages of their diaries to castigating him. They called him an 'ignoramus,' an 'arch rascal' and 'the biggest scoundrel whom the D[evil] ever put into the world...'"²⁵

Upon his return to Petropavlovsk after the expedition to Japan, Rezanov reportedly requested that the Governor hold an investigation of the whole affair.²⁶ Kruzenstern was then forced to make amends and issued a formal apology for actions taken against Rezanov. These events likely occurred, since they were on land, in a city

²⁵ Matthews, *Glorious Misadventures*, 2.

²⁶ Lopatnikov, "Yunona i Avos".

under the jurisdiction of a Governor that reported to St. Petersburg. Kruzenstern's reputation, and his rank in the Navy, was threatened by even the possibility of an investigation of mistreating a member of the court. It is not surprising that this version of events does not appear in Kruzenstern's or Langsdorff's narratives. In fact, both were publicly silent on the mistreatment Rezanov endured, despite exchanging private letters later condemning Rezanov's behavior on board the *Nadezhda*.²⁷ What is clear is that the government did not want the difficulties to go public. Memoirs were heavily censored, and participants were all awarded medals for the expedition. After all, despite the troubles, it was Russia's first circumnavigation of the globe.

Scene 2 – Rezanov in Russian America

Wherein we follow Count Nikolai Rezanov on his Voyages to Russian America and Spanish America

While making preparations for the journey to Russian America, Rezanov hired Langsdorff as his personal physician. He assured the German that he would have considerable opportunities to conduct scientific research and collect specimens of natural history along the American Pacific coastline. In addition, Rezanov reunited with Gavril Davydov and Nikolai Khvostov; who traveled overland to Petropavlovsk on their second expedition to Russian America.

Frustrated by his treatment in Japan, and seething from his treatment at sea, Rezanov began formulating his plans to boost the success of the Company. His letters to the Company, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Tsar during his Russian American sojourn demonstrate the Chamberlain's considerable imagination. Despite

²⁷ This story of Kruzenstern's apology does not appear in Rezanov's letter. Instead, Rezanov expressed grief that he had neither asked the General Major to intervene earlier nor abandoned the expedition all together.

Russia's weak position in the North Pacific, and in spite of the problems that plagued Russian America, Rezanov attempted to pivot Russian interest towards the colonies, where "natural resources of this earth... are already exploited by all neighboring powers."²⁸ But first he had to contend with the shortcomings that he witnessed first-hand upon arriving at Kodiak.

Chief among these were disciplinary problems with naval officers in the colonies. As we will see in act five, Rezanov even had difficulties with his own appointees – Khvostov and Davydov. In a letter to the Directors of the RAC, Rezanov indicated that many low-ranking officers, removed from the fear of punishment under the Tsar's law, had a ruinous impact on the financial operations of the colonies. "Great is the favor of our Sovereign," Rezanov wrote, "but perhaps due to the training and education of our navy officers, or to the remoteness of this country, in which everything seems to be allowed, the company will suffer losses with them and our Country is liable to lose the American colonies."²⁹

The root of the problem, according to Rezanov, was that the officers had absolutely no respect for the merchants that were in charge of company affairs. To obey Chief Baranov's orders, Rezanov wrote, "seems to them humiliating." The Chamberlain believed that this feeling stemmed from the contempt "which the nobility feels towards traders." He continued,

even if there is a manager who has a rank well merited, they cannot forget that formerly he was a merchant, which to many of them [naval officers]

²⁸ "Letter, Rezanov to Board of Directors, February 15, 1806 (Secret)" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 182.

²⁹ "Letter, Rezanov to the Directors of the Russian-American Company, from New Archangel, November 6, 1805" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 163-164.

means that he is of no account... They are unable to appreciate the services performed for the benefit of the Fatherland. The moment a whim of theirs is not obeyed, they shout: "we are free men. We do not want to be in the service – we are going back." It seems to me that even if we have no slaves in our service and everybody can leave it if he wants to, so long as he is employed he has to obey orders, otherwise notwithstanding all the freedom he must answer for insubordination...³⁰

He was frustrated by these experiences, intimating that it would be preferable to hire foreign naval officers to staff the merchant marine, in the hopes that they would be more bound to follow Company directives.

Another problem that Rezanov noted was the haphazard nature of Russian colonization. Initially, he believed that the issue was a shortage of Russian settlers. Despite his observation of the colonies becoming a drunken republic, and the fact that the few Russians that came to the colonies were often a poor example for the natives, Rezanov requested 1000-2000 Russians who were condemned to exile to be sent to the colonies annually. Skilled workers accused of public drunkenness would be particularly useful to help with the infrastructure, according to the Chamberlain. He felt confident that it would be easy to find landholders in Russia that had such men in their households - and that 25-50 rubles per year for their services would persuade the gentry to part with them. Finally, the colonies needed more skilled merchants - and he suggested that those convicted of bankruptcy or fraud might be useful.

In the hopes of off-setting the crippling debt *promyshlenniki* often incurred while in the colonies and to offset harmful overhunting, Rezanov encouraged the RAC to change to a salary system for the Russians in the colonies instead of granting shares on

³⁰ "Letter, Rezanov to Directors of the Russian American Company, From New Archangel, November 6, 1805" in Tikhmenev, *History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 163-164.

the furs they brought in. He also attempted to institute a court for resolving judicial matters, which Tikhmenev referred to as “the Tribunal of Promyshlenniks and Americans.” Rezanov wanted clergy to train in the native languages to accelerate the conversion of natives along the Alaskan coastline.³¹ A student of the Enlightenment, Rezanov also identified the lack of education among the native, Russian, and Creole populations as an issue requiring immediate redress. While in Kodiak, he encouraged the colony to establish schools for the young native girls and boys. Through instructing the girls in homemaking, and the boys in activities vital to the company, he hoped to improve morality throughout Russian America. He encouraged 60-70 Russian and Alutiiq boys to be instructed in reading, writing, keeping accounts, geography, mathematics, and French for future Company employment on the seas and in the counting houses. Tikhmenev indicated that the Chamberlain also wanted 10 pupils sent in rotation to Russia for education in mathematics and science. He even donated some of the books he brought with him to start a library. In this work, Rezanov hoped that, “Kodiak may by degrees vie in this respect with the best-built European town.”³²

The Chamberlain was also interested in improving communication between the colonies, and improving contact with the Russian mainland. When he arrived at Kodiak with Langsdorff, the German noted that, “[t]he possessions of the Russian-American Company are already so widely extended, and so far removed one from another, that in the present state of their navigation it is very difficult to keep up any general communication among them; and the want of ships and sailors must be doubly felt, if a

³¹ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol I*, 93.

³² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 369.

regular commercial intercourse with New California should be attempted."³³ The lack of communication, perpetuated by a dearth of ships, also left the Russian American colonies vulnerable to frequent attacks by the Tlingit, particularly around Yakutat Bay.

In attempting to fix the problems in the colonies, Rezanov also made a number of suggestions reprehensible to modern readers. He wrote that native women would have to be shipped between the colonies to make the settlements sustainable. This, despite voicing objections to Russians marrying and abandoning native women. The Chamberlain was startlingly comfortable with the idea of Russians reigning over, and in some cases transplanting, future Japanese and Chinese populations in addition to the Unangas, Alutiit, and Tlingit along the Russian American coastline. In a letter to the Board of Directors, Rezanov indicated that his plans included raids against the Japanese who settled on the Russian claimed Kurile Islands and at Aniwa Bay on Sakhalin Island. He noted that these raids might put some Japanese subjects under Russian suzerainty.³⁴ In planning future colonization, Rezanov hoped to move to more arable lands in California. He argued that, "[b]y kind treatment of the many savages we could develop our own agriculture and cattle raising in the proposed southern colonies and once our trade with Canton was fully organized; we could settle Chinese laborers there."³⁵

³³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 457.

³⁴ "If fortune puts me in charge of a colony composed of... Japanese, I would insist first of all that they be left free to practice their religion and would even assist them in building their temples..." He urged the Company to send an expedition to the Kuriles to persuade the population there of Russian friendly intentions while he informed the emperor of his plans.

³⁵ Tikhmenev, *History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 212.

Rezanov saw California as the stepping-stone to his future plans for Russian America. Hoping to expand trade in the Pacific to the “dimensions worthy of a great empire,” he argued that the RAC should immediately fortify Sitka, and open the Canton market to direct Russian trade at all costs to make commercial activity in the Pacific “quicker, safer, and more profitable.” He requested that ships sent from the Baltic to the colonies should not return to Europe, so as to bolster the strength of the RAC fleet. From a position of strength, Rezanov hoped to either force the Bostonians to trade with the Russians exclusively, or to drive them from Russian waters all together. But, with up to twenty American ships arriving per year, most bringing some supplies to trade with the Russians, it was crucial to obtain an independent source of provisions. For this, Rezanov recommended that the Tsar contact the Spanish in the hopes of reaching a deal for supplies from Spanish possessions in the Philippines and Chile.³⁶

He had reason to be concerned about the future of expansion along the Pacific Northwest coast. In addition to the Spanish, who staked nebulous claims to lands north of San Francisco, Americans that arrived annually from Boston were also exploring the region for potential colonization. Herbert Bancroft noted that the Jonathan Winship told Baranov about an expedition of 60 American men that “had started from the United States overland to settle on the Columbia River.”³⁷ This expedition, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, threatened to establish claim to part of the coastline as a result

³⁶ “Report, Rezanov to the Emperor, from Unalaska Island, July 18, 1805” in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 150.

³⁷ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: Volume XXVII History of the Northwest Coast* (San Francisco: The History Company, Publishers, 1886), 321.

of the Louisiana Purchase.³⁸ Indeed, in June 1810, the Winship family attempted to establish a trading outpost on the mouth of the Columbia River.³⁹ While both the Lewis and Clark expedition and the Winship's were ultimately unsuccessful in establishing permanent colonies, their efforts paved the way for John Jacob Astor's outpost of Astoria in 1811. President Jefferson, fearing that the British would supplant American influence in the burgeoning Pacific trade, promised that America would support Astor's attempt at a colony.⁴⁰

Rezanov's Diplomatic Voyage to Spanish America

The latter half of 1805 was a turning point in the history of Russia's American colonies. Shortly after taking Sitka Island, Baranov planned to permanently transfer the seat of RAC operations from Kodiak, while Rezanov showed up at the same time with significant operational powers. Plans and decisions could now be quickly made and implemented. But initially, business took a backseat to festivities on behalf of Rezanov's arrival. Such was the environment in which John DeWolf proposed the sale of the *Juno*. Langsdorff recalled in his memoirs that the negotiations proceeding directly between DeWolf, Baranov, and Rezanov. With the *Juno's* purchase, Langsdorff observed,

³⁸ As Donald Jackson and James Ronda pointed out, Jefferson became interested in the Pacific Fur trade after reading "Voyages from Montreal" by Alexander Mackenzie (1802). It is at this point, they argue, that Jefferson began to focus upon the Columbia River. Indeed, his readings, according to Jackson, jolted "Jefferson back into thinking in terms of hemispheric geography." See James P. Ronda, "Astoria and the Birth of Empire." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 36.3 (Summer 1986): 32 and Donald Jackson, *Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 121.

³⁹ Busch and Gough, *Fur Traders*, 26.

⁴⁰ Ronda, "Astoria and the Birth of Empire," 22-35; and Thomas Jefferson to John Jacob Astor, April 13, 1808 in *The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence, 1651-1827*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib015696>.

the Company obtained an excellent swift-sailing vessel, with a rich lading of objects of great importance for trading with natives on the north-west coast of America, consisting of a great quantity of linen and woolen cloth, of kitchen utensils, knives, axes, hatchets, some fire arms, &tc. &tc. But above all, a large supply of excellent provisions was obtained, by which all apprehensions of the menaced famine were removed. In fact, it was principally for the sake of this supply that the purchase was made.⁴¹

Rezanov was more direct about the necessity of the purchase. In a letter to the Board of Directors, dated February 15, 1806, he noted that buying the *Juno* was essential. "If I had not purchased the *Juno*," he wrote, "more than five hundred people, counting Russians and Americans, would be famine victims here. You will agree with me now that all our so-called "fine" ships bring nothing but grief..."⁴² Further, he expected that the *Juno* would prove a profitable purchase within two to three voyages, having the ability to transport enough supplies to keep Sitka stocked for years.

Beyond the gloomy and impending winter, Rezanov saw the purchase as a means for altering the habits of American merchants. As we have seen, the sale of weapons to the Tlingit and other indigenous populations that surrounded Sitka was particularly troubling to the Russians. In November 1805, Rezanov wrote that, "[i]t will be hard for you to understand my resoluteness, but I do not intend to sleep while I am here. Immediately after my arrival, I asked the Bostonians to show me their ships' papers. They brought them to me and I made them understand politely that our Sovereign is interested in this country and that soon they will be stopped from trading with the natives."⁴³ The *Juno*'s cannons and guns would bolster this policy while

⁴¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 377.

⁴² "Letter, Rezanov to Board of Directors, February 15, 1806 (Secret)" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 174.

⁴³ "Letter, Rezanov to the Directors of the Russian American Company, from New Archangel, November 6, 1805" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 158.

reinforcing Sitka, which was still vulnerable to a Tlingit counterattack. The *Juno* was, in his estimation, a "good new ship with good sailing qualities, built of oak, sheathed with copper, purchased with all rigging, sails and armament. The ship can hold fourteen cannons, but we got it with eight 4 1/2 caliber cannons."

The *Juno* was able to sail between colonies for supplies, even late in the year. Langsdorff recalled that such voyages were particularly risky for other RAC ships - even the better built *Alexander* and the *Maria*. But, Langsdorff noted, "the quick return of the officers with the *Juno* was an admirable testimony to the wisdom shewn by the Governor and Plenipotentiary in the purchase of that vessel; for notwithstanding the supply of stores obtained by the bargain, the settlement would have experienced a considerable degree of scarcity without the assistance procured by the *Juno's* voyage to Kodiak." The purchase of the *Juno* also fit well with Rezanov's evolving plans to invigorate Russia's Pacific Northwest holdings and expand RAC commercial capacity. In the short term, he planned a trip to California in search of a more permanent source of provisions, "God willing... and then, taking the tender *Avos* to sail to Aleksandr Island [Urup, in the Kuril Islands]... From there I will dispatch the *Avos* with reports for you..." Before his trip to Spanish California, Rezanov planned to "sail on a Spanish ship to Manila and from there to Batavia and Bengal, to make the first experiment in trade between India and Okhotsk."

Rezanov was nothing if not imaginative. While he often had to readjust his plans and perceptions of the colonies when confronted with the reality of the RAC's precarious position, he (like Baranov) also pushed relentlessly for greater access to foreign markets to exchange furs. Despite discovering that the American colonies were

little more than a drunken republic – ill-prepared to house even its current employees, sorely in need of organization, and often at the mercy of foreign merchants – Rezanov began to imagine Russian colonies in Hawaii, along the Columbia River, and even one north of San Francisco. From a position of strength, he would then seek to open Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, and Indian markets to Russian goods in a bid for supremacy in the North Pacific.

But the winter of 1805-1806 was tough for the residents of Sitka. The supplies obtained with the purchase of the *Juno* (and her subsequent expedition to Kodiak) were not enough to feed the extra mouths that took up residence in the newly built fort of New Archangel. Residents began to succumb to starvation and disease. Rezanov decided to take the *Juno* to the small Spanish settlement of San Francisco in February 1806 to open relations and obtain much needed food. Russian contact with the Spanish in the New World was infrequent due to the Spanish Crown's insistence upon the isolation of its colonies. In addition to Baranov's struggles north of the fifty-fifth parallel kept him from opening dialog with his Spanish neighbors to the south. While Khvostov and Davydov could have managed the voyage themselves, Rezanov went to act as an ambassador of both Russia and the RAC. He possessed letters of introduction from the Russian court, given to him for the round-the-world expedition. He hoped this would serve him well in interactions with the Spanish Governor. Rezanov believed that even modest trade with the Spanish American possessions would alleviate burdens in Okhotsk and Petropavlovsk, and may have even spurred industry in Siberia.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "Letter, Rezanov to Minister of Commerce from New Archangel, Jun 17, 1806" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 211.

The month-long journey from Sitka to San Francisco was fraught with problems. It took 30 able-bodied men to crew the *Juno* under normal conditions. But Khvostov and Davydov requested only 20 of the healthiest men of the Sitka colony. They were concerned that taking any more would risk scurvy spreading during the voyage. Baranov assigned 33 men to the vessel. Langsdorff recalled that of these men, only 18 were in any condition to sail the ship. In March 1806, the crew made an unsuccessful attempt to explore the mouth of the Columbia River, where they narrowly missed meeting the Lewis and Clark expedition. As illness had spread among the crew, the officers and Rezanov decided to abandon exploration efforts and sail the *Juno* directly to San Francisco.

They arrived in San Francisco on March 24, 1806. Written accounts of the expedition from Langsdorff, Rezanov, and Khvostov agree that, because of the ill health of the crew, it was decided to run the ship into the harbor without stopping, despite warnings from outer Spanish fortifications. Langsdorff wrote that he went ashore with Davydov to act as an intermediary with Spanish religious, government, and military officials. At this initial meeting, according to the German, they interacted predominantly in Latin with the Catholic friars.⁴⁵ In a letter written shortly before his death, Rezanov recalled that the Spanish Governor, Don Jose Joaquin de Arrilaga, was some distance away in Monterey. With letters of introduction in hand, Chamberlain Rezanov introduced himself instead to Don Luis de Arguello, the Commandant at San Francisco.

⁴⁵ Biographies of Rezanov indicate that he spoke Spanish, so it is unclear why it was necessary to send Davydov and Langsdorff ashore, unless they were asked to make a formal introduction for the Chamberlain.

A dispatch informing the Governor of the arrival was immediately sent to Monterey. While waiting for Don Arrilaga, Rezanov and the officers of the ship “spent every day in the home of the hospitable Arguello family and soon became well acquainted.”⁴⁶ There he met Dona Concepcion (Conchita) de Arguello, the Commandant’s daughter. She was, according to Rezanov, “the acknowledged beauty of California.” In the same letter to Count Rumiantsev, Rezanov hinted at a burgeoning relationship by noting, “Excellency may well understand when I say that we were well compensated for all our [previous] suffering and had a most enjoyable time. I hope you will forgive me gracious Sir, if I include a little romance in such a serious letter. Perhaps I should be more reserved.” The love story of Nikolai Rezanov and Conchita Arguello introduced twentieth century Russians and Americans to Russia’s American history.

Published accounts of their famed love began with Georg Langsdorff’s *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World, During the Years 1803-1807* in 1814. Langsdorff noted that the Arguello family had 13 children, but “[o]f the grown-up unmarried daughters, Donna Concepcion interested us more particularly. She was lively and animated, had sparkling love-inspiring eyes, beautiful teeth, pleasing and expressive features, a fine form, and a thousand other charms, yet her manners were perfectly simple and artless.”⁴⁷ Before the arrival of Governor Don Arrilaga, Count Rezanov courted Concepcion in the Arguello household. The greatest difficulty according to Langsdorff was, “the difference between the religion of the parties, but to a philosophic head like the Chamberlain’s, this was by no means an insurmountable one.”

⁴⁶ “Letter, Rezanov to Minister of Commerce, from New Archangel, June 17, 1806.” In Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 203.

⁴⁷ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 430.

Rezanov would travel to St. Petersburg and Madrid to get official permission for the marriage, and then return to San Francisco to claim his bride.

But there is considerable evidence that their relationship was not just romantic. In fact, Lydia Black depicted the entire affair as one of political intrigue on Rezanov's part.⁴⁸ But contemporary accounts point to the relationship having both romantic and non-romantic components. Concepcion was apparently an ambitious participant in the courtship. Rezanov found in Concepcion an "enterprising nature and boundless ambition." Dissatisfied with her lot in the far-flung periphery of the Spanish Empire, Conchita was intrigued by opportunities Rezanov offered to live in the modern European court of St. Petersburg.⁴⁹ As Rezanov recounted, "She was eager to live [in Russia], and at last, imperceptibly, I engendered in her an impatience to hear something more serious from me, so I proposed marriage to her and received her consent to my proposal." While it is unclear what degree of hostility Rezanov and Conchita faced from Spanish secular and ecclesiastic officials, the Chamberlain boasted in a letter to Count Rumiantsev that, through his relationship with the Arguellos, he was virtually "managing the port of His Catholic Majesty to the benefit of my own interests."

⁴⁸ Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 176. Black cites a letter Rezanov wrote to Mikhail Buldakov as proof of Rezanov's cold-heartedness. In the letter, he wrote that his relationship to Conchita was, "another sacrifice on my part for the glory of the fatherland." What Black does not mention is the fact that Buldakov was Rezanov's brother-in-law. Like Rezanov, Buldakov married one of Shelikov's daughters. Buldakov was at one time the largest holder of RAC shares as a result.

⁴⁹ "As I daily courted the Spanish beauty [Concepcion], I noted her enterprising nature and boundless ambition, which in spite of her age of fifteen years had already made her the one member of her family who was not satisfied with her homeland. Always in a facetious manner she would speak of it as 'a beautiful land, warm climate, lots of grain and cows and nothing more.'" Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 210.

Upon the Governor's arrival, a friar was sent to invite Rezanov to dinner. The Chamberlain recalled being slightly dismayed by receiving the invitation from a missionary rather than a garrison officer, to which the missionary simply replied, "Are holy fathers beneath officers? We live in America, and here we acknowledge no [protocol] but sincerity." Along the way to dinner, Rezanov learned from the friar that the Governor was expecting word at any time that Russia and Spain were at war due to Napoleon's campaigns in Europe. Having learned that the Spanish were apprehensive of the Russians and the motivations for their visit, Rezanov set about allaying Don Arrilaga's concerns. He conversed at length with the Governor in French about the affairs in Europe. Arrilaga laid out the case against cooperation due to impending conflict; while Rezanov continued to assure the Governor that the Russians in America were incapable of hostility. Further, Rezanov reasoned, the information the Governor had regarding Russian threats of hostility against the French or their allies was 5 ½ months old. Rather than respond to rhetoric of hostility, the Chamberlain argued that they were "now in such a remote corner of the world that by the time we hear of war it is possible peace has already been concluded."⁵⁰

Rezanov's testimony seemed to have a positive impact. The garrison at San Francisco knew something of the plight the Russians faced from American merchants who would occasionally update the Spanish during unofficial visits. The conversation then shifted to a definite point of agreement between the Russians and Spanish - concern over Yankee merchants along the Pacific Northwest coast. The governor opined that, "the boldness of the Bostonians has awakened us. This year the authorities

⁵⁰ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 206.

have promised to send me a naval frigate to put a stop to the vessels of the American states which are constantly smuggling along our coast and carrying on illicit trade...

They try in every possible way to settle here among us permanently."⁵¹ The Governor was critical of American commercial policy, noting that he believed,

[T]he Bostonians will profit by the breach in friendly relations with us [Russia and Spain], since upon declaration of war with England they renewed their former requests for opening trade with our American possessions. Our government refused them, but after the United States minister left Madrid to show his displeasure, our court in this critical situation was forced to send a satisfactory answer after them, by which four ports were opened to them, namely Buenos Aires, Vera Cruz, Caracas, and Cartagena... As I have personally witnessed in our waters the enterprise of the citizens of this republic, I am not surprised at their success. They flourish in the pursuit of trade, being fully aware of its possibilities.⁵²

Rezanov sympathized, replying that

[T]he Bostonians have harmed us more than they do you. They put people ashore in your territory, but they abduct them from ours. In addition to carrying on trade in our waters, this scoundrel of whom you are speaking (O'Cain) seized a departing hunting group of our American natives from Kodiak, 40 men and their families. The next year, Captain Barber, the same kind of knave, returned 26 of them to Kodiak, saying he had paid ransom for them in Queen Charlotte Islands and that he would not hand them over to us unless we paid him 10,000 rubles. We had to do this out of humanity, but we still do not know what O'Cain did with the others.

The Spanish were thus particularly concerned by the arrival of American vessels that hunted furs with Pacific Northwest natives. Rezanov feigned to not know the particulars of this trade, even though he was fully aware of the deals Baranov made with American captains like O'Cain to hunt along the coast south of Russian possessions. He closed his discussion with the Governor by noting that, "it is not love of gain, but merely a desire to benefit your countrymen, that makes it your duty to [trade with the

⁵¹ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 217-218.

⁵² Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 215.

Russians]. Here you are in a better position to see the needs of the country than the people in Madrid and truly I see no sin in it, especially, I said with a smile, when all the ecclesiastics will bend the knee in prayers for you." At the edge of their respective empires, Rezanov sought to alter Spanish and Russian policies to suit his designs for Russian hegemony in the North Pacific, whether or not the Tsar shared those designs.

The day after his dinner with Don Arrilaga, Rezanov returned to the Arguello household, where he learned "word for word" everything that was said afterwards from Conchita and her brother. The treaty Rezanov desperately sought for supplying the American colonies was unlikely due to the war rumors and the long-standing prohibition of the Spanish Court, consistently reinforced by provincial authorities in Mexico. The Governor and Commandant did, however, agree to allow repairs to the *Juno*, and to supply her with sufficient grain and provisions to bring back to the colonies in exchange for the goods brought aboard the *Juno*. Despite this setback, Rezanov still held out hope that his betrothal to Concepcion would alter the situation when he visited Madrid to seek permission to marry her.

Rezanov believed his betrothal would benefit the Russian colonies with Spanish trade. But he also saw opportunities should diplomacy fail. He encouraged the Russian Court to consider setting up a colony north of San Francisco, a proposal that was already being considered by Baranov. Having seen that the Spanish were able to control vast swaths of western America with little military expenditure, Rezanov argued that through kind treatment of the indigenous population, "we could develop our own agriculture and cattle raising in the proposed southern colonies." On May 10, 1806, the *Juno* set sail from San Francisco, loaded with as many provisions as the Governor

could provide without disturbing his superiors in Mexico. With only vague hopes of pressing his plans through to completion, Rezanov nevertheless set his sights squarely on strengthening the colonies, establishing direct trade with both Canton and Spanish California, and expanding the Russian empire to the mouth of the Columbia River upon his return to Sitka.

Instead, in June 1806, Rezanov received news that threw cold water upon his plans. Ten men at the Sitka colony had died from malnutrition. In addition, the *Elizaveta* sank while attempting a trip between Sitka and Kodiak. Worse still, he learned that Tlingit natives razed the Yakutat Bay colony; its inhabitants massacred. Emboldened Tlingits were, according to Langsdorff, “assembled in great numbers in their fortress with the intention of storming the Russian settlement, and murdering all the inhabitants.” It was believed by the German that only the arrival of the *Juno* forestalled such plans.

And yet, despite all of this, Rezanov merely modified his plans. He urged continued exploration of the Columbia River, which Baranov conducted. His vision was still set towards expanding trade “to dimensions worthy of a great empire.” The attacks on Russian settlements made it clear that the colonies were not ready to set up a triangle between European Russia, the colonies, and Canton. Rezanov therefore pleaded for ships to be sent to the Pacific Northwest for permanent deployment, rather than circumnavigation. In the short-term, he wanted the RAC to focus on trade between the colonies, Canton, and Siberia. World trade, he wrote, could only be attempted after establishing a hegemonic position, or the Russians risked commerce that was “only factitious glitter and no profits.”

All of Rezanov's plans for the RAC and Russia's destiny in the North Pacific were counterbalanced in his letters by an overriding desire for revenge against the Japanese. Rezanov never forgot how he was treated during his ambassadorial mission. His plan to attack the Japanese seemed to grow in proportion to his setbacks in Russian America. Meeting Khvostov and Davydov in Petropavlovsk in 1805 and the purchase of the *Juno* provided him with the means to enact this plan. In a letter to the Emperor written just after his arrival in the New World, Rezanov argued that an attack on the Japanese was necessary to force them to open trade. Further, he wrote, "I do not believe that Your Imperial Majesty will consider it an offense if I, with the able assistance of Messrs. Khvostov and Davydov, build ships and sail next year to the Japanese coasts to destroy their settlements on Matmai Island (in the Kurile Island chain), to push them from Sakhalin, and to ravage their coasts. By cutting off their supply of fish and depriving about 200,000 people of their food, we will force them to open trade with us."⁵³

While Rezanov waited for the completion of the *Avos* to launch his planned attack, he bade farewell to John DeWolf and Georg Langsdorff, who set off on their journey across Siberia less than a month after the California expedition. In July 1806, the finishing touches were put on the *Avos*. Rezanov immediately prepared to leave Sitka with her and the *Juno*. He initially planned to oversee the Japanese expedition himself, but in August 1806 Rezanov ordered Khvostov to carry him to Petropavlovsk instead. Perhaps he feared that he was overreaching with his unauthorized raid against the Japanese. He might have also been eager to set out for St. Petersburg in order to

⁵³ "Report, Rezanov to the Emperor, from Unalashka Island, July 18, 1805" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 150.

enact his plan to marry Conchita de Arguello. What is clear, as we will see, is that he left Khvostov and Davydov with conflicting and confusing orders regarding the Japanese attack after disembarking in Siberia.

Rezanov's head was filled with plans for his company and the Russian Empire as he set out for St. Petersburg. His far-reaching naval, diplomatic, and commercial vision would have been unthinkable by other aristocrats in the capital. But beyond Russia's continental frontiers, at the opposite end of the world, Rezanov moved unpredictably between representations of himself as a diplomat of the Court, a merchant intent upon advancing the interests of his company, and an aristocrat with easily offended sensibilities. His activities and presence in Russian America represented a transition between unregulated merchant activity (often the vanguard of continental and overseas expansion) and growing state interest in overseeing the Russian American territories and the markets that Russian merchants opened.

Initial expansion of the colonies under Baranov met with RAC and government approval. Indeed, this growth outpaced the ability and/or desire of Russia to extend military protection. In defense of Russia's claims to lands north of 55 degrees along the Pacific Northwest coast, Baranov had to manage political, economic, and social relations in a near vacuum. But Rezanov arrived in the colonies with plans that far exceeded the imaginings of Baranov, the RAC, or the imperial government. Fed on fantasies of Russian America's limitless potential by his father-in-law, Grigory Shelikov, Rezanov planned to realign foreign policy in the area, making Russia and the RAC the masters of the North Pacific. And the *Juno* was to play a pivotal role. She was the tool Rezanov needed to alter commerce, diplomacy, and even military activity in the region.

Rezanov's Death

Many have recounted the tragedy of the love between Rezanov and Conchita Arguello. It is the fodder of nineteenth and twentieth century poetry and historical fiction in Russia and America. In March 1807, while Rezanov was making his way to the capital, he became ill, and died after falling from his horse near Krasnoyarsk. The Ambassador to Japan, plenipotentiary and part owner of the RAC, and Chamberlain to the Court of Alexander I died without fulfilling any of his plans. But his life earned legendary status because of his ill-fated betrothal to Concepcion de Arguello.

In May 1872, the American writer Bret Harte published a poem entitled *Concepcion de Arguello*.⁵⁴ Much of Harte's previous literary *oeuvre* focused on the history of California. His poem followed the fate of the Conchita as she waited for Rezanov to return:

So each year the seasons shifted, - wet and warm and drear and dry;
Half a year of clouds and flowers,- half a year of dust and sky.
Still it brought no ship nor message, -brought no tidings, ill or meet,
For the statesman like Commander, for the daughter fair and sweet.
Yet she heard the varying message, voiceless to all ears beside:
"He will come," the flowers whispered; "Come no more," the dry
hills sighed.

Still she found him with the waters lifted by the morning breeze,-
Still she lost him with the folding of the great white-tented seas;
Until hollows chased the dimples from her cheeks of olive brown,
And at times a swift, shy moisture dragged the long sweet lashes

⁵⁴ Bret Harte, *Concepcion de Arguello (Presidio de San Francisco)*, *Atlantic Monthly*, 29 (May 1872): 603-605.

down;

Or the small mouth curved and quivered as for some denied caress,

And the fair young brow was knitted in an infantine distress.

Conchita never married. In 1851, she took the veil, joining the Dominican order.

Stories of her tragically waiting forty-five years for her love to return have torn at the heartstrings of readers ever since. Harte closed his poem with a dinner party, hosted in honor of a visitor to Spanish California, Sir George Simpson.

Far and near the people gathered to the costly banquet set,

And exchanged congratulations with the English baronet;

Till, the formal speeches ended, and amidst the laugh and wine,

Some one spoke of Concha's lover,- heedless of the warning sign.

Quickly then cried Sir George Simpson, "Speak no ill of him, I

pray,-

He is dead. He died, poor fellow, forty years ago this day.

"Died while speeding home to Russia, falling from a fractious horse.

Left a sweetheart, too, they tell me. Married, I suppose, of course!

"Lives she yet?" A deathlike silence fell on banquet, guests, and

hall,

And a trembling figure rising fixed the awestruck gaze of all.

Two black eyes in darkened orbits gleamed beneath the nun's

white hood;

Black serge hid the wasted figure, bowed and stricken where it

stood.

"Lives she yet?" Sir George repeated. All were hushed as Concha

drew

Closer yet her nun's attire. "Señor, pardon, she died too!"

Every biography of Rezanov includes a reference to the tragedy of their love. In 1970, Soviet poet Andrei Voznesensky published *Avos*, a poem that immortalized the tale in Russia.⁵⁵ The rededication for Rezanov's grave site in 2000 was attended by the Sheriff of Monterey county, who reportedly brought with him dirt from Conchita's grave to mix with Rezanov's, so that they could be symbolically reunited.⁵⁶ Historians have pointed out that Baranov, in fact, sent a letter to Spanish California in 1808, informing the authorities there of Rezanov's death.⁵⁷ But recently, Owen Matthews has suggested that knowledge of Rezanov's death in 1807, and Conchita taking the veil forty-four years later might have been connected. He points out that Conchita may have shrugged off initial rumors of the Chamberlain's death. But, it is nevertheless true that Conchita never remarried, and that she apparently decided to "remain loyal to the memory of her dead fiancé," despite being wooed by others.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Andrei Voznesensky, *Story Under Full Sail* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1974). Translated to English as *Story Under Full Sail* in 1974, Voznesensky's *Avos* is a curious long form poem with stanzas in sentimentalist style, interweaving dialogue, exposition, and occasional quotes from historical documents. Voznesensky recalled that he wrote it while traveling in Vancouver, after "consuming" *Russia's Eastward Expansion* by Florida State University professor George Alexander Lensen, who was a preeminent historian of Russian-Asian diplomatic relations.

⁵⁶ He also reportedly carried dirt from Rezanov's grave to Concepcion's. The story of the *actual* location of Rezanov's grave is a fascinating tale. It was reportedly ransacked by Bolsheviks in the 1920s, then moved during the 1950s, when the Soviet government took an interest in preserving historic monuments. Its history was traced in intricate detail by Olga Arzhanykh on a website dedicated to the history of Krasnoyarsk. See *Pamyat' o N.P. Rezanova, Taina Komandora* <http://rezanov.krasu.ru/eng/time/mystery.php>

⁵⁷ "Instructions from Aleksandr A. Baranov to His Assistant, Ivan A. Kuskov, Regarding the Dispatch of a Hunting Party to the Coast of Spanish California" in Dmytryshyn, *The Russian American Colonies*, 170.

⁵⁸ Matthews, *Glorious Misadventures*, 319. Matthews indicates that Conchita wrote to another nun that, "After much deliberation and prayer I concluded that I could not and

Rezanov's time in Russian America had a modest impact on the colonies. Many of his plans were eventually explored or enacted, including the founding of a settlement in Northern California (Fort Ross, in 1812) and a fort in Hawaii (Fort Elizaveta, in 1815). Russian diplomatic and exploratory circumnavigations of the globe continued after the first one led by Kruzenstern and Rezanov. While the Russian government did not immediately send ships to the Pacific Northwest as Rezanov requested, these expeditions did tie Russian America closer to St. Petersburg. Ilya Vinkovetsky has even suggested that such trips conceptually reoriented Russian America as a *western* overseas possession.⁵⁹ The Chamberlain's letters from Sitka had a strong influence on RAC and government officials. Lydia Black argued that these letters had a pernicious negative influence: encouraging the vision of Russian America as a drunken republic, filled with scoundrels who enslaved the native populations they encountered.⁶⁰ While laying blame for perceptions of Russian America solely on Rezanov's pen may be a bit unfair, it is definitely true that state and company representatives became increasingly worried about the pernicious influence of Yankee merchants on their own, more modest plans for the North Pacific after reading Rezanov's missives.

Denouement – In Search of the Real Rezanov

While previous histories of Rezanov painted him as a dashing, heroic, and tragic figure, modern historiography has fairly consistently swung the other way. As mentioned previously, Lydia Black found him at fault blamed him for virtually every shortcoming of the Kruzenstern expedition, the Japanese Ambassadorship, the trip to

would not be joined in marriage to one whom I did not love... I felt a certain lasting loyalty was demanded of me by a Higher power - a loyalty to Nikolai and myself!"

⁵⁹ See Ilya Vinkovetsky, "The Voyages Between Sitka and St. Petersburg and the Ethnic Policies of the Russian-American Company" in *Over the Near Horizon*, 89-97.

⁶⁰ Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 174.

Spanish America, and his tenure in Russian America. In her translation of Hieromonk Gideon's writings and in her history of Russian America, Black accused Rezanov of stealing credit for the work done by the clergy in Russian America, including the establishment of the school at Kodiak, and an Alutiiq dictionary.

Private correspondences and memoirs from Rezanov's contemporaries certainly do not paint a flattering picture of the man. During the Kruzenstern expedition, von Lowenstern's memoirs depict Rezanov as unstable at best. The private letters of Langsdorff and Kruzenstern certainly do not seek to correct this perception. So, how could a man trusted by the Tsar, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Board of Directors for the Russian American Company be so unstable? Writers of historical fiction attribute his dysphoria to the loss of his first wife before setting out on the expedition around the world.

But I believe a more likely explanation lies in the social environment that Rezanov operated within during his voyages. As Rezanov departed from St. Petersburg, he was set adrift without the social system in which he was raised. On board the *Nadezhda*, his rank in the aristocracy had little meaning. It was only on land that others seemed to recognize his status and authority. Social conventions on board a ship did not conform to his expectations due to his standing. Order was rigorously maintained through the chain of command, lest mutiny occur. Thus, the captain, officers, and crew on board had their own social norms that left Rezanov and the others as outsiders. To make matters worse, the officers belittled Rezanov for being a merchant. While it was permissible for members of the nobility to participate in trade during the reign of Alexander I, it was an insult for members of the crew and officers to

treat Rezanov and his diplomatic mission *as merchants*, with little to no social standing. As we have seen, once Rezanov was on land, he did everything in his power to establish himself as an authority figure with varying degrees of success. But his ultimate inability to control the situation must have infuriated him. In St. Petersburg, Rezanov probably never had to endure the kinds of insults that were hurled at him daily by Russian Naval officers and crew.

Then, once he arrived in Japan, he was greeted with still more insults to his honor. The Japanese refusal to officially treat with a designated ambassador of the Russian court certainly pushed Rezanov beyond the breaking point. While official reports left out much of Rezanov's behavior, Lydia Black noted that he was, "arrogant, tactless, and inept, he lost his temper on more than one occasion and felt himself deeply insulted."⁶¹ Lowenstern reported in his memoirs that he often feigned illness, and demanded any luxury found aboard the *Nadezhda* for his personal use.

Upon his arrival in the Russian American colonies, Rezanov immediately tried to gain control of situations he encountered. Here he was invested with considerable authority. The purchase of the *Juno* gave him the ability to exert influence over maritime and mercantile operations. He began to focus upon reigning in Yankee access to the coastline around Sitka, and turned his attention towards opening up new markets for Russian American furs. The *Juno* figured prominently in these plans, as a ship of defense, commerce, and diplomacy. As we will see, it also provided him with the opportunity to extract a measure of revenge against the Japanese. Enscorced in a position of authority, Rezanov took credit for the hard work done at Kodiak to make it a

⁶¹ Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 171.

respectable settlement. In his letters to company and government officials, Rezanov derided the work of the clergy and claimed responsibility for the educational work they had begun.

Peter Tikhmenev, the RAC employee that wrote a history of the company in the mid-nineteenth century, definitely put a positive spin on Rezanov's manic activity in the colonies. His history was cited by Bancroft, Chevigny, and others, and contributed greatly to the image of Rezanov as a heroic figure. Tikhmenev credited Rezanov for developing the plan to change RAC employees from payment in shares of fur catches to a fixed annual income. He also wrote that Rezanov reproached the clergy, urging them to learn the native language and stay out of company affairs.⁶² Khlebnikov did not help matters in his depictions of the Chamberlain, but gave a better picture of the man. In his biography of Baranov, Khlebnikov wrote in the 1830s that Rezanov came to the colonies at a time of great promise. "If Rezanov had arrived perhaps five, or even two years earlier," he wrote,

In a period which had been miserable for Baranov, when he had not received reinforcements on the *Phoenix*, when he had neither sufficient men, nor ship stores, nor goods, nor necessities; or at the time when he had just lost the Sitka settlement, when he was pressed by circumstances and threatened by new misfortunes and internal troubles; then he would have been inclined more to proposals that were arranged on a smaller scale.⁶³

Rezanov was thus swept up by a wave of optimism. Despite the problems that Rezanov encountered, there was promise for improvement; and he saw the opportunity to impose his authority in a way that was denied to him on board the *Nadezhda* and in Japan. Thus, he took credit for every positive, exaggerated wildly, and shaped the

⁶² Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Colonies Vol I*, 92-93.

⁶³ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 53.

narrative of the Russian American colonies for several years. His correspondence back to Russia also had a strong influence on opening official diplomatic offices with the United States.

Rezanov's voyage to the colonies and his experiences also reveal how ships marked a key difference between overland and overseas expansion. We have discussed above the shortcomings of the *soslovie* system on board vessels, but Rezanov also understood ships to be the means to change the fortunes of the colonies. More Russian ships in the area would discourage Yankee trade with the Tlingit. They would alleviate the growing dependence upon these same merchants for supplies. Most importantly, they would provide significant diplomatic opportunities. Without the *Juno*, it is unlikely that the diplomatic voyage to Spanish America would have occurred. Vessels in the colonies at the time would not have housed the Chamberlain and his retinue in Spanish America as the *Juno* could.

The *Juno* was important to diplomatic activities in other ways. Khvostov recorded in the *Juno's* ship log that Don Arguello and Don Arrilaga were both fêted aboard the ship.⁶⁴ Ships were frequently a locus of diplomacy, where deals were struck by masters or captains that affected the political economy of nations; and often in the absence of statesmen. Both naval officers and merchants frequently had a great deal of latitude while they were on the seas, to both the benefit and detriment of their countries. The trip to Spanish California paved the way for future contact between the Russians and the Spanish on the Northwest coast until the 1840s. As we will see in Act

⁶⁴ Extract from the log of the ship *Juno* in Richard A. Pierce ed., *Rezanov Reconnoiters California, 1806* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1972), 52. Pierce published a transcription of the *Juno's* ship log, which was found in the Library of Congress 'Yudin Collection' – a Siberian library that was purchased in 1906

Five, the potential to act independently aboard a ship like the *Juno* also led to disastrous circumstances.

Finally, the *Juno* was the potential means to continue exploration of the Pacific American coastline. Lieutenant Khvostov, who commanded the vessel on behalf of Rezanov, was attentive to the geographic details of the lands north of San Francisco.⁶⁵ He observed areas rich in lumber and with adequate ports for potential Russian colonization. When Rezanov made his plans to travel to Spanish America, Georg Langsdorff jumped at the opportunity to explore the coastline along the way and to make observations of the Spanish territories. As we will see in the next Act, Langsdorff also chronicled the establishment of Russia's colonies from a natural historical perspective. His published findings contrasted sharply with Rezanov's assessment of the colonies. Langsdorff offered a scientific critique of how the colonies expanded, and the bleak outlook they faced in light of the poor management of resources.

⁶⁵ Pierce, *Rezanov Reconnoiters*, 52-53.

CHAPTER 5
ACT 4 – GEORG LANGSDORFF AND THE NATURAL HISTORY OF RUSSIAN
AMERICAN COLONIZATION, 1805-1807

Scene 1 – Natural History and Empire

Wherein we meet Georg Langsdorff and examine his observations of the Russian American colonies

Like the naturalist Carl Linnaeus, Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff was both a physician and a natural historian. Langsdorff was born in Wollstein two years before America's Declaration of Independence was signed. He received his Doctor of Medicine and Surgery from Gottingen University in 1797.¹ Langsdorff was a self-described disciple of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a physician that taught natural science and anthropology at Gottingen University. After leaving the university, Langsdorff traveled to Portugal, studying natural history in the area while serving as a surgeon for Portuguese and English troops during the French Revolutionary Wars. In 1801, he accompanied Portuguese forces in their fight against the Spanish during the War of the Oranges. After the Treaty of Amiens, he was able to visit both London and Paris before returning to Prussia in 1803. Langsdorff's work in natural history during his journeys put him in contact with scientists and politicians throughout Europe.

While the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were redrawing national borders in Europe, naturalists like Langsdorff scoured the continent and the globe to catalog natural diversity. There was much more at stake than mild scientific curiosity. Beginning in the eighteenth century, naturalists inspired by Linnaeus began scouting natural and mineralogical resources across the globe, adding to the scientific knowledge of their respective countries. As one historian noted, "scientific inquiry had joined the established motives of territorial acquisition, commercial gain, and religious conversion

¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, vii.

as dominant themes for European exploration.”² Naturalists became requisite members of maritime and continental expeditions of exploration, including the voyages of Bering, Cook, and Vancouver. Their observations carried significant implications for the courts of Europe, and the right to occupy lands that were so discovered. They lent scientific legitimacy to such voyages; their research of natural flora and fauna was used to improve agricultural techniques and find ways to better exploit natural resources.³

Natural historians also influenced how Europeans viewed indigenous populations. With little distinction between anthropology and natural history at the time, naturalists observed the peoples of distant lands within the context of their natural setting. They were often the first and the only members of expeditions to publish their conclusions in a format accessible to both the scientific community, and the literate population in general. Their early observations had profound implications for scientific (and pseudo-scientific) discovery. Observation of similarities between man and ape led Linnaeus and Blumenbach to classify humans *within* the context of the natural world. This paved the way for the evolutionary theories of Erasmus Darwin, and later his grandson, Charles Darwin.

But viewing indigenous populations as an extension of their natural surroundings also had profound implications for colonization and conquest. Before Orientalists could fetishize Eastern cultures to exert Western intellectual hegemony, natural historians blended direct observation with assumptions about the political and moral development of the people they studied within a state of nature. Theories such as environmental

² Iris H W Engstrand “Spain's Role in Pacific Exploration during the Age of Enlightenment” in Haycox, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, 25.

³ Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, "Rival Ecologies of Global Commerce: Adam Smith and the Natural Historians." *The American Historical Review*. 115.5 (Dec 2010): 1342-1343.

determinism, which held that the environment dictated the physical, cultural, and even moral attributes of populations, often framed assumptions made by naturalists. These assumptions, in turn, led to ideas of racial hierarchy, justifying further Western expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Langsdorff Heads to Russian America

Langsdorff's decision to join Russia's first round-the-world expedition was motivated by his passion for natural history. He heard about the proposed voyage while at Gottingen University, and petitioned his contacts in Russia's Imperial Academy of Sciences to be included. Langsdorff had never been to Russia, and could not speak Russian. But as a correspondent with the Russian Academy, he was in close contact with scientific and political leaders in the Russian Empire. Fellow scientists informed Langsdorff that the expedition had left Kronstadt, but was scheduled to stop near Elsinore. He thus hastened to Denmark, arriving on the August 24, 1803. Meeting the expedition's leaders at the Sieur Rau hotel, Langsdorff reported,

I entreated so earnestly of the Chamberlain Von Resanoff, who was going with the expedition in quality of Ambassador to Japan, to be received as a sharer in the voyage, that at length, as my petition was supported by the excellent Captain Von Krusenstern, the proper chief of the expedition, I had the happiness of finding it granted. To this amiable man, and scientific navigator, whose well known services are far above my praise, I must therefore be permitted here publicly to make my grateful acknowledgments, confessing that I am principally indebted to his friendship and support, for all the gratification I received in the travels I am about to record.⁴

The first part of Langsdorff's narrative details the expedition's voyage to Japan via London, the Canary Islands, Brazil, Easter Island, and French Polynesia described above. After their unsuccessful stay in Nagasaki, Krusenstern directed the *Nadezhda*

⁴ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, viii-ix.

towards Kamchatka. At that point, Langsdorff recalled, Rezanov was persuaded to personally inspect the status of the colonies that he fought so hard to organize during the reign of Tsar Paul I. Langsdorff accompanied Rezanov after meeting Khvostov and Davydov; who agreed to act as the German's interpreters in the Russian America. Ostensibly serving as Rezanov's doctor, Langsdorff availed himself of every opportunity to examine natural life on the way through the Aleutian Island chain. "My choice," he wrote, "determined in many respects by accessory considerations, was made for accepting the ambassador's proposals; it seemed so much a debt due to science to undertake a journey to parts so little known, and which had received so little scientific examination, under auspices to all appearance particularly favourable, that I could scarcely consider myself as justified in declining it."⁵

Langsdorff had reason to be hopeful that his efforts would bring him significant prestige. There was considerable interest in natural history among RAC shareholders and the Tsar's inner circle in St. Petersburg. Count Nikolai Petrovich Rumiantsev, the Minister of Commerce who partially financed the Kruzenstern-Rezanov expedition, had an abiding interest in natural history. He experimented growing plants from around the world on his estates. State interest in the fruits of natural historical research also had direct impact upon the Russian American colonies. In an 1805 letter from Baranov to the manager of the Andreianov and Rat Islands, the Chief Manager asked the Russians there to ship, "curios such as: sea animals, plants, fossils, etc. Such things are in demand in Petersburg and other places."⁶

⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 308.

⁶ Letter, Baranov to Demid Il'ich Kuliakov, April 29, 1805 in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 141.

But Langsdorff faced significant obstacles in his attempt to fulfill his “debt to science” while in Russian America. He was initially able to collect some specimens, and casually observed plants and animals along his way from the Western Aleutians to Northern California. But between June 1805 and September 1806, he frequently encountered problems. Shortly after arriving at Unalaska from Petropavlovsk, Langsdorff noted that, “I had now, in several instances, had occasion to observe... that though at Kamchatka large promises were made me, both in writing and orally, as to what should be done for the promotion of scientific undertakings, no alacrity had been shewn in fulfilling these promises, so that I began almost to repent having undertaken the voyage.”

A major impediment was, in his opinion, the lack of “upright and enlightened friends” who respected his efforts, such as Captain Kruzenstern.⁷ Rezanov showed little interest in assisting Langsdorff once they arrived in Russian America. Instead, the Chamberlain occupied himself with the financial and social management of the colonies and dreams of expansion. In addition, Langsdorff suffered from a number of shortcomings prevalent in the islands, including, “a short and indefinite stay, almost constant rain, my ignorance of the language, and want of support in my researches in Natural History.” These obstacles prevented him from spending his time as he would have liked. “To examine a country accurately,” he added, “three things are essentially requisite, not one of which I at this time enjoyed, leisure, serenity of mind, and convenience.”⁸

⁷ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 353.

⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 368.

Observing the Native Population of Russian America

Nevertheless, from the moment Langsdorff arrived at St. Paul's Island on July 5, 1805, he did his best to observe both his natural *and* social surroundings. He noted the variety of flora that grew on the Pribilof and Aleutian Island chains. At Kodiak, he was surprised to learn that the climate was as temperate as Massachusetts and Rhode Island due to the area being sheltered by the mountains of the mainland. He believed that "potatoes and culinary vegetables would do alright here," but saw little interest in large-scale planting among the Russians.⁹ Berries and edible roots of various kinds grew naturally, and served as part of the diet for natives and *promyshlenniki* throughout the Aleutians. In addition, there was plentiful fauna upon which the natives fed. These included fur seals, whales, foxes, seabirds, fresh and saltwater fish, and various kinds of shellfish. And yet, at many turns, Langsdorff also observed that people in the colonies were frequently starving. To find the explanation for this, Langsdorff studied the Russians and indigenous populations, focusing on their customs and their practices to determine how the natural order could be so off-kilter.

The German took stock of the populations that inhabited the islands between Kamchatka and Sitka. He believed that the Unangas of Unalaska were "a sort of middle race between the Mongul Tartars and the North-Americans."¹⁰ Of Tlingit physiognomy, he noted that, "[t]hey do not appear to have the least affinity with the Mongol tribes; they have in general large fiery eyes, a small flat broad nose, and large cheekbones; indeed, in all respects, large and strongly marked features. The men have little or no beard, since, like the Aleutians, they pluck the hairs out by the roots as soon as they begin to

⁹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 356.

¹⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 332.

appear. Some of the women and girls, who live chiefly with the Russian Promuschlinks, when their skins are clean, and purified from the dirt, which they consider as ornamental, have complexions as fair as those of many Europeans, and by no means unpleasing features."¹¹ He was particularly critical of the Tlingit women that pierced their lower lips and inserted wooden discs or buttons. For a western European, it was "the most extraordinary, it may be said the most unnatural, idea, of increasing their beauty, that the fertile imagination of man ever yet invented."¹² With a scientist's precision, he noted that

[t]his ornament, so horrible in its appearance to us Europeans, this truly singular idea of beauty, extends along the north-west coast of America, from about the 50th to 60th degree of latitude. All the women, without distinction, have it, but the circumference of the piece of board seems to mark the age or rank of the wearer: the usual size is from 2 to 3 inches long, about half an inch thick; but the wives of chiefs have it much longer and broader...

While perplexed by this habit, he concluded this analysis in as objective a fashion as possible: comparing it to Chinese foot binding, and Japanese tooth blackening, and strange European practices, such as "blowing our noses and carry the rag with us."

Langsdorff raised a similar objection to the piercing practice that DeWolf recalled: "Without...being able to say anything as to the use of this lip ornament, one disadvantage that it has must strike everybody, that it is wholly impossible for the fair-sex, on the north-west coast of America, to receive a kiss."¹³ A significant portion of his observations were devoted to topics of native sexuality. Among the Western Aleutian peoples, he "was assured that the most promiscuous intercourse between the sexes, even among the nearest relations, is allowed: not only do brothers and sisters cohabit

¹¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 397.

¹² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 399.

¹³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 400.

with each other, but even parents and children. An Aleutian, whom I questioned on the subject, answered me with perfect indifference that his nation in this respect followed the example of the sea-dogs and sea otters.”¹⁴

At Unalaska, he observed that some Unangan boys were raised as girls “and instructed in all the arts women use to please men.”¹⁵ Langsdorff was amazed that the practice continued after the Russians arrived, and believed it was further proof of the immorality of Russian motivations for colonization. But homosexual and transgendered practices were common among the indigenous population of Russian America. Langsdorff reported male concubinage in both Unalaska and at Kodiak, where some men would dress as women, perform women’s tasks, and be taken as concubines by native men. At Kodiak, Langsdorff found the Alutiiq to be very similar to the inhabitants of Unalaska. They had similar habits of adornment (piercing and tattooing), but were more rarely seen since the Russian presence at Kodiak was more significant. What continued, Langsdorff reported, were immoral sexual practices such male concubinage. He again blamed the continuation of these practices squarely on the Company, and its emphasis on profit over morality.¹⁶

The Tlingits, while similar in some respects to the Western Aleutian natives in Langsdorff’s estimation, provided some interesting contrasts. He noted that they were, for the most part, more monogamous. Polygamy was only practiced by “a few among the chiefs, who are in their way very rich and substantial men.” Tlingit males were also far more protective of women’s sexuality. “It is not uncommon,” he wrote, “when a

¹⁴ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 358.

¹⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 345

¹⁶ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 357-358

young girl is grown up to shut her up, even for a whole year, in a small house by herself, at a distance from her family and acquaintance, where she is kept constantly employed: the idea is, that by this means she acquires habits of industry and diligence, reserve and modesty, which will afford the better chance of becoming a good wife, and lay a solid foundation for wedded happiness." This formed, in Langsdorff's mind, "a most valuable distinction between them and the women of the more northern parts of the coast."¹⁷

But he found that the Tlingits lacked social cohesion. In a particularly judgmental passage, he wrote that, "[a]ge, superiority of natural understanding, or temporal wealth obtained by good fortune in catching sea otters, and in selling their skins to advantage, or the great number of persons which a family consists, -- these seem the requisites for obtaining respect and distinction among the Kaluschians [Tlingit]."¹⁸ The only reason there was a village for him to visit was because of their "common interest" - hostility towards the Russians and the need for protection. "Otherwise," he wrote, "every family seems to live to itself alone." This, for Langsdorff, represented the natural order that the Russians encountered when they arrived in search of furs. But while the natives lacked

¹⁷ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 414.

¹⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 410. In July 1806, as Langsdorff and DeWolf were departing from Russian America, they had the opportunity to visit the "northern" coast of Alaska near Kodiak, where Langsdorff confirmed the sexual licentiousness of the population by noting that, "[t]he men seem as little jealous of their wives, as the young girls are backward in bestowing their favors. A handful of beads, some leaves of tobacco, or other European trifles, above all, half a dozen fine sewing needles, were sufficient to remove all difficulties" (Langsdorff, 499). It is interesting to note that many of Langsdorff's second hand observations include a phrase similar to "I have been assured by persons deserving of credit..." But most of his observations on native sexuality appear to derive from direct observation or interviews with natives. He described the native women on the mainland as, "not unpleasing," except for their deformed lips; but also added somewhat suggestively that, "The winter must be very cold here, and of long duration."

cohesion, as Europeans understood it, there was an ecological balance between them and their environment. Of their fitness for the climate, he wrote, "it cannot but excite the astonishment of people accustomed to warmer climates or more cloathing, to see how much the bodies of these people are proofed against cold; scarcely will any other nation be found where they are so hardened against the effects of a very rough climate."¹⁹

Observing the Nature of the Russian American Colonies

From the moment Langsdorff arrived in the Aleutian Islands, he encountered telltale signs of poor Russian management. He was informed that on islands infrequently visited by the Russians, the natives led "happier lives than most of these people, as they are not so much under the immediate influence of the Russio-American Company, and consequently are less frequently visited by the promyshlenniki."²⁰ Fur hunting led by Russians had a punishing impact upon native villages, disrupting the cycle of lying in provisions for the winter, and depriving villages of hunters for months at a time.

Another problem according to Langsdorff was the lack of proper moral guidance and a strong hand to shepherd the lands and the peoples of Russian America. He lamented that, even after the Russians established themselves in the Aleutian Islands, "there is no such thing among them as an ecclesiastical, or a house of prayer; and the small number of Christians established here, have, in general, given such very indifferent specimens of the morality of the nation to which they belong, that the natives can hardly have any great belief in the benevolent influence which they are told the

¹⁹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 397.

²⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 350.

Christian religion has over mankind.”²¹ The initial lack of oversight by ecclesiastical and state authorities, Langsdorff argued, had profound implications for the success or failure of Russia’s endeavors along the American coastline. Without direct authority from the crown, Langsdorff recalled,

stewardship in each single establishment is entirely despotic; though nominally depending upon the principle factory at Kodiak, these stewards do just what they please, without the possibility of being called to account. The Aleutians of the distant islands are commonly under the superintendence of a *Promyshlenniki*, which is, in other words, under that of a rascal, by whom they are oppressed, tormented, and plundered in every possible way.²²

Obviously, Langsdorff had nothing but disdain for the *promyshlenniki* and other employees of the RAC. Taking stock of the Russians that accompanied him to Russian America aboard the *Maria*, he wrote that they were louse-ridden and starving “adventurers, drunkards, bankrupt traders, and mechanics, or branded criminals in search of fortune.”²³ In the absence of moral authority, Langsdorff argued, the Russians in the American colonies adopted native customs. At St. Paul Island, Langsdorff witnessed Russian hunters resisting transfer off the island after it was discovered that it was being over-hunted. They pleaded to be left alone, as they had all of the food and supplies they needed. Many Russians ‘married’ native women. And, Langsdorff observed, Russians began to follow many of the natives’ “licentious examples.”

Langsdorff saw the relentless focus upon extracting natural resources (furs) from the colonies as the main problem. Rather than carefully restraining the Russian fur hunters, overseeing orderly gathering of furs and other resources, and providing strong

²¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 344.

²² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 362.

²³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 315-316.

moral leadership, the entire Russian operation in the New World was horribly out of balance. He witnessed firsthand the need restrain the untrained Russian hunters, who killed 30-40 sea lions in half an hour. Langsdorff recollected that, "the sailors would have killed them by the hundreds, if they had not been restrained by our positive commands."²⁴ Further, as mentioned earlier, the "share" payment system for employment in the Russian colonies, which often kept Russians in a state of perpetual indebtedness, encouraged the hunters to cull as many fur bearing animals as possible.

The Russian managers treated the *promyshlenniki* little better than the Alutiiq or Unangan hunters. Langsdorff recorded John DeWolf's abhorrence for the casualness with which life and death were encountered in the colonies in 1805:

Captain D'Wolf, one of the most compassionate and benevolent of men, who often made me the sharer of his joys and sorrows, sighing one day over the numbers that were constantly dying, said to me: "It is indeed very extraordinary that Christians can practice so little philanthropy towards each other. The body of the Promuschleniks is thrown carelessly into the earth, and all ceremony of internment is waved with the Aleutian; we scarcely see a friend or a comrade following his deceased fellow-countrymen to the grave. Funeral ceremonies, which under some form or other are practiced even among the most uncultivated nations, and which for the sake of example ought here to be performed with the particular decency and decorum, seem to be things of which people have no idea."²⁵

This callousness, even amongst the Russians, resulted in the natives knowing "no other laws than submission exacted from them by the strong arm of power; nor does it seem ever to have entered into the ideas of their conquerors to instill into their minds the more pure and correct notions of morality that obtain among civilized nations."²⁶

Thus, Langsdorff attributed the chaos that reigned in the colonies to two factors:

(1) the primacy of profit over long term, state supported commitment to the colonies,

²⁴ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 320-321.

²⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 382.

²⁶ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 357.

and (2) the nature of governance in the colonies. He was baffled by the fact that a private joint-stock company exercised political, social, and economic control over such a vast swath of territory. "It has often struck me as a very extraordinary circumstance," he wrote, "that in a monarchical state a free trading company should exist independent as it were of the government, not confined within any definite regulations, but who can exercise their authority free and uncontrolled, nay even unpunished, over so vast an extent of country."²⁷ Enjoying no state protection, and having no judicial recourse, the inhabitants of the colonies were left to the whims of oftentimes-cruel overseers at such a distance from St. Petersburg, that they did not fear punishment for their behavior.

The emphasis on extracting value from the colonies led Langsdorff to see exploitative and wasteful behavior at every turn. Several historians have noted that the Russians over-hunted fur seals. Company warehouses often contained pelts that went bad due to improper treatment, neglect, or the inability to ship furs back to Russia on a regular basis. Langsdorff similarly heard of such practices, where "such a number were taken, that skins to the amount of some millions of rubles rotted in the warehouses of the Company, more anxiety having been shewn to collect a number than to attend to their being properly cured."²⁸

He also noted the human costs of such wasteful behavior. Because Russians were not encouraged to settle in America, Russians deemed to be vagabonds by Rezanov and his entourage were the only example of morality for the natives. Worse still, as mentioned previously, women were trafficked from island to island to meet the "domestic" needs of the settlements. Langsdorff noted that "From such an order being

²⁷ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 362.

²⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 324.

given and acted upon, it is obvious that the Aleutians are complete slaves to the Company: no Aleutian of Kodiak would ever voluntarily remove to Sitcha, since very few of those that are transported thither return back again.”²⁹ The treatment of the male hunters was little better. Hunting expeditions were very dangerous. Alutiiq and Unangan men traveled for days via baidarka, often into hostile areas. They then had to return with their boats loaded with furs. “Even if the hunt is successful,” Langsdorff observed, “the men return exhausted, inflamed lungs, and the effect is that they die sooner or later.”³⁰ The German was no stranger to the practice of slavery, having visited Brazil on the round-the-world voyage to the Pacific. But, Langsdorff recalled, “[i]n the countries that I have seen, where negro slaves are employed in the labor, great care is taken to feed them well, and keep them in health, since they must be purchased at a high price; but the case is otherwise here.”³¹

The only way that the colonies continued to function, in Langsdorff’s estimation, was because of a few reliable men in key positions. Langsdorff singled out three. The first was Emelian Grigorevich Larionov. A partner of Shelikov’s in the original private venture, Larionov was in charge of Unalaska when Langsdorff stayed there from July eighth through July twenty-first, 1805. After Larionov’s death in 1806, Langsdorff reflected that, “the integrity and philanthropy with which he uniformly conducted himself

²⁹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 379.

³⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 488.

³¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 493. It is doubtful that Langsdorff studied Portuguese slavery practices too closely. Hieromonk Gideon, who accompanied the Kruzenstern expedition along with Langsdorff, had a vastly different opinion: “They are bought for the purposes of labor for 100 to 200 piasters... They go about practically naked, are exhausted by unceasing heavy labor, and are beaten inhumanly. The native Portuguese, however, spend their lives in lazy and carefree condition.” See Gideon, *The Round the World Voyage*, 12.

during ten years that he continued in his office, had justly gained him the love and respect of all the islanders. Under his stewardship, this was undoubtedly the best conducted of all the Russian-American Company's settlements."³² His successor, on the other hand, was far less scrupulous. "So far was he from walking in the steps of his predecessor," Langsdorff wrote, "that, in only six months, instead of order and unanimity, everything was turned into chaos."

When he arrived at Kodiak on July 29, 1805, Langsdorff enjoyed the hospitality of another reliable man: Ivan Ivanovich Bander. Bander was a Dane who worked with Baranov before the latter moved to Sitka after 1804. Shortly after taking on new responsibilities as manager of the Kodiak colony, Bander and his wife greeted the crew of the *Maria* warmly. Langsdorff recalled that at the suggestion of Rezanov, Mr. Bander began to build a library for the denizens of Kodiak, numbering some 450 laboring men plus women and children. While historian Lydia Black has convincingly shown that most of these processes were well underway due to the work of the clergy at Kodiak before Rezanov's arrival, Langsdorff still gives credit for them to the Chamberlain.³³ According to Langsdorff, Rezanov encouraged Bander's wife to begin schooling 14-15 year old native girls, to instruct them in European-style chores (cooking, cleaning, gardening, etc.).

Finally, Langsdorff met Baranov upon arriving at Sitka in August, 1805. The German was impressed with Baranov's extensive knowledge of the areas under his jurisdiction, and the respect he commanded among the natives and Russians. In fact,

³² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 501.

³³ See Lydia Black's comments on Gideon and Rezanov in Hieromonk Gideon, *The Round the World Voyage*, 100-101.

Langsdorff saw Baranov's leadership as the only reason that the colonies had not collapsed, for "the greater part of the Promyshlenniki and inferior officers of the different settlements are Siberian criminals, malefactors, and adventurers of various kinds, not a little credit is due to his vigilance and address, that he has been able in any degree to put a bridle on them."³⁴ While rough around the edges due to his long service in the colonies, Langsdorff was impressed with the progress Baranov made in shipbuilding, creation of settlements, and expanding the Company's sphere of operations.

While Baranov was expanding Russia's dominion in America, it was not, in Langsdorff's estimation, an orderly expansion based upon sustainable practices. Baranov merely continued the eighteenth century pattern of following the sea otters down the Pacific Northwest coast. After taking Sitka, Russian hunters reached a point beyond which expansion would prove difficult. "I have been assured by persons deserving of credit," Langsdorff wrote, "that the tribes lying to the south and the south east of Sitcha are much more populous, and bear such a determined hatred to [Baranov] and his hunting parties, that it is very probable a disastrous fate would await him and his whole company if he should ever seek to establish a settlement farther south."³⁵

Nor were the already established colonies sufficiently protected. The fall of Sitka in 1802, attacks on fur hunters along the coast, and the destruction of the Yakutat Bay colony in 1805 all pointed to the instability of Russia's hold upon the colonies. Upon returning from California in June 1806, Langsdorff noted that, "the political situation of New Archangel was at this moment very critical. Certain intelligence was received that a

³⁴ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 360.

³⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 375.

few days before the return of the *Juno*, the Kaluschians had assembled in great numbers in their fortress with the intention of storming the Russian settlement, and murdering all the inhabitants. The unexpected arrival of the *Juno*, however, alarmed them, and deterred them from prosecuting the attempt; but it was not abandoned without the threats that it should be carried into execution at a future period."³⁶

Langsdorff also noted the dire consequences of such improper management of natural and human resources. The animal populations that the Russians hunted were in decline, even in the early nineteenth century. Again, according to the German naturalist, over-hunting and poor management were the main culprits. As previously noted, Rezanov had to decrease the number of hunters at St. Paul Island because their efforts ran "the hazard of exceedingly diminishing the several breeds in the future" - including polar bears and ice-foxes.³⁷ The Russian method of expansion put further strain on seal and otter populations. Following patterns that first led Kamchatka fur hunters to the coast of America, the sea otters were "killed in such numbers that their total extirpation was to be approached in a very short time..."³⁸ At Unalaska, he also witnessed silver-grey foxes, black foxes, and various otter populations in decline due to over-hunting.

Simultaneous with over-hunting, the native populations of the Aleutian Islands were similarly in decline. At Unalaska, Langsdorff saw that, "a rapid cause of the depopulation most probably is to be ascribed to the directors of the principle establishment of the Russio American Company at Kodiak, being in the habit of sending

³⁶ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 490.

³⁷ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 326.

³⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 371.

the best hunters from hence to the Islands of St. George and St. Paul, to Kodiak, and even to the north-east Coast of America, to chase the large sea otters; and it is very rarely that any of these people ever return to the bosoms of their families. It is extremely probable also that the oppression under which they live at home, the total want of care, and the change in their modes of living, contribute exceedingly towards diminishing the population."³⁹

Nor was this problem confined to the furthest reaches. At Kodiak, Langsdorff was shocked by the rapid depopulation of the island from the time Shelikov set up his first colony there. During Langsdorff's sojourn, he noted that the working population of the island was around 450. But Shelikov reported 50,000 inhabitants in 1784. Shelikov's penchant for exaggeration was legendary, but reliable estimates still put the population of the island at 4,000-5,000 inhabitants in the 1790s. Langsdorff could only conclude that, "[n]ew ways of life, unknown diseases, oppression and ill-usage (compulsory and fatiguing hunting parties), insurrections, etc. have depopulated the island..."⁴⁰ These processes threatened the native population with extinction. In such an environment, Langsdorff believed, the education of native children at Kodiak was in fact counter-productive. It took the children away from assisting their families during the crucial summer months, when food was gathered for winter. In addition, he questioned the value of training native children in mathematics, geography, and French, as Rezanov desired, when there were insufficient jobs in the factories and accounting houses of the Company for them.

³⁹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 333.

⁴⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 355.

For Langsdorff, poor planning, overemphasis on profit, and little regard for properly using natural resources led the colonies to struggle. Nowhere was this seen more clearly than in the winter of 1805. As previously mentioned, after the Battle of Sitka, Baranov's meager resources were stretched beyond capacity by the arrival of the *Maria* carrying Langsdorff, Rezanov, Khvostov, and Davydov. Even the cargo purchased with the *Juno* was unlikely to last for the Alutiiq, *promyshlenniki*, officers, and other inhabitants of Sitka. For this reason, the *Juno* was quickly dispatched to Kodiak for additional supplies. While it passed unmentioned by Langsdorff, he must have undoubtedly scoffed at Baranov's audacity to bring so many men south to invade Tlingit lands without a plan to provision, feed, and shelter them.

The dire circumstances of the settlement in February 1806 prompted Rezanov to sail for California aboard the *Juno*. Langsdorff noted that the situation would not have been as catastrophic if supplies were allocated better. Like DeWolf, Langsdorff witnessed a two-tier class system that dominated the colonies. "What shocked me the most under these circumstances," he wrote, "and really harassed my feelings, was, that while a large portion of the people lay in this state of wretchedness, the directors and under-seers, the clerks and their friends, the officers and their hangers-on, of their own authority sent the Aleutians out to hunt or fish, and fed sumptuously upon wild-ducks and geese, fresh fish and fish pasties, good bread, biscuit, sugar, rice, molasses, brandy, in short, upon whatever was afforded wither by nature or the storehouses."⁴¹ Langsdorff also noted that he quickly learned to bully the corrupt keepers of the stores for supplies to aid those who most needed supplies.

⁴¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 381.

In addition, cruelty pervaded in the colonies. Sick employees were forced to work more instead of being allowed to rest. Langsdorff reported that by February 1806, eight of the 192 Russians at Sitka had died, and another sixty had scurvy. As Russian and Alutiit hunters and employees fell ill, they were forced to continue working, or given guard duty with continuous exposure to the elements. Denied rest and wood for fires, the sickness spread quicker. Langsdorff implored officials and overseers for better supplies and lodging, but was met with laughter at the notion that the sick should get preferential treatment. In these circumstances, Langsdorff jumped at the opportunity to travel to Spanish California with Rezanov.

Scene 2 – A Ship of Exploration

Wherein we examine Georg Langsdorff's comparative analysis of the Russian Colonies and Spanish
California

Shortly after arriving at Sitka in August 1805, Langsdorff sketched the fortifications, harbor, and settlement. His vantage point afforded an excellent view of Castle Hill, where Baranov built the main Russian fortification after defeating the Kiks.ádi in 1804. In the harbor, the viewer is presented with three ships in the foreground, and a single-masted vessel far off in the background. The two closest vessels have two masts, and are likely the *Maria* and the *Ekaterina*, as they were in the harbor at the time according to Langsdorff written account.⁴² The third vessel has three masts, and its hull rides much higher in the water than either Russian craft.

Khlebnikov's biography of Baranov noted that the *Neva*, the three-masted vessel under the command of Yuri Lisiansky during the Kruzenstern-Rezanov expedition, plied

⁴² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 87-88.

the waters between Kodiak and Sitka during the summer of 1805.⁴³ Lisiansky then loaded the ship with furs for trade in Macao. But the ship in Langsdorff's sketch was not the *Neva*. Shortly before Langsdorff sketched Sitka harbor, Lisiansky painted watercolors of Sitka and Kodiak with the *Neva* featured prominently in the foreground of both. Its long, straight keel does not resemble the rounded vessel in Langsdorff's sketch.

In a November 1805 letter to the Directors of the RAC, Rezanov indicated that he was unable to meet up with the *Neva* while in Russian America, thus Langsdorff would not have seen it either.⁴⁴ In this same letter, he noted that, "two three-masted ships from Boston were here in New Archangel [Sitka] this summer, the *Mary*, Captain Trescott, which sailed to Canton, and the *Juno*, Captain Wolfe. This ship was here when I arrived and I can congratulate you with it, because I bought it for the company with all its cargo and armament..."⁴⁵ The *Mary* was not present when Rezanov and Langsdorff arrived, having sailed for Canton on August 20, 1805 according to John DeWolf.⁴⁶ Thus, the ship in Langsdorff's sketch is most likely the *Juno*.⁴⁷ Langsdorff would have first seen the *Juno* shortly after arriving in mid-August. At the time, the *Juno* was in the harbor in need of repairs after DeWolf ran up onto rocks in the Chatham Straits. The German, who also spoke English, befriended DeWolf during their mutual sojourn at Sitka after Rezanov purchased the American's vessel.

⁴³ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 50.

⁴⁴ Letter, Rezanov to the Board of Directors of the RAC, from New Archangel, November 6, 1805 in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 156.

⁴⁵ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 158.

⁴⁶ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 28-29.

⁴⁷ In his *Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle* (1959), George Howe similarly identified the ship in the sketch as the *Juno*.

When Rezanov left for Spanish California, Langsdorff accompanied him to study more of the coastline and to escape the conditions he witnessed in Sitka. Langsdorff could not help but contrast his observations of Russian America with their Spanish neighbors. Langsdorff's writings about the colonies and population there closely resembled the process used by naturalists to describe plant or animal characteristics. He observed environmental and social conditions in the Russian colonies and compared them to analogous institutions in the area, namely the Spanish colonies. He then reported his conclusions. Thus the voyage to California aboard the *Juno* helped Langsdorff to chart the natural, economic, and political geography of the Russian colonies at the dawn of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, his observations were heavily critical of the *method* of Russia's imperial conquest. Spanish California appeared to confirm Langsdorff's observations. Taken as a whole, the second volume of Langsdorff's *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World* also reveal important differences between followers of Adam Smith and disciples of Linnaeus in their understandings of commercial relations and empire.

This rift between liberal economists and natural historians was explored by Fredrik Albritton Jonsson in his 2010 article entitled "Rival Ecologies of Global Commerce: Adam Smith and the Natural Historians." Jonsson argued that while both natural history and liberalism were descendants of the Enlightenment, they diverged in regards to the role of the state in managing natural resources. Naturalists, according to Jonsson preferred cameralist conservation policies on everything from transplanting grasses for better agricultural development to population and agricultural policies. Liberals, on the other hand, saw nature as a self-correcting system. Like markets, they

believed, nature needed little or no direct intervention. As Jonsson summarized, “This quarrel... suggests a new way to think about empire and capitalism. In essence, the defense of global commerce pioneered in the Enlightenment was inextricably tied to the improvement of the natural order. But from the outset, the conversion of nature into capital raised a fundamental question of management. Was the market sufficient to order nature, or did the complexity of the natural order require the intervention of an environmental expertise?”⁴⁸

For Langsdorff, this quandary was not a theoretical question. His observations focus on this issue as it developed in Russian America during the colonies’ early formation. He was one of the few outside observers to leave a detailed account of early Russian colonization efforts. His conclusions were rooted in his epistemological approach to the subject. For Langsdorff, the *Juno* became a vessel of scientific exploration. While in Spanish California, the German was moderately successful at describing flora and fauna he encountered. He also observed the events between Rezanov, Donna Concepcion de Arguello, and the Spanish authorities in San Francisco described previously. But his observations of the political economy of Russian America are of far greater significance than his particular scientific endeavors. The *Juno* played a crucial part in this process, allowing Langsdorff to travel the breadth of the colonies, observe lands outside of Russian America, and compare his observations to other lands.

Trip to Spanish America

In addition to escaping the horrible conditions at Sitka, Langsdorff hoped to use his voyage aboard the *Juno* to explore more of the Pacific Northwest coastline.

⁴⁸ Jonsson, “Rival Ecologies,” 1345.

Seventeen days after departing from Sitka, the expedition approached the Columbia River. Typical of Rezanov's boundless imagination, Langsdorff recalled that Rezanov had already "sketched his plans for removing the settlement from Sitka to the Columbia River, and was busied with building ships there in the air."⁴⁹ Unfortunately, shifting winds kept the *Juno* from initially exploring the mouth of the river. The next day, after evening currents and contrary winds conspired to send the ship to the north, Rezanov agreed to allow Langsdorff and other crew members to explore the area with longboats. Langsdorff observed smoke, presumably from settlements in the far distance, but was unable to make contact with them. As darkness fell, the Langsdorff expedition headed back to the *Juno*, barely finding their way thanks to signal cannon fire from the ship.

Davydov recommended foregoing any more exploration, as the Midshipman and Lieutenant Khvostov felt that, "we should be among civilized people, and should no doubt find plenty of provisions and everything necessary for the recovery of our sick."⁵⁰ They arrived in San Francisco on March 28, 1806. Langsdorff went ashore with Davydov to act as an intermediary with the religious and military officials present at the garrison. At first glance, he saw similarities between the Russian and Spanish settlements. Both empires had overextended their resources to reach the periphery of the known world. The Spanish seemed intent upon claiming as much land as possible on North America's west coast due to fears of Russian encroachment. The Russians, in turn, sought to expand as quickly as possible to protect claims from eighteenth century Russian expeditions and to secure fertile hunting grounds.

⁴⁹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 419.

⁵⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 424.

But Langsdorff also noted crucial differences. The Spanish were far more wary of foreign visits than even the Russians. “The Spanish Government,” he wrote, “is well known to be extremely suspicious, and, properly speaking, does not allow the vessels of other nations to run into any of her ports in either North or South America.” Spanish officials restricted all trade to only those ports that had a Spanish Customs house and refused admission of all ships that were not in dire circumstances. American ships, in particular, were closely monitored, and “the freedom of all the sailors who are not native Spaniards is so extremely restrained, that none can come on shore without particular permission.” Fortunately, no one could deny the sorry state of the Russian crew of the *Juno*. Further, Rezanov’s letters of welcome from the Kruzenstern expedition opened the door to discussions with the Spanish in San Francisco.

The contrasts Langsdorff found between Spanish America and Russian America upon closer inspection were striking. He was amazed to discover that the Spanish missions along the California coast were so lightly staffed. Approximately 15 military personnel and two-three ecclesiastics supervised two missions in the area of San Francisco. The primary purpose of the missions was to settle the indigenous population and instruct them in Christianity. They were self-supporting communities that traded little with foreigners, or even each other. The priests and monks were mostly of the Franciscan order, headquartered in Mexico. They signed up for ten-year service, with the government providing little more than their clothing, books, and tools. Each of the 19 missions at that time, Langsdorff noted, had between 600-1000 converts.⁵¹ They were guarded by a total of 300 military personnel.

⁵¹ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 433.

Langsdorff was *not* impressed with the California natives as natural specimens, deriding them as “pigmies” and noting that, “we all agreed we had never seen a less pleasing specimen of the human race.”⁵² His encounters with the California natives even challenged his faith in environmental determinism. While they enjoyed the benefits of a moderate climate and abundant food sources, Langsdorff concluded that California natives were overall smaller, weaker, less handsome, and far less intelligent than the Tlingit of the Northwest coast. As a result, he was not overly surprised that so few Spanish could successfully maintain order and peace in the lands they occupied. But in contrast to the immorality and relatively weak ecclesiastical institutions of the Russians, Langsdorff reported that Spanish monks conducted themselves, “in general with so much prudence, kindness, and paternal care towards their converts, that peace, happiness, and obedience universally prevail among them. Disobedience is commonly punished with corporal correction, and they have only recourse to the military upon very rare occasions; as for instance, when they go out in search of converts, or have any reason to apprehend a sudden attack.”⁵³

Along with strong ecclesiastical support, Langsdorff noted that expansion in California was financially supported directly by the Spanish crown. “I was assured, by a person well deserving of credit, that the Spanish government does not expend less than a million of piastres annually upon the support of missions in the two Californias, with the military establishments annexed to them, without deriving any other advantage from them than the spreading of Christian religion over countries where it was before unknown.” After visiting several missions in the area while Rezanov sought in vain to

⁵² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 440.

⁵³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 433.

open trade relations, Langsdorff could only wish “the most complete success” the efforts of the Spanish to colonize the area.

But Langsdorff had some issues with the way the Spanish colonies were run. First, the “paternal care” showed by the Spanish included excessive forms of corporal punishment. These included bastinado (foot whipping) and fastening metal rods to the feet of those that tried to escape.⁵⁴ Second, Langsdorff was appalled at the prevalence of cock fights and other sport involving wild animals. While Rezanov was wooing Concepcion de Arguello, her family ordered a combat between a bear and a wild bull. A bear was duly captured for the fight, but died the night before the fight. Langsdorff was at a loss to explain, noting that, “...I could not help being struck at seeing, that the fathers, who in all their instructions to their converts, insist so strongly upon their cultivating tenderness of heart, and kind and compassionate feelings, never oppose these national amusements, though it cannot be denied that they are very cruel and barbarous.”⁵⁵

He was also surprised by Spanish reluctance to build or maintain ships for the seas and waterways throughout the region. He wondered if the Spanish were fearful that boats would enable the more adventurous native, “who never wholly lose their love of freedom, and attachment to their ancient habits,” to escape. In this area, Langsdorff concluded that the Spanish government was negligent in not supplying enough vessels for at least the defense of the region. The dearth of geographical information about California, and the inability of military personnel on one side of San Francisco Bay to communicate with the other side were deplorable to him. Nevertheless, Langsdorff

⁵⁴ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 445.

⁵⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 455.

noted that small overland ventures would set out every year from Santa Fe and California in the hopes of opening overland communication routes. "It would give the Spaniards less trouble," he added, "and would be much less expensive to the government, if they were to institute expeditions by water, and to explore the great river which runs into the bay of San Francisco..."⁵⁶

On the way back to Sitka in June 1806 aboard the *Juno*, Langsdorff had time to ponder what he had witnessed in relation to his earlier experiences in the Russian colonies. The Spanish missionaries were bound to the colonies by ten-year contracts, but the "reciprocal relations" of the *promyshlenniki* and the RAC were stranger still. Rather than being founded upon ecclesiastical or military service, Russian colonization was primarily a financial transaction that exploited the RAC. The German recalled that,

a certain portion of the produce of every hunting party is to belong to the hunters, but as the latter never know the value of the booty obtained, they can never be assured whether they receive their due or not. Their accounts are never made out till after a lapse of some years, and as all the necessities of life have during this time been sold to them by the Company for which extravagant prices are always charged, it commonly appears that they are debtors, instead of creditors to their employers, and they are detained as hostages for the payment of their debts. They then strive to drown their cares in brandy, and should they be strong enough to survive so many trials, must esteem themselves fortunate, if, after many years spent in hardships and privations, they return home at last with empty pockets, ruined constitutions and minds wholly depressed and broken down.⁵⁷

The perpetual state of despair, among all levels of society in Russian America, had a profound impact on Langsdorff. From Baranov's retinue down to the *promyshlenniki* that oversaw the fur hunts, and the Alutiiq population, the sorry state of the Russians in the colonies mirrored the sorry state of the natural order that Langsdorff observed.

⁵⁶ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 475.

⁵⁷ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 364.

Leaving Russian America

Like other figures that sailed aboard the *Juno*, Langsdorff came to Russian America for one purpose, and wound up being remembered for another. The German arrived as Rezanov's physician with the desire to study natural history. But his experiences in the colonies led him instead observe *how* the Russians operated in the area. Langsdorff was not surprised by Rezanov's failure to secure permanent trade relations. For one thing, the Russians had little to offer to the Spanish. In addition, the tight controls on trade imposed by the Spanish government from Mexico ensured that the Spanish were unlikely to be brought into the sea otter trade. Indeed, as we saw in the previous act, the Spanish were increasingly worried about American merchants transporting natives from Russian America to poach sea otters off their coastline.

The only viable means of supplying and reinforcing Russia's colonies, Langsdorff argued, would be for the central government to become more involved. He agreed with Rezanov that Russia would have to plant a colony of her own along the New California coast. Once established, it could supply grain and cattle for the colonies without the problems associated with commerce or long distance supply routes. The establishment of farming and cultivation – both in California, and on a smaller scale in the other colonies - was crucial in Langsdorff's mind. Such efforts, displacing the ever-greater push for profits at the expense of the colonies' natural resources, were requisite for setting the colonies on a proper footing.

Langsdorff also agreed with Rezanov that the Russian government needed to be more involved in protecting the colonies. More ships were needed along the coast, but Langsdorff doubted the cost-effectiveness of sending them from the Baltic. Unlike Rezanov, he hoped that company profits would not be the motivating factor in the

further development of the colonies once the Tsar extended additional protection. The effects of unregulated commerce upon the natural resources of the region convinced him that the success of Russian America depended upon better spiritual, political, economic, and military management and engagement.

By the time the *Juno* returned to Sitka from California in June 1806, Langsdorff was ready to depart from Russian America. When John DeWolf persuaded Rezanov to part with a small vessel to sail for Kamchatka, Langsdorff jumped at the opportunity to leave. Though the ship DeWolf was to captain was “nothing very tempting” since it was built by Russians in the colonies, Langsdorff decided to throw in his lot with the American captain. During his yearlong sojourn along the coast, Langsdorff collected many specimens of natural history. But he lost almost as many due to improper care or the recklessness of those that promised to help him with collecting. He nevertheless continued to observe the flora and fauna along the way back to Petropavlovsk with DeWolf.

Denouement – Natural History and Russian America

Langsdorff’s travel writings from the first Russian circumnavigation of the globe have been referenced by historians of the Pacific Northwest and maritime exploration since their publication. They provide a wealth of knowledge on both the natural environment of the Pacific Northwest in the early nineteenth century, and social conditions in the same area. In 1928, a reviewer of a new English translation of Langsdorff’s writings demonstrated that the German’s writings were much livelier than Rezanov’s letters from the same period. Langsdorff, the author wrote, embraced “whatever came within the range of his observation. Having the eyes of a scientist,

trained to notice, he overlooked little worth recording of the new country in which he found himself.”⁵⁸

After his sojourn in Russian America, Langsdorff traveled through Siberia, meeting up with John DeWolf occasionally while the American captain worked his way to St. Petersburg. In 1811, Langsdorff published his observations in his native language. An English translation followed in 1815. Langsdorff’s narrative fared well in translation, with minor changes in transliteration of names and places in subsequent editions. It was not uncommon for authors of such narratives and travel journals to be shocked by changes made by publishers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. James Cook was livid after the publication of the travel journals from his first expedition. As historian Anthony Payne pointed out, it was not uncommon for publishers to lack the skill to accurately translate or describe scientific information. In addition, they frequently put added emphasis on the more titillating aspects of the narratives.⁵⁹

Natural history as a discipline is inextricably connected to voyages of exploration that began in the Age of Enlightenment. Scientific inquiry was an essential component of proving a state’s right to discovered lands. As Lydia Black demonstrated in *Russians in America, 1733-1867*, natural historical accounts of the Bering expeditions in the early and mid-eighteenth century formed the initial basis of Russia’s ownership of Alaska: the

⁵⁸ Helen Throop Pratt, “Review: Langsdorff’s Narrative of the Rezanov Voyage to Nueva California in 1806, trans. Thomas C. Russell,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Jun., 1928): 197.

⁵⁹ Anthony Payne, “The Publication and Readership of Voyage Journals in the Age of Vancouver” in Haycox, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, 177-178.

“right of discovery.”⁶⁰ In addition to discovery, a state proved its claim to such lands through the “right of occupation.” Langsdorff’s writings describe Russia’s occupation of Alaska. His work is a quintessential example of co-production, which Sheila Jasanoff defined as the “interpenetration of science and technology with cultural expressions of social authority.”⁶¹

Langsdorff was almost desperate to organize his observations into a coherent thesis: that colonization of the Russian American coastline was flawed and unsustainable because it did not account for the rational use of natural resources by those with social and political authority. As a scientist he portrayed himself (and has been subsequently portrayed) as an impartial commentator and, at times, arbiter. While he portrayed much of his work in Russian America as a failure, his writings and observations were (and still are) an invaluable source of information on Russian America during the period.⁶² Even today, scholars are tempted to separate Langsdorff as a scientist from the social and political conditions of the emerging metropolises and peripheries. But the scientific knowledge he gained in the colonies aboard the *Juno*, as well as the knowledge he brought to them, was patterned in the social and political culture from which he came. His observations, filtered through the lens of his training and education, were aimed at changing social and political norms in Russian America to better manage natural resources.

⁶⁰ Black *Russians in America*, 39 and James K. Bennet “Alaska and the North Pacific: A Crossroads of Empire” in Haycox, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, 6.

⁶¹ Jasanoff, *States of Knowledge*, 18.

⁶² Richard Pierce wrote that “Langsdorff’s many writings, and the many specimens he gathered are still studied by specialists in ethnography and natural history. In 1974 the Academy of Sciences of the USSR held a major conference to honor the 200th anniversary of his birth.” See Pierce, *Biographical Dictionary*, 292.

One should also resist the temptation to reduce Langsdorff's writings to a fetishization of the periphery in line with Edward Said's analysis of orientalism. Langsdorff's narrative is complex. He tried to take local factors into account while building up his premise. He was also keenly aware of the *importance* of his work for state leaders and members of the scientific community. Historian Stephen Haycox observed that natural historians became increasingly aware of the importance of their writings. According to Haycox, who studied Russian America in particular, the commercial and political elite began to value such writings upon realizing, "the intimate relationship between knowledge, power, dominion, and profit."⁶³ Langsdorff's work was not born of idle curiosity, nor was it a projection of inferiority upon the periphery; his purpose was nothing less than the intellectual subjugation of natural space along the Pacific Northwest coastline. A comprehensive understanding of the natural history of the area was necessary, he believed, for proper commercial and political management of the colonies.

Langsdorff's continuous contact with political and scientific elites in Europe ensured that his words would carry heavy weight. While his analysis of the Russian American political economy contradicted many of those in direct service to the Russian state, his observations were seemingly well-received. Langsdorff stayed in frequent contact with individuals he met during the circumnavigation aboard the *Nadezhda*, including Captain Kruzenstern. He even served the Russian state as a diplomat several years later. Langsdorff's published observations were among the first to publicly note the shortcomings of the Russian colonies during this formative period. His opinions of

⁶³ Haycox, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, xi.

the individuals he met in the colonies were the foundation of historical and biographical sketches that followed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His work may have also inspired Gavril Davydov to record his own observations of the Alutiiq population of Kodiak and the surrounding environs during the Midshipman's two visits to the colonies. And Like Langsdorff's work, Davydov's writings would become a foundational source for those that study Russian America.



gez. von J. von Langsdorff. gest. von J.P. Weith.
Ansicht des Etablissements der RA Compagnie in Norfolk-Sound oder Sitka.

Figure 5-1. Langsdorff sailed aboard the Juno from February through June 1806 with Rezanov on expedition to Spain. He agreed to accompany the Chamberlain to study the natural history of California in comparison to the North Pacific.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Alaska State Library, Alaska Purchase Centennial Collection, Drawing of Establishment of the Russian American Company at Norfolk, Sitka Sound, Alaska, 1805, ASL-P20-142.

CHAPTER 6
ACT 5 – ROSENCRANTZ AND GULDENSTERN VISIT RUSSIAN AMERICA, 1802-
1807

Scene 1 – Two Visits from the Metropole to the Periphery

Wherein we meet Nikolai Khvostov and Gavril Davydov, and examine how they spent their time in Kodiak
and Sitka

As Langsdorff prepared to leave the colonies in the summer of 1806, a great deal of work was being done on the *Juno* and the *Avos*. Rezanov had the supplies from California unloaded from the former vessel, while the latter had just been completed and set afloat in the harbor. Despite the threat of Tlingits descending on Sitka from all sides, Rezanov was preparing for his planned expedition against the Japanese with Lieutenant Khvostov and Midshipman Davydov in command of the respective vessels. Nikolai Khvostov and Gavril Davydov's service in the Russian American Company during their two visits to Alaska demonstrated how ideas of empire passed between, and were modified by, the center and the periphery. As officers in the Imperial Navy, they brought to the North Pacific a number of assumptions based upon their education, training, and social status originating at the center of the Russian Empire.

Unlike army officers, settlers, or merchants that occupied the expanding continental frontiers, company officials throughout Siberia and in the colonies were often in better communication with St. Petersburg. This is partly due to the Court's diplomatic and financial interest in RAC activities. As a result, the colonies were at times monitored more closely than events in Central Asia. In published and unpublished letters, memoirs, ship logs, and scientific treatises, Khvostov and Davydov inadvertently recorded how their experiences in Russian America challenged their previously held ideas. They left St. Petersburg in 1802 as officers in the Imperial Russian navy. During

their stay in Russian America, however, they could not help but observe and participate in the daily life of the Kodiak and Sitka colonies. Most historiography of Russian America treat them as little more than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: floating in to take a small part in the larger plot of Russian activities along the Pacific Northwest, then suddenly and tragically dying off stage. Their exploits and writings, however, demonstrate the fluidity of social standing in the colonies. While one of them provided a vivid example of the difficult social dynamics mentioned in previous acts, the other took on the mantle of academic-in-residence, writing an *in situ* ethnography of the Kodiak natives that was published posthumously.

Nikolai Aleksandrovich Khvostov was born July 28, 1776. The son of a state councilor, Khvostov was enrolled in the Naval Academy at the age of seven. After graduating in 1790 at the age of fourteen, he saw action against the Swedish during the closing months of the Russo-Swedish war, and was commissioned as a Midshipman.¹ Between 1795 and 1799, during the French Revolutionary Wars, Khvostov's detachment worked with the English to protect the British coast. While serving aboard the *Retvizan*, Khvostov was promoted to Lieutenant, and distinguished himself by saving the ship after it ran aground on a sandbar just before a Russian-English attack against the Dutch fleet. Vice Admiral Aleksandr Shishkov, who was briefly his commanding officer in 1809, praised Khvostov by noting, "[f]rom this single example it can be seen with what firmness of spirit, amongst fear and confusion, this young man acted, and what fearlessness and love of fame burned in his soul."² Shishkov had a long military and academic career. He published a guide for naval terminology and pre-

¹ Pierce, *Russian America: a Biographical Dictionary*, 234.

² Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 2.

Slavophile treatises that railed against the importation of foreign words into Russian.³ A strong critic of liberalism, Shishkov rose to prominence in Alexander I's post-Napoleonic government. He was appointed President of the Russian Academy by the Tsar, and was Secretary of State for a short time. In 1809, Davydov was staying with Shishkov while in St. Petersburg. At Shishkov's insistence, Davydov began to compile the notes from his two journeys to America for publication. Publishing Davydov's work posthumously as *Two Voyages to Russian America*, Shishkov gave a patriotic tribute to Khvostov and Davydov in the introduction.

Shishkov's description of Khvostov was typical from the Lieutenant's contemporaries. In a letter to Baranov, Davydov said that, "[d]espite all his temporary lapses and pranks, it is hard to find his equal."⁴ Khvostov was in almost constant movement and action. After serving with the English, he was briefly assigned to Sevastopol. In April 1802, Khvostov first met Rezanov in St. Petersburg. Prior to his assignment as Ambassador to Japan, Rezanov recruited Imperial Navy officers into the service of the RAC. He had recently won approval to do so via an imperial *ukaz* designed to imitate a British East India Company policy that allowed naval officers to maintain their rank, and even promote, while in the service of the Company.

The same day Khvostov accepted Rezanov's offer of Company service, the Lieutenant allegedly met Davydov at a party. According to Shishkov, "[Khvostov] told his friends about the proposed journey to America, and this filled Davydov (who was not yet eighteen) with a burning desire to accompany him. Davydov's straightforwardness

³ Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 30-31.

⁴ Letter, Midshipman Davydov to Baranov, August 7, 1807 in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 227.

and boldness were much to Khvostov's liking so he took him to see Rezanov, and they both entered service with the American Company."⁵ Davydov was born in the Tambov Gubernia in 1784. He was enrolled in the Naval Cadet Corps at the age of eleven, and was commissioned three years later. Like Khvostov, Davydov served with the British, spending time in Edinburgh in 1799.⁶ He was well educated before entering the Cadet Corps. Sharp of wit, and well versed in literature and mathematics, Davydov graduated at the top of his class.⁷ He was the perfect traveling companion for the more rowdy Khvostov, helping to restrain the more boisterous tendencies of his superior officer, and smoothing over relations between everyone they encountered. Langsdorff noted that Davydov was often helpful, acting as a translator and helping the German understand what was going on in the Russian American colonies by translating via French.

Davydov vibrantly described the first of his two journeys to Russian America with Khvostov in his *Two Voyages to Russian America, 1802-1807*. The first half of this manuscript, which covered their initial journey to and from Russian America (1802-1804), was edited and made ready for publication before Davydov died. It was written in a journal format, with Davydov's commentary and thoughts listed chronologically. The second half of the manuscript was not compiled until after he died, and was composed thematically.

In an April 1802 entry, Davydov analyzed his motivations for traveling to Russian America. The lure of exploration and describing the unknown, a popular motive of Enlightenment-educated adventurers, certainly played a part. For Davydov, "[t]he

⁵ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 3.

⁶ Pierce, *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*, 112.

⁷ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 19.

desire to see such remote parts of the world, to be at sea, and to be in countries which were rarely visited, and about which little was known did allow us long to ponder over any possible personal advantage to ourselves.”⁸ But Davydov was not completely selfless in his motivations. On April 19, 1802, while reflecting on the potential pain he was causing his family with the sudden decision to head for parts unknown, Davydov reported that,

the thought of completing such a long journey, of seeing such a large number of unusual things, of being in places I would not often have the chance to visit, of gaining new knowledge, and maybe of making a name for myself as an explorer, all this awoke my curiosity and flattered my *amour-propre*. I could already imagine to myself in advance the extreme pleasure I would have when such a difficult journey was over and I was returning and about to see my relatives and friends again, and would tell them of the adventures I had had, of how I had spent the time, of how I crossed uncharted seas and islands, living with savage peoples and wild beasts...⁹

This notion of *amour-propre* bears closer scrutiny to understand the mindset of Russians like Khvostov, Davydov, and Rezanov; who all decided to travel from the center of Russian power to the farthest flung periphery. Langsdorff used the exact same phrase, *amour-propre*, to describe Rezanov’s fury at the Japanese that led to the planning of his attacks. In English, this concept is sometimes translated as “selfishness” or “egoism.” In late eighteenth century discourse, philosophers believed *amour-propre* was the motivation for man emerging from the state of nature. Up until the nineteenth century, French translations of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* used *amour-propre* in place of “self-love” when Smith discusses the incentives that drove the

⁸ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 22.

⁹ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 23.

specialization of labor.¹⁰ Rousseau used the word (“self-respect” in English translations) in his *Discourse on Inequality* to differentiate men in a state of society from the savage man. *Amour-propre*, Rousseau argued, was a natural feeling “guided in man by reason and modified by compassion,” creating humanity and virtue. This allowed men in a state of society to value the prerogatives of others in assessing their own self-worth, as opposed to the savage man, whose self-value did not depend upon the feelings of others.¹¹

With *amour-propre*, Enlightenment philosophers were trying to delve into human nature, removing humanity and society from previously held divine origins and placing man within the state of nature. As Rousseau so elegantly put it, “Let us begin then by laying [Scriptural] facts aside, as they do not affect the question.” *Amour-propre* motivated Davydov to seek experiences that would increase his stature among friends and family. Simultaneously, he wrote an ethnography studying the “savages” he encountered. For Davydov, these two motives were intrinsically connected. In his own words, “[w]hen one is describing a newly discovered people which is near to its primeval state one must take into account not only the pleasure one may give the reader, but the benefit that may accrue from the accuracy of one's observations. In connection with this I propose to lay out here everything that I was able to see for myself or learn about.”¹²

Interspersed between descriptions of the people and places Davydov encountered, he also provided readers with his first impressions of Khvostov. During

¹⁰ Pierre Force, “From ‘Amour-Propre’ To ‘Égoïsme’: The French Translations of the Wealth of Nations,” 2. Available online at

https://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/hasrg/frnit/pdfs_gimon/force.pdf

¹¹ See “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality” in Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (New York: E.P Dutton and Co, 1950): 223.

¹² Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 165.

the initial phase of their journey across continental Russia, on a particularly treacherous stretch of road, Davydov recalled being attacked by bandits. After stopping to feed the horses in the afternoon, Davydov wrote that they “heard two gunshots, and seven men stepped out of the bushes. Anticipating that nothing good was to come of this encounter we began to reach for our damp guns. Khvostov, who could not get his out quickly, with just a sabre in his hands, ran to meet them, and going to their ataman said: ‘What do you want? How dare you approach members of the armed forces like this? Lay down your arms or I shall order you to be shot!’ This bold act frightened the ataman.”¹³ Afterwards, they even spent time at the ataman’s camp, allegedly receiving profuse apologies for the attempted robbery after Khvostov’s brash berating.

The journey from St. Petersburg to Okhotsk across the Eurasian continent took four months. Along the way, Davydov noted the ethnographic differences of those he encountered. First, he observed the Buryat people living along the Lena River. Closely related to the Mongols, Davydov thought that they had “unpleasant faces.” He erroneously ascribed their swarthy complexion to poor hygiene and constant exposure to the elements. This idea of physical appearance being dictated by ones surroundings appears repeatedly in Davydov’s observations, reflecting common assumptions of the day. As a result, Davydov believed it important to simultaneously describe the geography surrounding the peoples he observed. While his observations lacked the detail of a geologist or geographer, he was nevertheless attentive to record natural rock formations, soil conditions, rivers, and weather whenever he described indigenous populations.

¹³ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 56-57.

On August 12, 1802, Khvostov and Davydov arrived in Okhotsk. Davydov's first observations of Okhotsk bear witness to the perilous situation faced by Russia's American colonies. The *Elizaveta*, one of the best ships in the RAC fleet, and the ship that Khvostov would command to take them to Russian America, was in rough shape. "All the rigging," Davydov wrote, "the blocks and other mechanical equipment seemed to have been manufactured specially to increase our troubles and not to lessen them." Like most naval officers that traveled to the colonies, Davydov was not impressed with the crew and Company employees in town. He recalled that they were hired and dispatched from around Siberia, with few reliable men to be found. Despite their misgivings, Khvostov and Davydov set sail for Kodiak with 49 *promyshlenniki* on August 26, 1802.

The trip between Okhotsk and Kodiak involved staying very close to the coastline and the Aleutian Island chain. Davydov observed that even the crew that routinely crossed between Siberia and Russian were poor at both sailing and navigation. In addition, most ships in Company service were poorly made and could not handle the rigors of the Bering Sea. The lure of profit from furs, however, drove Company employees onward. In a more poetic moment, Davydov reflected that,

[t]hese latter-day Argonauts, also journeying for fleeces, but this time to America, are worthy of more amazement than those led by Jason. For though they are equally ignorant and their equipment is just as primitive, yet the seas they have to cross are far greater in expanse, and are completely unfamiliar to them. To their complete ignorance of seamanship must also be added the lack of leadership, for the *promyshlenniki* have absolutely no respect for their skippers, whom they often beat and lock into their cabins.¹⁴

¹⁴ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 90.

While sailing with these mutinous Argonauts, Davydov spent time reading about shipwrecks and the difficulties faced by the Dutch navigators in the Arctic Ocean. In the maritime equivalent of telling ghost stories in the dark, Davydov reported that, “[a]lthough a similar fate could easily befall us, the descriptions we read did not alarm us. Perhaps this was because it is difficult to think deeply about other people's misfortunes when you are near to them yourself.”¹⁵

The *Elizaveta* arrived in Kodiak in November 1802, despite a galley fire that nearly sank their ship. At the time, Baranov was still making plans to conquer Sitka after Fort Mikhailovsk was destroyed by the Tlingit. As a result, Company activity was largely restricted to the Aleutian Islands and the Alaskan coastline near Kodiak. Davydov described the tedium he also endured: "My duties and exercises were always the same and consisted of reading, of walking along the seashore with my gun and visiting the natives in their huts. For this purpose I would take along with me some food and get into my baidarka and travel for five or six days and more away from the port." It was during these trips that Davydov did the bulk of his observation of the Alutiiq people.

But Davydov and Khvostov did not stay long in Russian America during their first trip. It took nearly seven months to reach Kodiak. And yet, after helping with a couple of fur hunts, and observing a number of native festivities, the young naval officers made ready to depart for Okhotsk in June 1803. Langsdorff recalled that the Russian naval officers were initially sent to “place the Marine of the Russio-American Company upon a better footing, to build ships, to train up sailors, &c. &c.” It appeared that they were planning to return to Russian America after delivering furs to the Siberian port.

¹⁵ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 87.

Khlebnikov noted that they were best qualified to ensure the safe delivery of a cargo that was valued at 1.2 million rubles aboard the *Elizaveta*.¹⁶

Over a two-month stretch, Khvostov and Davydov tacked between the Aleutian and Kurile Islands on the way back to Russia. They navigated treacherous currents and seas, during which Davydov commented on the unfavorable qualities of the wide-bottomed RAC merchant ships, which were difficult to navigate with full cargo holds. Perhaps foreshadowing the virtues of purchasing the *Juno*, Davydov wrote that, “[t]he citizens of the United States of America have realized this truth earlier than anyone else; they have begun to build better merchant ships, and to lose less of them than the Europeans.”¹⁷ The Russian officers arrived near Okhotsk on August 22, 1803. Stuck on a sandbar in the bay until the tides came in, Davydov showed the impetuosity of his youth. He rowed to shore in a baidarka to check on mail and get updates, and decided to row back to the ship despite rough surf and the advice of the locals. After being told by a local resident that it was unsafe, Davydov sought, “to prove to him that it could be done.”

The results were predictable to all those assembled: the waves tore off his protective coverings, and Davydov nearly died in the attempt to reach the ship. In a moment of candor, he confessed, “that stubbornness forms no small part of my nature and it has several times cost me dearly. I cannot justify what I did. It deserves more to be called senseless obstinacy than praiseworthy boldness. That was what I thought of it, not when I was doing it, but afterwards. I must say that on this occasion only extreme

¹⁶ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 41.

¹⁷ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 127.

good fortune saved me from the effects of my extraordinary foolhardiness."¹⁸ As we will see, this foolhardiness would eventually cost both men their lives. The *Elizaveta* finally reached the port of Okhotsk the next day. While there, Khvostov briefly scouted the Siberian coastline for possible locations for an alternate port. Like Davydov, Khvostov was nearly drowned in a baidarka while exploring the Urak River. Also like Davydov, the cause of Khvostov's misfortune was self-inflicted. He refused to believe a Yakut man who reported dangerous wave activity near the mouth of the river.¹⁹

Upon learning that there were no supplies to be brought back to Russian America, Khvostov and Davydov decided to travel home to St. Petersburg instead. They reached the capital on February 5, 1804 - twenty months after departing. Davydov waxed poetic about his reunion with the city, family, and friends. The first half of Davydov's *Two Voyages* closes with these remarks, which summed up the satisfaction of his *amour-propre*:

Was it not long ago that we saw in our imagination the immeasurable distance, the innumerable dangers, an alien world and alien sky? Was it not long ago that we had the desperate thought that perhaps we might never return, and this gnawed at the very depths of our soul? Now all these earlier fears were past. We have satisfied our curiosity, performed certain services and with a pleasant memory of our past difficulties, now we hasten on to see our relatives, our well-wishers, friends and acquaintances. Anyone who has been on a long journey will know this joy, but he will appreciate it even more if he never expected to live and to enjoy it.²⁰

Upon their return to St. Petersburg, Khvostov reported to the RAC directors that the mouth of the Ulia River was most promising for a future port. The directors

¹⁸ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 133-134.

¹⁹ "A Report by Imperial Russian Navy Lieutenant Nikolai A. Khvostov Concerning the Condition of the Ships of the Russian American Company" in Dmytryshyn, *The Russian American Colonies*, 54-55.

²⁰ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 144.

peppered Khvostov with a number of questions about the geography, flora, and fauna of the area, demonstrating the active interest in natural history shared by leaders in the RAC and the Russian government. Finally, the Lieutenant was asked about the state of the fleet in Russian America, and what was needed to improve safety on ships sailing between Okhotsk and America. Not surprisingly, Khvostov answered that the ships were inadequately built by apprentice shipwrights, with inferior materials, and crewed by inexperienced sailors. “In short,” he answered, the ships lacked “everything necessary for proper and safe sailing.”²¹

Khvostov further recommended finding better land routes from the coast to Yakutsk to improve Eurasian transport of goods and men. He also hinted at a rift between himself and Baranov when he recommended putting shipbuilding and Company business under the oversight of an experienced employee who would supervise competent shipwrights. Khvostov recommended that this should be a Russian naval officer. He indicated that, as of 1802, the Company only had seven ships in the Pacific, and only three of them were truly seaworthy (the *Elizaveta*, the *Alexander Nevskii*, and the newly completed *Maria*). None of them matched ideal specifications needed for the job: 60-70 feet in length and built with a sharp keel. “Ships from the United States,” he recalled, “may serve as evidence of this.”

To secure Russia’s American possessions, Khvostov recommended that at least one ship should sail from America to Okhotsk every May, and one from Okhotsk to America in late June or early July. In addition, two or three naval vessels should be on patrol to protect the colonies, and prevent the Bostonians from, “entering into trade with

²¹ Dmytryshyn, *The Russian American Colonies*, 47.

the American savages.” In this way, Khvostov argued, the Bostonians could be squeezed out of trade with the Tlingit near Sitka, and the RAC could start trading with them “in the manner of the Bostonians.”²² The Lieutenant was in complete agreement with Rezanov on this point, believing that Yankee merchants were disruptive to Russian interests in the region, “every effort should be made to persuade the Bostonians to trade with us rather than the savages.”

Khvostov: Social Status and the Return to Russian America

Khvostov and Davydov’s second journey to Russian America, like the second voyage of the *Juno* from Rhode Island, is much better documented through letters, and the accounts of those they encountered. But Davydov’s first person account is unfortunately absent, as he died before completing the second part of his *Two Voyages*. Georg Langsdorff wrote that the intrepid adventurers left again for Russian America in May 1804, three short months after returning to the capital. They were promised of double pay for their return to the colonies. They arrived in Okhotsk at the end of August, 1804. Leaving immediately for Petropavlovsk, the two officers spent the next several months awaiting favorable conditions for traveling back to the Pacific Northwest. As mentioned previously, they met up with Rezanov at Petropavlovsk for the first time since the Chamberlain sent them to Russian America in April, 1802. They also met Georg Langsdorff. Rezanov reportedly paid keen attention to Khvostov and Davydov’s observations from their first journey before they all traveled to Kodiak.

In Petropavlovsk, Lieutenant Herman von Lowenstern had an opportunity to observe Khvostov. Lowenstern was the German cartographer aboard the *Nadezhda* who chronicled the difficulties caused by Rezanov during the first leg of the Kruzenstern

²² Dmytryshyn, *The Russian American Colonies*, 49.

expedition. Davydov and Lowenstern previously served together with the English. The Baltic German naval officer thought highly of Khvostov, describing him as “a quick fellow” because he had “already seen through Resanoff.”²³ Lowenstern also admired Khvostov’s bravery, recounting how the latter singlehandedly brought order to the crew of the *Maria* by punching the leader of a rebellious group of sailors “square in the jaw” before they left Petropavlovsk. Lowenstern felt confident that order would be similarly restored in the colonies once Khvostov arrived. This opinion of Khvostov, coming from a fellow Russian naval officer, reveals how those serving in the Tsar’s navy thought and felt about the merchant-controlled American colonies and the rag-tag Russians that were employed by the RAC.

In June 1805, Rezanov, Langsdorff, Khvostov, and Davydov all sailed for Kodiak aboard the *Maria*. After stops at Unalaska and Kodiak, they headed for Sitka upon learning of Baranov’s conquest of the island. They arrived on August 20, after a six days journey from Kodiak. Following through on his intentions to build vessels capable of attacking the Japanese, Rezanov brought shipwrights from Petropavlovsk, and in September 1805, they began construction of the *Avos*.²⁴ But two ships, as it turned out, would not need to be built once the *Juno* was purchased.

Shortly after the purchase of the *Juno*, Khvostov was put in charge of the vessel. Rezanov hoped that giving the young Lieutenant such responsibilities would improve the bad behavior he began to notice. According to a letter Rezanov wrote to the Board of Directors shortly before their trip to Spanish America, he was sorely mistaken. Despite being an extremely talented mariner, Rezanov reported that Khvostov was the

²³ Lowenstern, *The First Russian Voyage Around the World*, 322.

²⁴ Khlebnikov, *Notes on Russian America, Part 1*, 250.

“principle person in all the escapades and is harmful to the interests of the community, though a most useful and amiable man when he is in the right condition.” At Kodiak, Rezanov witnessed Khvostov undermining Ivan Banner’s authority, rummaging through company stores, interfering with Company business, and drinking to excess. Banner also reported to Rezanov that Khvostov was getting into the exact same trouble that allegedly caused problems on his previous visit in 1802.

In the same letter, Rezanov accused Khvostov of attempting to recruit him in support of such activities. Khvostov reportedly believed that Company officials were insulting the authority the Lieutenant deserved because of his noble birth and naval rank. Rezanov then told Khvostov that unless he could prove that he was directly insulted he was “not only to refrain from insulting the authorities appointed by the company but to respect them fully, as otherwise any kind of order was impossible...” Khvostov was reportedly infuriated. He began insulting Rezanov, threatening the Chamberlain with “connections” back home for failing to support him. Rezanov apparently decided to try a different tactic at this point, begging Khvostov to think of his parents, and the problems his behavior would cause them should word get back to the capital. Davydov also began working on the Lieutenant, and Khvostov’s behavior allegedly began to improve.

But with command of the *Juno*, Khvostov was in a position to cause problems again. Khvostov began to quarrel with Company leaders, asserting the prerogatives of a ship’s captain. Rezanov hoped that sending Khvostov aboard the *Juno* to gather supplies at Kodiak would make the situation better. But upon returning to Sitka, Khvostov prevented the unloading of supplies for seemingly trifling reasons, using his

prerogatives as the captain of the vessel to cause problems for Rezanov, Baranov, and the entire colony. In November 1805, while in the harbor at Sitka, Davydov moved on shore because he could not deal with Khvostov's drunken rampages. Even among the Russians, Khvostov's drinking was legendary. In a three-month span, he alone was alleged to have consumed "9 1/2 buckets of French brandy and 2 1/2 buckets of strong alcohol" from company stores.²⁵

Rezanov next turned to Davydov in the hopes that he could calm his tempestuous friend. Petr Tikhmenev, the RAC employee that wrote a history of the Company in the mid-nineteenth century, indicated that the Midshipman had a far more "sober behavior."²⁶ DeWolf thought well of Davydov as well, referring to him later as "an old Norfolk Sound friend."²⁷ According to Rezanov, when Davydov moved ashore in November, the Midshipman feared for Khvostov, who allegedly sought to raise anchor on a nightly basis, but was restrained by the drunken condition of the men aboard the *Juno*. When the Chamberlain ordered a limitation of one bottle of vodka per man per day, Rezanov reported that the men on shore and on the ship "began to divide among themselves. The men working in the shipyards formed a party. You could hear, 'We are from the shipyards!' or 'We are from the Juno!' Losing their minds from too much drinking they wanted to attack the fort and take me and Baranov."²⁸

Khvostov declared that limiting alcohol consumption was a form of violence directed against him. During the chaos, Baranov threatened to resign. But around

²⁵ "Letter, Rezanov to Board of Directors, February 15, 1806 (Second Secret Letter) in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 194.

²⁶ Pierce, *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*, 114.

²⁷ Davydov, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 76.

²⁸ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 196.

Christmas of 1805, Khvostov apparently made an effort to reform under persistent pressure from Davydov. Rezanov reported that Khvostov “came repeatedly to beg my pardon with tears in his eyes. I forgave him and will take him with me when I start on my voyage. I took Davydov too, who being convinced of his sincere repentance forgave him also wholeheartedly. He was pardoned also by Baranov, Kuskov, and all the others, who do not wish anything better than that all these happenings be forgotten, unless something similar happens again.”²⁹

According to Khvostov’s log from the *Juno*, Rezanov sent orders on January 24, 1806 that the Lieutenant was to make the ship ready for the voyage to Spanish California.³⁰ After a month of steady activity loading supplies and caulking the vessel, the *Juno* left Sitka. All aboard witnessed Khvostov at his finest, avoiding rocks, and safely navigating the vessel along the Pacific Northwest coast, despite contrary conditions and a sick crew. Khvostov reported in his log that on March 18 the ship reached the mouth of the Columbia River. While Rezanov wanted them to sail into the river, Khvostov urged the Chamberlain to sail on, as “Bostonians all declare that one cannot enter the Columbia River except on a counter current, as confused swells are often experienced. The wind began to freshen. It was dangerous to let down a rowboat, so raised anchor and set course for San Francisco.”³¹

After briefly considering a stop at Bodega Bay, the officers and Rezanov arrived at San Francisco on March 28. While Rezanov was flattering the Arguello family and the Governor of Spanish California, and Langsdorff was off recording his observations

²⁹ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 196.

³⁰ Pierce, *Rezanov Reconnoiters California*, 44-45.

³¹ Pierce, *Rezanov Reconnoiters California*, 48.

on San Francisco's natural history, Khvostov stayed on board to deal with discipline problems, and to make the ship ready for the return voyage. On April 12, Khvostov reported that the Arguello family dined aboard the *Juno*. Two weeks later, Governor Arrilaga also dined aboard, with much fanfare and the firing of cannons from the ship and presidio to toast the long lives of the emperor of Russia and the King of Spain. But Khvostov also had an eye for exploration. Under the pretext of looking for two runaway Russian sailors, Rezanov secured permission for Khvostov to explore around San Francisco Bay. Foreshadowing future colonization efforts in Northern California, Khvostov wrote that, "[i]f the lucky experiment of trade with California made by His Excellency continues, I may boldly state that, once established at Bodega, the Russians could use this small isthmus to extend their settlement to the north shore of San Francisco Bay. The Spaniards, as [religious] fanatics, are not interested in industries; they do not even have a rowboat, and the frigates which deliver the supplies are not interested in the north shore either."³² With three days of exploring, Khvostov presented Rezanov with a chart noting the geography of north and south sides of the bay, an analysis of the edible flora in the area, and the conclusion that there were great trees in the area that could be used for shipbuilding.

Davydov's Ethnography

While Khvostov's idle hands were the devil's playthings in Russian America, Davydov busied himself studying the indigenous populations of Kodiak and Sitka. Many texts from Russian America from the nineteenth century concerned ethnography. Authors of natural history, geography, religious scholars and even casual observers like DeWolf all wrote the native populations they encountered. The popularity of

³² Pierce, *Rezanov Reconnoiters California*, 52-53.

ethnography in Western Europe, Russia, and the United States ensured that such texts would be published widely. Writers have been observing and comparing foreign cultures since the birth of the written word, but ethnography as a discipline of natural history traces back to the Enlightenment. For the Russians, ethnography was not a matter of idle speculation about foreign peoples. Eighteenth century Russian intellectual heavyweights like Mikhail Lomonosov and Gerhard Friedrich Müller studied linguistic and ethnographic data and vigorously debated the origins of the Russian people.³³ Beginning in the sixteenth century, Western Europeans came into increasing contact with unfamiliar peoples encountered during maritime exploration. Today ethnography is defined as a qualitative branch of anthropology or sociology that focuses upon the everyday life of a group of people. Scholars of anthropology often describe ethnography as possessing two interdependent aspects: the work done to study a group in the field, and the ethnographic text that an ethnographer produces. Like their eighteenth and nineteenth century counterparts, modern ethnographers attempt to collect data and present their findings from an inside perspective, becoming both participants and observers in social phenomena.³⁴

³³ H. Tichovskis , “An Eighteenth-Century Controversy on the Relation between Baltic and Slavonic Languages *The Slavonic and East European Review* 42 no. 99 (June, 1964): 431.

³⁴ Since Edward Said published *Orientalism* in 1978, scholars have been contending with how their disciplines contributed to European imperial hegemony over much of the globe. Criticism of ethnography often came from within the disciplines that practice it. See Nicholas Thomas, "Against Ethnography" *Cultural Anthropology* 6 no. 3 (Aug 1991): 306-322; Peter Pels, “The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History, and the Emergence of Western Governmentality” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 163-183; Gille Zsuzsa and Seán Ó Riain "Global Ethnography" *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 271-295.

Like Langsdorff's study of populations along the Pacific Northwest coast, Davydov left a record of how experiences beyond the frontier were filtered through ideas of the day. Russian America proved to be an alluring place to conduct ethnographic studies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to a prevalent belief that the Pacific – with its discreet island groupings and vast territorial distances – offered ethnographers an ideal laboratory in which to test their ideas about the relationships between different ethnic groups, and the relationship of these people to their environment.³⁵

Unlike Langsdorff, Davydov did not tie his observations to a larger critique of management of Russia's overseas colonies. Davydov saw culture, physiognomy, and habits as a function of people's natural surroundings, but his observations bear less weighty judgment than Langsdorff's account. This may be attributed to Davydov not completing his book prior to his death. The second half of his *Two Voyages* certainly chronicles the difficulties Alutiiq hunters and villagers faced under Russian management, but the overall tone more closely resembles the writings of naval officers and experts from eighteenth century expeditions of discovery. This might be attributed to the differences between Davydov's naval education, and that of natural scientists like Langsdorff.

Davydov's observations of people began as soon as he set out from St. Petersburg in 1802. He described the Yakuts as "a good-natured people, hospitable, generally even cowardly, idle, and, when they get the chance, gluttonous beyond all bounds, and they can equally well exist for long periods without food when need or

³⁵ See Phyllis S. Herda's "Ethnology in the Enlightenment: the Voyage of Alejandro Malaspina in the Pacific" in Haycox, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, 65.

poverty forces them to do so."³⁶ Davydov frequently relied upon hearsay and stories to explain his ethnographic observations. After losing three horses during the fording of the Akachan River, he wrote that the guides set off in search of the horses with a pot to eat their fill of the horsemeat.³⁷ Gluttony, according to Davydov was rampant among the Yakuts, and led them to even eat diseased horses. As proof, he offered up a story he heard regarding the "Yakuts from the Aldan" who were nearly decimated as a result of feasting on sick and dying horses. He reinforced this image with a description of gluttonous Yakut wedding festivals.

The Midshipman also noted the differences between the ethnic Russian population in Siberia and their European counterparts. The peasants around Irkutsk were new settlers and exiles that continued to arrive in Siberia, often without wives. As a result, "they only serve as a burden for those villages in which they have been settled."³⁸ He also noted that they frequently engaged in pillaging and banditry in the summer. The growth around Irkutsk was partly the result of shifting trade routes, with the city replacing Tobol'sk as the "cross road of trade between Russia, Siberia, America, and China." As a result, Davydov also came into contact with Siberian peasants who were also merchants. These Siberians were "descendants of exiles and settlers" that bore little resemblance in culture or appearance to their Russian forefathers. They were "in general more businesslike, honorable, and hospitable-- they are even more enlightened than the Russian ones." On July 11, 1802, on the way between Irkutsk and Yakutsk, the travelers "stopped to wait for a Cossack who was

³⁶ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 77.

³⁷ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 69.

³⁸ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 31.

supposed to act as our Yakut interpreter, because very few of the Yakuts can speak Russian...” Davydov also distinguished differences between Siberian Cossacks and their European brethren: “The term Siberian Cossack does not mean Cossacks in our sense, but a command of men under the leadership of the constables. They are descended from the Cossacks, trappers and hunters who won Siberia. All these people called themselves Cossacks, and this name was taken over by the descendants. Cossack children go into the same command, and so it still exists, although it has decreased considerably in size.”³⁹

With his arrival at Kodiak aboard the *Elizaveta* in November 1802, Davydov almost immediately began to observe the Alutiiq and their ceremonies. More than an idle curiosity, understanding the Alutiiq in the area and their intent was required for the continued survival of the Russians along the Pacific Northwest coast. Baranov informed Khvostov and Davydov that the natives were beginning to suspect that the Russians had sent their entire population with the last boats, since they had not had a ship arrive from Okhotsk in a number of years. The arrival of supplies and healthy men, Baranov assured them, reaffirmed to the local population that the Russians were there to stay. Baranov was particularly concerned about this, as Fort Mikhailovsk at Sitka was overrun by the Tlingit a few months earlier. With little activity going on due to approach of winter, Davydov began to reconnoiter around Kodiak.

Since the large island is naturally sheltered from the worst of the Alaskan winter by high mountains along the mainland and the relatively warm Japanese Current, Davydov was able to explore Kodiak late in the season. Over the next several months,

³⁹ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 47.

he spent significant portions of his time among the Alutiiq, learning to use baidarkas to travel from island to island. Until April 1803, when hunting resumed, Davydov observed the population of Kodiak and the surrounding islands. "I had already seen crowds," he recalled, "of what for me were new tribes of people, called savages, in every way different from ourselves. But now I would have an even better chance of seeing them and of noting the differences between a man enlightened by science and one guided only by nature."⁴⁰

Davydov viewed Russian tactics vis-à-vis the Alutiiq and Unangan peoples in the colonies with relative detachment. He did observe the food shortages among the Alutiiq that resulted from the Company putting able-bodied men to work hunting seals during the times when they used to gather provisions for the winter. "True," he reported, "in cases where the islanders are literally starving the company helps them with supplies of iukola; but it should happen, in accordance with the laws of truth and good sense, that the labor of others was so sparingly used that our interests and profits were based on their well-being."⁴¹ As others observed, such was seldom the case. Langsdorff praised Davydov for his work among the natives. "To the honor of Khvostov and Davydov," the German wrote, "it must here be added that they endeavored by every means in their power to repress these abuses: the latter in particular was a real father to the sick, and was always ready to give them assistance with a degree of philanthropy rarely to be found... but my voice, as well as that of Lt. Davydov, however raised against the abuses, was too weak to be heard."⁴²

⁴⁰ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 104.

⁴¹ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 175.

⁴² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 114.

Davydov was nevertheless comfortable with the confiscation of native baidarkas and the taking of hostages to ensure cooperation among the local populations. He justified these tactics by noting that the native populations were “generally fierce and tend towards war and murder. They consider it a pleasure to torture enemy prisoners, and in almost everything they are similar to the inhabitants of northeast America, who are described in the writings of Reynal, Campe, and others.”⁴³ The Midshipman also attended several Alutiiq festivals, and observed the interactions of the population with RAC employees. Like many attempts to describe native populations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, his ethnography vacillated between praise and scorn for them. This dual opinion can be traced to Rousseau, and his imagining of the ‘savage’ native in a state of nature, before the rise of society.

The young Midshipman saw the natives as supremely inventive, particularly in matters concerning sea travel. They were naturally gifted navigators, who used their keen senses and superb memory, “unburdened by learning and knowledge,” to navigate the treacherous coast⁴⁴. The Alutiiq used “all of their senses to the maximum... to a point of perfection unknown to Europeans.” In line with Rousseau’s ideas, Davydov observed that the Alutiiq had a profound love of freedom. In writing about the Kenai along the Alaskan coastline north of Kodiak, he recalled that,

all the local tribes love freedom and independence. The term ‘kalgi’ (slave) rouses the most craven coward to despise death. When the Russians first came to Kinai Bay the commander of the ship sent a landing party to capture some savages so that their acquaintance might be made. The party found seven or eight families of Kinai and brought them to the ship, but the savages believing they were being taken into bondage, murdered

⁴³ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 106.

⁴⁴ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 156.

all of their women and children on the way and then killed themselves. Such examples are not infrequent here.⁴⁵

In two different parts of his work, Davydov mentioned this sense of freedom and how it led to several native populations to view corporal punishment as a great dishonor.

But he was also quick to criticize what he perceived as less desirable qualities of the people he observed. First among these was their temper. The Alutiiq had, according to Davydov, an “implacable vengeance toward their enemies, the savagery with which the latter are treated, lack of devotion to their relatives, and indifference to the sufferings of those nearest to them are also part of their nature.” In comparing the Alutiiq to other “savage” peoples, Davydov noted that they were similarly “prodigal to the ultimate degree, and are so idle that they are only galvanized into activity by the extremities of need.” Writing in support of Russian colonization, Davydov indicated that only innovations brought by the Russians and the desire for tobacco seemed to spur them to productivity.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion that Davydov reached was the idea that native savagery and sloth were tied to a lack of a sense of value and the inability to think abstractly – qualities of an enlightened man that lived in a state of society. Even while admiring some of the handicrafts produced by the native women, Davydov noted that “[i]t is true that all this is done rather sluggishly; often a woman will spend several months over a headdress to be worn at one of their festivals and after all that will part with it for a few leaves of tobacco.”⁴⁶ Their lack of a concept of value made them appear “lazy and phlegmatic, and even stupid.” Davydov heard about one Alutiiq hunter that attempted to sell the Russians a headdress at an outrageously inflated price, but he

⁴⁵ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 159.

⁴⁶ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 165.

wound up selling it for a small amount of beads elsewhere because he could not get the price he wanted.

Even if he was not aware of it, Davydov was, in fact, contrasting the qualities of the “savage” people he encountered with his own *amour-propre*. Lacking a sense of identity derived from a concern over the thoughts and feelings of others, he wrote that the Alutiiq would “sacrifice even the life of a friend for the acquisition of some trifle which pleases them.”⁴⁷ Overtly, he attributed this lack of compassion to the natives’ inability to think abstractly, a condition that would derive from a sense of self-respect based upon concern about the opinion of others. When confronted with a concept they did not understand, Davydov reported that the Alutiiq would say “I have no ear” or “bad.” He expounded that “[i]t must not be forgotten that the majority of unenlightened peoples confuse hearing with understanding. The reason for this is of course a poverty of language with which to express abstract thought.”⁴⁸

Davydov was also interested in comparing the Alutiiq to other populations that he observed on the way to Russian America. As with his description of the Yakuts, Davydov concluded that the physical appearance of the Kenai and Kodiak Alutiiq natives was directly related to their environment, arguing that their dark copper skin color was “a result, it would seem, rather of their being constantly in the open air, as well as the fact that in summer they sail their baidarkas naked and also, when it is warm, sit naked in their houses. It would thus seem to me that their skin coloring is not inborn. This is borne out by the fact that many of the women have a very pale skin,

⁴⁷ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 161.

⁴⁸ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 171.

which results from the fact that they are in the open air less.”⁴⁹ As with the Siberian populations, Davydov was also fascinated with Alutiiq culinary habits. He detailed a hospitality festival, which consisted, “of a large feast -- the eating goes on day and night so that some are physically exhausted...” Further, he indicated that their appetite knew no bounds, and they would eat just about anything. They often showed off, he indicated, by eating until they were ill. Davydov was fascinated with gluttony among indigenous populations. It seemed to be a marker of a more savage state, where the boundaries of etiquette and propriety did not exist.

Like Langsdorff, Davydov also showed a keen interest in domestic affairs like family, women, and sexuality. While offering a glimpse into the intermarriage of Russian men with native women Davydov noted the influx of European fashion and how native wives would

sometimes wear jackets and skirts, and even long dresses, which do not seem to suit them at all, but what is even more comic is to see a native woman wearing high heel shoes. Like women everywhere, they love dressing up. They may sometimes be seen in all of their finery, walking through the mud, holding their shoes in their hand. But however much a local girl may dress up, beads, bugle beads, and multi-color stones do not cease to please her. An idea of luxury is furtively stealing into the savage mind, for the Americans love dressing in European clothes, if they can acquire them.⁵⁰

He detailed the responsibilities of native women, including sewing clothing and bags, preparation of thread for arrows, and basketwork - “in short all that belongs to the handiwork of their sex.” Among the Alutiiq, he noted that the women wielded considerable power due to their ability to select their husbands.⁵¹ But he also indicated

⁴⁹ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 148.

⁵⁰ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 153.

⁵¹ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 165.

that they had to leave the village during menstruation, and live in special huts.⁵² Along with Langsdorff and DeWolf, Davydov seemed to have the most difficulty in accepting native notions of beauty and adornment.

He recorded their habits of piercing nostrils, lower lips, and the “sewing” of beards into male and female jaw lines by drawing strings coated in ash and charcoal through their faces. But, he noted, as European standards began to exercise influence over the Alutiiq, these activities began to decline. In their place, Davydov observed that the women were, “beginning to wear plaits when they see how the Russian women dress.” Davydov also observed sexual licentiousness of the Alutiiq women with great interest. He accused them of putting “all of their vanity into pleasing a large number of men.” He believed that such activity began in childhood, as “the parents not only pay little heed to their daughters' chastity but for the most part in return for trinkets they will themselves encourage the girl to transgress, even though she may not be of age to do so.” He even reported unsubstantiated rumors of incestuous relationships among the natives: “One young Koniaga who had killed a Russian was placed in irons with his mother, who, as it later turned out, had had nothing to do with the crime. His mother was also his wife.” To escape the shame of being held captive, the mother and son jumped off a cliff and the mother/wife drowned the son/husband.

Interestingly, Davydov failed to account for Russian intervention in Alutiiq culture as a possible culprit for the more unsavory behaviors he allegedly observed. This glaring omission from his observations of Alutiiq and Tlingit women in particular, and indigenous cultures in general, implies a strong desire to view his subjects as

⁵² “When everything has finished,” he wrote, “she washes herself and is only then allowed back into the village.” Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 171.

completely separate from the European peoples that were trading and colonizing in the area. And yet, Davydov offered surprising observations that are of great interest to historians that study gender and sexuality. He observed families that included transgendered partners. He wrote that, “there are men with plucked beards who only do women's tasks, they live with the women and like them they sometimes have two husbands. Such men are called *akhnuchiki*. They are not despised, but on the contrary the villagers obey them and they are often wizards.”⁵³

Davydov also made a few observations of the Tlingit while he was in Sitka in 1805 and 1806. But these notes were mostly used in contrast to the Alutiiq who occupy the bulk of his narrative. The most obvious reason for this was that he died before organizing his thoughts about his second voyage to Russian America. In addition, he only spent a couple of months in Sitka. During that time, the Kiks.ádi Tlingit of Sitka were exiled at a distance from the Russian settlement. Finally, Davydov spent about as much time in Spanish California as he did in Russian America. He simply did not have the same amount of leisure time that he did when he visited Kodiak in 1802. Davydov's memory of his second voyage to the Russian colonies must have been heavily tainted by the difficulties he endured after carrying out Rezanov's plans against the Japanese.

Scene 2 – The *Juno* as a Ship of War: Davydov and Khvostov at War with Japan

Wherein we follow the *Juno* and the *Avos* during the expedition against the Japanese under the command of Khvostov and Davydov

In July 1806, fresh from the mission to California, Rezanov prepared the *Juno* and the *Avos* to leave Russian America with a compliment of 65 men. With Nikolai Khvostov in command of the *Juno*, and Gavril Davydov overseeing the newly completed

⁵³ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 166.

Avos, Rezanov believed he had the people and equipment needed to force a trade agreement from the Japanese. Rezanov never forgot the slight he endured as Ambassador to Japan. Shortly after meeting Khvostov and Davydov at Petropavlovsk in May 1805, Rezanov wrote that, “[t]aking advantage of such a happy meeting of like minds all agreed on a single aim, I have endeavored to organize for next year an expedition which may open a new avenue of trade and give the support needed to this region and fill many of its requirements.”⁵⁴

Attacking the Japanese

Prior to purchasing the *Juno*, Rezanov intended for two ships to be built for the purposes of this expedition. After his deal with DeWolf, he only had to have the *Avos* built, which was finished in June, 1806. Rezanov's plan was to scout Sakhalin Island's southern region around Aniwa Bay and the southern Kurile Islands, raiding any Japanese settlements they found to liberate them from Japanese encroachment. He planned to award Russian medallions to the natives of Sakhalin, encouraging them to swear loyalty to the Tsar rather than the Japanese. In case the Japanese did not leave the islands, Rezanov considered direct rule over them by capturing Japanese priests and skilled artisans so that they “could be more easily settled through practice of their faith.”⁵⁵ Rezanov intended to personally oversee the expedition.

On August 8, 1806, he ordered Khvostov to take him suddenly to Okhotsk. The *Avos* was to continue to Aniwa Bay to await the *Juno*. When the *Juno* arrived in Okhotsk in September 1807 it was provisioned for the upcoming expedition. But on September 24, Rezanov asked for Khvostov's written orders to make an amendment.

⁵⁴ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 8.

⁵⁵ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 101-102.

Citing the lateness of the season, a crack in the *Juno's* mainmast, and “contrary winds,” Rezanov seemingly backtracked on his audacious plan. He ordered the *Juno* to head back to America to support operations there. But, if time permitted, Rezanov indicated that Khvostov should visit Aniwa Bay, and to “try to be generous to the people of Sakhalin, giving them presents and medallions, and try to discover how the Japanese in charge there are situated.”⁵⁶ Making matters even more confusing, Rezanov closed the amendment by noting, “I, for my part, am extremely sorry that the harbor we happen to be in is not suitable for replacing our mast, and that a combination of circumstances has forced me to change my plans.”

In the introduction to Davydov's *Two Voyages*, Vice Admiral Shishkov noted that Khvostov was perplexed by these changes. Should he conduct the raid, since the repairs were minor, or head back to America? Was the plan cancelled, or just suspended until repairs and time would permit? When Khvostov sought clarification from Rezanov, he discovered that the Chamberlain left suddenly for St. Petersburg. Shishkov indicated that fear for the safety of the *Avos* prompted Khvostov to sail for Aniwa Bay in October, 1807. But unbeknownst to Khvostov, Davydov was unable to stay in Aniwa Bay very long. At the time that the *Juno* was leaving Okhotsk, the *Avos* arrived in Petropavlovsk due to crew illness and damage sustained to the ship.⁵⁷ On October 7, Khvostov enacted Rezanov's initial plan by visiting an Ainu village on Sakhalin Island. From the *Juno*, he ordered another Russian officer to plant the

⁵⁶ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 10.

⁵⁷ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 12; and Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 294-295.

Russian flag on shore and to have gifts given to elders on the village.⁵⁸ The crew then began raiding Japanese villages, such as Kushunkotan, on the western shore of southern Sakhalin.⁵⁹ During operations in the area, Khvostov seized over 19 tons of rice, and looted tobacco, fishing nets, and various household goods. He also burned several houses, and captured four Japanese subjects.⁶⁰ Continuing with the expedition's original plans, Khvostov nailed a copper plate onto the torii of a Japanese temple, demanding that Japan open trade, or face more raids.⁶¹ He also distributed some of the seized goods among Sakhalin's natives to curry favor.⁶²

The lateness of the season, coupled with damage sustained to the *Juno* and curiosity about the fate of the *Avos*, compelled Khvostov to forgo a planned expedition in the southern Kurile Islands. Instead he sailed back to Petropavlovsk, where he met up with Davydov. Khvostov also reunited with John DeWolf and Georg Langsdorff, who were waylaid in the Kamchatka port on the way to Okhotsk. DeWolf reported that the *Juno* arrived around the middle of November, the sight of which was "especially agreeable" to him. As Langsdorff later recalled, "[a]fter passing the winter with us in the huts of Petropaulovsk, where we partook together of the best cheer the country afforded in fish, rein-deer's flesh, and other of its productions, above all, in the excellent rice brought by the *Juno*, having lived in the utmost harmony, sharing many parties of pleasure; --after all these things, in the Spring of 1807, the two friends prepared,

⁵⁸ Mikhail Vysokov, *A Brief History of Sakhalin and the Kurils* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalin Book Publishing House, 1996), 36.

⁵⁹ Henry Emerson Wildes, "Russia's Attempts to Open Japan." *Russian Review* 5 no. 1 (Autumn 1945): 76.

⁶⁰ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 103-104.

⁶¹ Wildes, "Russia Attempts to Open Japan," 76.

⁶² Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 294-295.

according to the instructions they had received, for a renewal of their military enterprises..."⁶³

The target this time was the largely abandoned Kurile Islands, which the Russians had used in the past for hunting furs. DeWolf indicated that the *Juno* and *Avos* were made ready to sail on March 25. Langsdorff recalled May 2, 1807 as the date the ships left Petropavlovsk harbor. Always on the lookout for objects of natural history, Langsdorff reported that in the Kurile Islands, Khvostov found,

a number of armed Japanese, who at first made a show of resistance with their bows and arrows, but soon took flight, abandoning their habitations and magazines entirely to the Russians. The latter found in them a number of very beautiful lacerated utensils, books, maps, a large provision of rice and salt, tobacco, clothes, working tools of various kinds, everything, in short, necessary to life. Among other things worthy of remark were some pieces of cannon, muskets, swords, cuirasses, helmets, bows and arrows: we were in this manner indebted to these brave men for becoming acquainted with a number of objects which we endeavoured in vain to obtain during our six months' stay at Nangasaki.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Tikhmenev indicated that the fighting was fiercer, with the Japanese at Iturup firing cannons at the *Juno* and *Avos*. Subsequent historians have disputed this, with one noting that the Russians overcame Shana (present day Kurilsk), the largest Japanese fortification on Iturup, with relative ease.⁶⁴ Davydov, who reported that no repairs were required to the *Juno* or the *Avos* after the expedition, corroborated the ease of the excursion.⁶⁵ Ransacking the Japanese settlement of Naihū, Khvostov and Davydov sailed for Urup. Despite their expectations of finding a Russian fur hunting settlement, Khvostov and Davydov found that it has been

⁶³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 295.

⁶⁴ Vysokov, *A Brief History*, 38.

⁶⁵ "Report, Midshipman Davydov to the Main Administration of the Company, October 18, 1807" in Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 228.

abandoned.⁶⁶ Returning to Aniwa Bay, the crews of the *Juno* and *Avos* pillaged two more settlements, burning sheds of fish, and destroying five unmanned Japanese ships. At this point, according to Tikhmenev, “on the return voyage Khvostov released all of the captured Japanese except two, whom he kept on the ship for some unknown reason.”⁶⁷ Langsdorff, on the other hand, indicated that all four captured Japanese fishermen, who had learned some Russian while in Petropavlovsk for the winter, were released “to instruct their countrymen that the Russians had more just claims to these islands than themselves inasmuch as they could urge priority of possession.”⁶⁸

In July 1807, Khvostov ordered the *Juno* and the *Avos* to sail for Okhotsk to send reports to the Company, and to replenish supplies for a return voyage to America. According to a letter from Davydov to Baranov, they only intended to stay for three or four days to make minor repairs to the *Avos*. But the Company’s official at Okhotsk, Commander Second Class Bukharin, “found it to his advantage to keep us longer, because during this time at least 6,000-7,000 rubles have gone into his pocket.”⁶⁹ On July 18, a day after arriving, Davydov reported that he brought all of the boats from both ships to shore. At that point, Bukharin had Davydov placed under guard.

Bukharin stated that he did not believe that Rezanov gave any orders for the attacks, and that Khvostov and Davydov acted “willfully.” According to written testimony Davydov gave, Bukharin attempted to extort money from him prior to the arrest. Davydov elaborated on the reprehensible character of Bukharin. With the crew of the

⁶⁶ Tikhmenev reported that they found the grave of the expedition leader with a date of April 1805.

⁶⁷ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol I*, 104.

⁶⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 299.

⁶⁹ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 227.

two ships under arrest, "for lack of enough men to do all the work the company would have to hire Bukharin's oarsmen." They reportedly earned an unheard of five hundred rubles in a day to unload bales from the Company ship *Maria*. Adding insult to injury, Bukharin ordered that command of the *Juno* would be transferred to Fedor Markovich Karpinsky, an officer that took part in the raids before turning on Khvostov and Davydov. Davydov described him as a "regular dastard," blaming him for the loss of the *Elizaveta* in December, 1805.

Khvostov and Davydov went on to spend the next month in confinement at Okhotsk. Even after a commission decided that they should be sent to St. Petersburg to clear matters up, Bukharin kept them under arrest. With the help of sympathetic townsfolk and guards, the two escaped on the night of September 17, 1807. In October, they were detained in Yakutsk, under orders from Bukharin. At that time, Davydov wrote to the Company directors in St. Petersburg to explain the situation. Despondent over the possibility of being transferred to Irkutsk, or possibly back to Okhotsk under Bukharin's orders, Davydov recalled,

When His Excellency [Rezanov] instructed us to seize the Japanese vessels and men, and to say that this was done in revenge for the refusal with which our embassy met in Japan; when the Chamberlain Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov reported to His Imperial Majesty about this undertaking from Unalashka Island a year ahead of the time it was begun; when medals and goods were given to befriend the aborigines in places where Japanese have settled and when during such a long period of time the resources of the Russian-American Company were used to organize and outfit this expedition. Taking all this into consideration, who could doubt that it was done in accordance with the will of the Emperor, and who could ask His Excellency, even if he could? You are, of course, aware of the instruction given by His Excellency to Lieutenant Khvostov, to whose command I was assigned, and whose instructions I have obeyed.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 230-231.

In the same letter, Davydov again accused Bukharin of abusing his power, using his influence in Okhotsk to line his pockets, and tampering with the post to prevent these crimes from reaching the centers of power.

Significance of the Japanese Excursion

Interpretation of the meaning and significance of the attacks began almost as soon as Khvostov and Davydov were detained. Ten days after Davydov wrote his letter to the Main Administration of the RAC from Yakutsk, the Company sent a report to Alexander I regarding the Company's activities and the status of the fur trade. While Davydov's appeal had doubtlessly not been received by the Main Administration at that time, the report was strikingly silent on the arrest of Khvostov and Davydov, and the raids that took place, before the winter of 1806-1807.

It is likely that the Company sought to distance itself from the attacks, while passing responsibility onto Rezanov, acting in his *public* capacity as Chamberlain of the Court (rather than his *private* role as plenipotentiary and major shareholder of the RAC). After reporting on the arrival of furs from Sitka to Okhotsk aboard the ship *Maria*, the Company reported to the Tsar that, after spending the winter of 1806 in the port of Petropavlovsk, the *Juno* and *Avos* arrived in Okhotsk. However, they added that both vessels "were selected by Privy Councilor Rezanov for some kind of secret expedition. Since the Main Administration of the Company has not been informed about this, it does not know what those two ships were doing. There was no Company cargo aboard them."⁷¹

⁷¹ "A Report from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company to Emperor Alexander I, Regarding the Fur Trade, October 28, 1807" in Dmytryshyn, *The Russian American Colonies*, 149.

In his 1810 introduction to Davydov's *Two Voyages*, Shishkov elaborated on the motives for the attacks. Like Langsdorff, he explained that the attacks against the Japanese were planned by Rezanov to avenge the personal and professional insult of Japan's refusal to admit the Russian delegation. Rezanov's chance meeting of Khvostov and Davydov in Petropavlovsk after leaving Japan gave him the means of realizing this goal. According to Shishkov,

Rezanov, feeling that he had been insulted by the Japanese as Ambassador of Russia, searched his mind for some way to revive their fading respect for our flag and remind them that by adopting a hostile and difficult posture they would be putting themselves in danger from our armed might; but that peaceful and friendly relations would be both advantageous and useful for them. This alone, he believed, would compel them to begin peaceful trading relations with us.⁷²

From Shishkov's perspective, Rezanov hoped that he could avenge his honor, the honor of Russia, and simultaneously accomplish his original mission of opening up Japan to trade with the RAC at the same time.

This interpretation, while passing over questions of state responsibility for Rezanov's actions, bears remarkable consistency with Rezanov's sentiments. In a letter to Davydov and Khvostov, the Chamberlain wrote, "I must admit that, for my part, I await with impatience the results of your bravery, and so with a common effort we shall undertake this great adventure, and we shall show the world that in this happy century a handful of Russians is putting all its efforts into those great matters in which millions of foreign peoples have taken part for centuries."⁷³ But in assessing Khvostov and Davydov's actions, a second question inevitably arises: did the brash, young naval officers act illegally once Rezanov gave Khvostov modified orders in September 1806?

⁷² Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 6.

⁷³ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 8.

Shishkov portrayed Khvostov's predicament regarding the ambiguous orders and his decision to attack as heroic. According to the Vice Admiral, Khvostov decisively put concern for the *Avos* and love of country ahead of his safety when deciding to attack.⁷⁴ As for their imprisonment in Okhotsk after the Japanese expedition, Shishkov lamented the "bestial" conditions they endured at the hands of Bukharin. Shishkov speculated that Bukharin believed Khvostov and Davydov plundered a great deal of gold from the Japanese. The arrest order that Bukharin signed arrived in Yakutsk ahead of Khvostov and Davydov, and requested that authorities apprehend them and any gold they had on them.

Georg Langsdorff's second-hand account of the expedition bears a distinct bias against the Japanese. Perhaps strongly colored by Langsdorff's experiences with Rezanov during the 1804-1805 ambassadorship in Nagasaki, the German wrote that Rezanov planned the attacks in retaliation against them. The Chamberlain, in Langsdorff's estimation, bore Japan "no little grudge." He also wrote that Rezanov felt justified in conducting the attacks because the islands belonged to the Russians through past exploration and fur trading settlements. By attacking the Japanese, Langsdorff wrote, they would learn, "through the mortified *amour-propre* of the Ex-ambassador, to understand, in some degree, the extent of the Russian power." With a decreasing likelihood of opening the Japanese or Chinese markets, Langsdorff wrote that Rezanov may have left Okhotsk suddenly to get official input on the events that were unfolding. Langsdorff was more evasive on the legality of the attack, observing that "all possibility of M. Von Resanoff's ever being called to account for the measures

⁷⁴ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 12.

he had pursued, was precluded by his death, which happened the following year in Krasnojarsk...⁷⁵

Similar to Langsdorff, John DeWolf recollected that Rezanov's plan to attack the Japanese was justified by prior Russian claims to Sakhalin and the southern Kuriles. He wrote that after Khvostov dropped Rezanov in Okhotsk, he received orders "to proceed to one of the southernmost of the Kurile Islands, and break up a Japanese settlement reported to have been established there."⁷⁶ In addition, DeWolf euphemistically referred to the attacks as a preamble for making "some further attempts to establish an intercourse" with the Japanese.⁷⁷

Kyrill Khlebnikov brushed over the Japanese expedition in his 1833 biography of Baranov. A long time employee of the RAC, and a contemporary of all of those involved, Khlebnikov reported that,

Possibly an interesting historical picture could have emerged from the bold acts of Lieutenants Khvostov and Davydov on certain Japanese islands, had they been carefully and firmly controlled from the start... But for us, this picture is obscured by a curtain of unpleasant memories, and will doubtless go into oblivion that way. Perhaps only the shy and incredible Japanese will leave to posterity legendary tales of the Russians' deeds of heroism.⁷⁸

The Russian government also reportedly distanced itself from the actions taken by young naval officers by blaming the RAC. In a dispatch to the Japanese government, Russian officials claimed that the attacks were instigated by Company officials, whose employees were often "vagabonds and adventurers" that drank

⁷⁵ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 547.

⁷⁶ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 77.

⁷⁷ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 87.

⁷⁸ Khlebnikov, *Baranov*, 60.

excessively, and treated native populations poorly.⁷⁹ This was certainly the position of Captain Vasili Mikhailovich Golovnin, who was taken captive by the Japanese in 1811 when his ship, the *Diana*, arrived in Japan. While jailed, the Japanese grilled him about the attacks three years previous. In his memoirs, Golovnin recalled that he blamed Khvostov's attack on "merchantmen" not in the emperor's service.⁸⁰ When the Japanese confronted Golovnin with Khvostov's written statements from the raid, Golovnin argued that this was just prideful boasting by an "obscure figure acting without sanction." But, as he recollected, he was unsure how to convince the Japanese that this was the case.⁸¹

For the Japanese, the attacks had far reaching consequences. Fearing additional raids, they quickly moved to refortify positions in the Kuriles and on Sakhalin. Itorup was garrisoned by 2,500 Japanese soldiers by 1808. Japanese sources also record large troop movements on Hokkaido and Honshu in the aftermath of the attacks.⁸² Diplomatically, the fallout from Khvostov and Davydov's actions was felt throughout the nineteenth century, as Japanese officials continued to blame poor relations upon the *Juno* raids.⁸³

⁷⁹ Wildes, "Russia's Attempt to Open Japan," 76.

⁸⁰ Vasili Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan, during the years 1811, 1812, and 1813; with observations on the country and the people* (London: H. Colburn and Co, 1824), 153.

⁸¹ Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity*, 166.

⁸² W.G. Aston "The Russian Descents upon Saghalien and Itorup" *Transactions Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. 1 (1873): 88.

⁸³ Wildes, "Russia's Attempt to Open Japan," 70-79. Wildes noted that, "[a]s late as 1882, the chief of Japan's Geographical Society, Admiral Viscount Buyo Enomoto, wrote a series of articles tracing the origin of Russo-Japanese hostility to their activities."

Thus, the echoes of Khvostov and Davydov's attacks were felt in the Pacific throughout the nineteenth century. While they were, at best, minor military skirmishes, the invasion was conducted by ships far larger than the Japanese could produce, as indicated by Golovnin during his captivity. From the Russian perspective, the attacks exposed the benefits *and* pitfalls of an overseas empire run by a semi-private company. While reaping profits from the fur trade and expanding Russian dominion along America's Pacific Northwest, the State could distance itself from diplomatic scuffles it was ill-prepared to handle by blaming it on Company men. For historians, the Kurile and Sakhalin expeditions offer a glimpse into the praxis of empire building on the micro-level. The raids certainly did not further the aims of the Russian Empire in the Pacific, but they do expose the importance of individual actors and their ideas of empire put into operation beyond the frontier of the continental Russian Empire.

The Tragic Deaths of Khvostov and Davydov

In October 1807, while being detained in Yakutsk, Davydov wrote to the Main Administration of the RAC. Bitterly disappointed by all that he had undergone in the colonies, the young Midshipman lamented wasting the best years of his life in the Russian American colonies, as he saw "how unsatisfactorily all the underlings here turned out."⁸⁴ Missing his home and family, bereft of the sense of *amour-propre* that brought him to the colonies, Davydov humbly requested to be transferred to Irkutsk, and onward to St. Petersburg instead of being remanded to Bukharin's authority in Okhotsk. He then summed up the precarious position many endured in the colonies:

This affair has persuaded me not to seek glory any more in such remote regions, where all actions can be made to appear doubtful; where one is afraid to disobey a man of such high rank as the Ambassador to Japan,

⁸⁴ Davydov, *Two Voyages*, 229.

and then later to suffer for his obedience at the hands of another government official. In these parts, due to their remoteness and great distances, the contracts made with the Main Office often become invalid and the conditions of the contract are not always kept... This is the reward for my willingness to serve! In comparing my former life with the present, my heart bleeds, and the cruel insult to my honor makes me curse the man who is responsible for what has happened, and life itself.⁸⁵

Both Davydov and Khvostov did return to St. Petersburg. Unofficially, it appeared that the Russian government took a soft-gloved approach towards them. They were sent to fight against Sweden shortly after arriving in St. Petersburg in late 1807, with judgment against them suspended. According to Tikhmenev, there are indications that Bukharin's actions against the naval officers in Okhotsk met with some degree of official disapproval. Tikhmenev wrote that, "[f]rom the company archives it is seen that on the decision of a general meeting of stockholders, the board of directors informed the authorities of Bukharin's actions and as a result the Japanese goods which had been seized in arresting the ships were taken from him. Part of the booty was delivered to St. Petersburg and two Portuguese cannon and a Japanese falconet were placed by Imperial command in the arsenal; the other falconet taken by Khvostov was presented by the company to his Imperial Highness Grand Prince Nikolai Pavlovich."⁸⁶ Khvostov and Davydov earned forgiveness from the Russian Navy in 1809, when they returned to St. Petersburg for rest and recuperation at the close of the fighting season. Shishkov indicated that Khvostov in particular was well regarded by his superiors, and was again cited for his fearlessness in battle.

In October 1809, a chance meeting occurred. John DeWolf returned to the Russian capital to open into trade relations via the Baltic. Georg Langsdorff was living

⁸⁵ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol II*, 234.

⁸⁶ Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company Vol I*, 105.

in the capital after his trek across Russia. DeWolf recalled that while meeting with Langsdorff, Khvostov and Davydov “came over to pass an evening with us, and we sat talking of old times until two in the morning.”⁸⁷ Langsdorff similarly recalled that they “talked over with delight all the dangers we had experienced by sea and by land, all the adventures that had befallen us.”⁸⁸ When the party finally broke up, Khvostov and Davydov had to cross the Neva River. The German and the American accompanied the Russian naval officers to the drawbridge to say their goodbyes. Since the bridge was up, the Russians hopped on a barge and across planks to reach the other side. DeWolf recalled them calling and wishing a good night from the other side. He concluded his narrative by noting,

After we had parted from them, they became desirous, God knows for what purpose, to return to us again, and, in order to get over quicker, they attempted to spring from the bridge upon a bark that was going through. They mistook a sail for the deck of the vessel, and both fell into the water. The people in the bark endeavored to rescue them, but the night was so dark, and the current so strong, that they went under before they received any assistance. Though fifty years have gone by since the death of these young men, I cannot forbear to recall their many virtues and lament their untimely end.⁸⁹

Shishkov indicated that the location was St. Isaac’s Bridge. Almost echoing DeWolf, the admiral reported that “the night was very dark, and the current very fast under the bridge, and the strong wind aided the Neva in dragging them down to its bosom.” Their comrades, friends, and families were left to wonder at the sudden and mysterious tragedy of their untimely deaths.

In December 1809, Derzhavin wrote a eulogy in verse for the two intrepid adventurers. *In Memory of Davydov and Khvostov* immortalized the men as Russian

⁸⁷ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 146.

⁸⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 549.

⁸⁹ DeWolf, *A Voyage to the North Pacific*, 147.

patriots who fought “Finns and Gauls.” For Derzhavin, they lived their lives like Greek heroes, traversing the world heroically. They also lived “in the spirit of Cook and Nelson.” Of their untimely death in the Neva River, Derzhavin asked Russians not to forget these heroes that exemplified the Alexandrine age. Shishkov, founder of the literary circle *Beseda Liubitelei Russkago Slova*, also wrote a poem in praise of Khvostov and Davydov. In Davydov’s *Two Voyages*, Shishkov similarly eulogized the adventurers, calling them “two swift eagles, whose great deeds matured while they were yet young” – taken not by the enemy in battle, but by “one careless step.”

Denouement – The Periphery and Identity

When Khvostov and Davydov stared into the periphery beyond the frontiers of the Russian Empire, the periphery stared back into them. The behavior of former, and the writings of latter, demonstrate how disconnection from the social and political center transformed those that traveled to the distant edges of power. The periphery *shaped* individuals that arrived there. Khvostov, like Rezanov, suffered what seemed to be a crisis identity, only feeling secure when he was in command of the *Juno*. Despite all the trouble he caused while more or less marooned in the colonies, the Lieutenant tended to his duties carefully during the expedition to Spanish California. While Rezanov was scouting possibilities of trade, and Langsdorff was collecting specimens of natural history, Khvostov carefully observed the northern California coastline in the *Juno*’s ship log. But when there was significant down time in the colonies, both in 1802 and in 1805-1806, Khvostov became dysphoric. He began to interfere in the affairs of the colonies and drink to excess. He tried to use his noble and military rank in the colonies, and grew increasingly frustrated when this was not respected.

Davydov, on the other hand, took a more introspective approach. His education predisposed the Midshipman towards comparing himself to those he observed. Davydov left for the colonies with the hope that he would discover something about himself, and to contribute to Russian knowledge about the periphery. These were not discreet exercises to him. When Davydov wrote about the Alutiiq and Tlingits, he was comparing them to himself, as an exemplar of an enlightened, civilized society. Davydov simultaneously revered and reviled those he viewed as savages in their natural state – comparing his *amour-propre* to the selfishness of the natives. At the same time, he admired them for the strength of their local knowledge, unburdened by western learning. Like Khvostov, Davydov was ultimately frustrated by his experience in Russian America. But unlike the Lieutenant, it was not the colonies that frustrated him, but the capricious nature of authority in the colonies that left both naval officers in dire circumstances upon their return to Russia.

Davydov's observations were not completely selfish. As anthropologist and Pacific historian Phyllis Herda noted, "there was a growing feeling in Europe that observation and scientific investigation of indigenous peoples of other lands should replace the subjective impression of previous explorers."⁹⁰ The Pacific, she wrote, was thought to be the perfect environment to observe discreet indigenous populations for comparison and contrast. Davydov was eager to participate in this process. The knowledge gained by the ethnographic observations of men like Davydov was also put to use by the RAC.⁹¹ As Ilya Vinkovetsky demonstrated, by the middle of the nineteenth

⁹⁰ Phyllis S. Herda, "Ethnology in the Enlightenment: the Voyage of Alejandro Malaspina in the Pacific" in Haycox, *Enlightenment and Exploration*, 65.

⁹¹ Miller, *Kodiak Kreol*, 68.

century, RAC officials sought to balance the tendency to assimilate the native population with a desire for them to maintain aboriginal skills such as fur hunting that kept the company profitable.⁹²

Other historians have noted the complex relationship between the anthropological knowledge gained through study of the population under Russian control and the effects of Russian activities in and around Kodiak. Gwenn Miller, for instance, noted that the Russians inflicted severe, “intimate” violence on the Alutiiq before they were studied by Langsdorff and Davydov.⁹³ Those that studied the Alutiiq in the years after the 1790s saw a population that was completely disrupted by Russian hunting and tribute practices. Observations ranging from the gendered division of labor to sexual practices failed to take into account the influence of Russian political, social, cultural, and economic exploitation.⁹⁴ For example, depictions of Alutiiq and Tlingit violence against Russians and Europeans in such texts fails to account for the retaliatory nature of such activities – it just paints the “natives” as easily prone to violence if the Russians dropped their guard. Similarly, ethnographers and natural historians universally failed to mention the sexual abuse that Alutiiq women endured at the hands of the Russians. Worse still, the women were often depicted in these accounts as whores that threw themselves at the Russians in exchange for trinkets. As Miller wrote, “Alutiiq women were not helpless victims, but the notion of choice takes on a whole different meaning in the context of violence and despair.”⁹⁵

⁹² Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 127.

⁹³ Miller *Kodiak Kreol*, 46.

⁹⁴ Miller *Kodiak Kreol*, 65.

⁹⁵ Miller *Kodiak Kreol*, 46.

Davydov and Langsdorff missed the important role Alutiiq women began to play in the society that was forming on Kodiak. As Miller noted, the population of Kodiak was approximately seven thousand in 1794, and comprised a mixture of Alutiit, Unangan, *promyshlenniki*, missionaries, and managers of the colonies.⁹⁶ On the surface, Langsdorff and Davydov both observed that Alutiiq women who married Russian men began to act in a European fashion, and were aesthetically more pleasing to them. But these women also reared the generation of Russian-Alutiiq youth that became employees, hunters, and navigators for the RAC. In many respects, they were arbiters of Alutiiq and Russian cultural norms as the two cultures fused together in the early nineteenth century. But the violence they endured, and the role they played, was largely unheralded by men determined to see natives in a state of nature.

The adventures of Khvostov and Davydov also reveal the importance of ships like the *Juno* for the colonies. As with the *Neva* in 1804, the *Juno* under the command of competent naval officers was more than capable of protecting Russian interests in the area, and even advancing them against foreign powers in the North Pacific. In this regard, Khvostov and Davydov both proved Rezanov and Langsdorff in their belief that Russia could easily fortify Russian America with a few large vessels. But it was also clear that the absence of a naval chain of command in the area would have had negative consequences. More Russian naval vessels in the area would have required additional state supervision of the colonies, which would have doubtlessly increased the cost of operations. As Gwen Miller noted, the RAC merchants had a tenuous relationship with imperial government. From the 1780s until the end of Baranov's

⁹⁶ Miller *Kodiak Kreol*, 54.

tenure in Russian America, the Russian state preferred to allow the RAC to absorb all the risks associated with the overseas colonies.⁹⁷ It wasn't until 1818 that the Russian government decided to get more involved. The first step was to appoint a governor from the Russian Navy – invested with authority over the vessels that operated in the colonies.

⁹⁷ Miller *Kodiak Kreol*, 54.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

In an article detailing Russian historiography of the RAC, Andrei Grinev referred to the period 1806-1817 as a “dark period,” where a dearth of primary source materials exists, partially because of the loss of Baranov’s papers. As we have seen, the period before this time is relatively well documented by those that visited the colonies. But after 1806, documentary evidence from the RAC tends to be limited to official financial updates, major events like the loss of ships, and diplomatic entanglements recorded in official correspondences.

One such loss was that of the *Avos*. According to an official dispatch from the RAC to the Tsar, the tender was lost in October 1808 near Sitka on a voyage from Unalaska under the command of Lieutenant Alexander Gerasimovich Sukin.¹ Like the *Avos*, the *Juno* returned to Russian America shortly after the arrest of Khvostov and Davydov in Okhotsk. Bukharin appointed Midshipman Fedor Markovich Karpinsky to her command. Davydov referred to Karpinsky as a “dastard” for denouncing Khvostov, Davydov, and Rezanov following the Japanese raid.

The *Juno* apparently spent the next four years protecting Russian hunting parties, and transporting goods between the colonies. In May 1810, American Captain Sam Hill aboard the *Otter* spotted the *Juno* at Clarence Strait, approximately 110 miles southeast of Sitka. By this time, her captain was a Prussian in the service of the RAC named Khristofor Benzeman. The *Juno* was sailing with Captain Winship aboard the

¹ Dmytryshyn, *The Russian American Colonies*, 191-192. Historical accounts differ on where the *Avos* actually went down, lending a sense of irony to her name. Khlebnikov lists two different locations for the loss of the *Avos*, one of which was near Sitka. Tikhmenev, on the other hand, stated that the ship was lost near Unalaska. See Pierce, *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*, 491.

O'Cain, heading towards California on a major hunting expedition. But the *Juno* did not complete this voyage. In June 1810, Unangan hunters in the US-Russian hunting expedition came under attack by the Haida, south of Sitka. After eight of the hunters were killed, Benzeman retreated to Sitka. Benzeman and Ivan Aleksandrovich Kuskov, the leader of the expedition, blamed Captain Hill for instigating the attacks, as the Yankee feared that expanding Russian influence south of Sitka would mark the end of his trade.

We can speculate based upon financial updates from the colonies that the *Juno* sailed to and from Siberia transporting goods at least one more time before she sank. But the fateful July-November 1811 voyage of the *Juno* to Petropavlovsk would be her last. In September 1812, the RAC sent Tsar Alexander a report detailing the loss of the *Juno*. The company also reported the unfortunate loss of 200,000 rubles worth of goods and the loss of all but three of the crew. The directors were, nevertheless, upbeat about the future prospects of goods arriving from the colonies.²

Curious Anomalies

This optimism, coupled with the actual financial gains that the company made during the period, constitute one of the curious anomalies that historians of the RAC encounter when studying its early history. These peculiarities point both the uniqueness of the 1799-1811 period and the significant differences between Russia's overland and overseas colonies. As we saw in previous acts, the distant colonies were at times in better communication with St. Petersburg than Russia's continental outposts. Langsdorff indirectly commented on this curious phenomenon while observing the Yakut

² *Rossiisko-amerikanskaia kompaniya i izuchenie tixookeanskogo severa: 1799-1815* (Moscow, 1994), 223-224.

people on his way across Russia. He wrote that, “[a]lthough the Jakutschians [sic] have long been very much connected with the Russians, they have acquired less of their language, manners, and customs, than the more remote Kamschadales and Aleutians. They pay a small tribute to the crown, and live undisturbed among their families...”³

The necessity of reporting to local offices of the RAC throughout Siberia, the Main Administration of the RAC in St. Petersburg, and directly to the government meant that activities in the colonies met with more (albeit delayed) scrutiny than rural outposts of the continental empire. In addition, because the RAC was a joint stock company, the flow of information was integral to setting stock prices. Thus, the economics of the overseas colonies encouraged better communication with St. Petersburg and regular interaction with Russians than frontiers closer to the metropole.

Starting in 1810, the company entered into a period of unprecedented financial success. Even as the colonies continued to face shortages and hostility, Baranov actively pursued expansion of the colonies. After DeWolf, Langsdorff, Khvostov, Davydov, and the Chamberlain left Russian America, Baranov briefly relocated to Kodiak, leaving Ivan Kuskov in charge at Sitka. When Baranov returned to Sitka a year later, he found that New Archangel had become a relatively busy port on the North Pacific. He ordered Kuskov to explore the Columbia River area for potential colonization. Departing in October 1808, Kuskov returned in ten months later to advocate for the creation of a colony in California instead, as Khvostov and Rezanov both suggested.

³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 593.

In the spring of 1811, Kuskov set out to found a Russian settlement in California. The fortuitous circumstance of a revolution in Mexico made it easier for the Russians to insinuate themselves along the coastline, and even open up some trade with the increasingly isolated Franciscan settlements near San Francisco. Mikhail Buldakov, son-in-law to Grigory Shelikov, and the largest shareholder in the RAC, sent several updates to the Tsar about the prospects of improving trade with Spanish America after 1808.⁴ Fort Ross quickly became an agricultural colony for the RAC as well as a port of call in the fur trade. The colony persisted, despite the virtual elimination of sea otter populations in the area, until 1849.

In 1808, the *Neva* arrived in the colonies on its second voyage to the Pacific from St. Petersburg. Following Rezanov's suggestion, the ship was the first Russian naval vessel designated to stay in the colonies to protect Russian interests. Baranov promptly sent Ludwig von Hagemeister, who commanded the *Neva*, to explore the potential for a Russian colony in Hawaii in November, 1808. Baranov had reason to be hopeful after exchanging some letters of greeting. However, the American captain Jonathan Winship Jr. reported to Baranov that Hagemeister's trip to Hawaii was disastrous, mostly because of the arrogant attitude of the Russian officer at Kamehameha's court. But in 1815, a contingent of Russians occupied a portion of Kauai Island with the permission of the local chief. In 1817 they built Fort Elizaveta. Russian presence in the Hawaiian Islands was short-lived, however. In the same year, the fort came under the control of forces loyal to king Kamehameha during the latter's consolidation of control over the Hawaiian Islands.

⁴ *Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennyi Biblioteka, Otdel Rukopisei*, f. 255, g. 1801-1814, k. 5, p. 41, ll. 45.

The success of the colonies during the early nineteenth century was primarily measured by the profits that they generated for the RAC and the crown. The key to Baranov's success was his ability to force American merchants to strike fur hunting agreements with the Russians. Between 1806 and 1810, he became the broker of success or failure for Yankee merchants in the area. He began to strike deals with New York ship captains in addition to the Bostonians, like the previously mentioned arrangement with Captain George Washington Ayers (one of John Jacob Astor's employees) in May, 1808.⁵ With a firm grasp on the labor required to profit from sea otter hunting, Baranov was able to send regular shipments of furs and bartered Chinese goods back to Siberia from American ships. But in the summer of 1809 no American ships arrived in Sitka. As Baranov puzzled over this, Captain Winship arrived to explain that Thomas Jefferson enacted a general trade embargo to protest British and French violations of US neutrality during the Napoleonic Wars. By the summer of 1810 the embargo lifted and ships again began to arrive, but the uptick in international hostilities would have an impact on the colonies soon thereafter.

Official Diplomatic Relations

Another characteristic of this period was an increased interest in RAC activities among policymakers in Washington and St. Petersburg. Relations between the American republic and the Russian Empire began with fits and starts when Catherine II declared the policy of Armed Neutrality during the American Revolution. Official relations, codified by the exchange of recognized representative, had to wait another 25 years. Between 1804 and 1809, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander I exchanged several letters, establishing a common lexicon for future relations. Jefferson seized upon the

⁵ Bolkhovitinov, *The United States And Russia*, 511.

opportunity to write to Alexander I shortly after Russia intervened with the Turkish Porte regarding a captured American frigate stranded off the coast of Tripoli. Having learned of Alexander's liberal education under the guidance of Swiss statesman Frédéric César de La Harpe, Jefferson, as an elder statesman, initially praised the young Russian Tsar.⁶

But there was more to the letters than an exchange of liberal pleasantries between two statesmen. Jefferson was keen to point out the importance of private trade relations between the two countries, despite the lack of a formal trade agreement. He noted: "we have not come into the policy, which the European nations have so long tried, and to so little good effect, of multiplying commercial treaties. In national, as in individual dealings, more liberality will perhaps be found in voluntary regulations..." He added that, despite the lack of formal treaties, "your flag will find, in our harbors, hospitality, freedom, and protection, and your subjects will enjoy all the privileges of the most favored nations."

The response Jefferson received from Alexander I in August 1805 reciprocated feelings of collegiality, as the Tsar was happy to assist Jefferson's "respectable nation," and was gratified to learn that his assistance met with Jefferson's personal satisfaction.⁷ Like Jefferson, Alexander also took the opportunity to express his desire for the continuance of good commercial relations, and expressed esteem for America's liberal constitution. Jefferson's follow-up letter in 1806 asked Alexander for news from Europe,

⁶ Thomas Jefferson to Alexander I of Russia, June 15, 1804 in *The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827.*

See <http://memory.loc.gov/master/mss/mtj/mtj1/030/0800/0819.jpg>

⁷ Alexander to Jefferson (in French Aug 20 1805) in *The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827.*

See <http://memory.loc.gov/master/mss/mtj/mtj1/034/0400/0444.jpg>

as Napoleon's armies began their offensive across central Europe. He hoped that Alexander's intervention would be timely, and result in "pacification which will reestablish peace and commerce." Further, Jefferson tied American interests to those of the Northern European nations, as they were all "habitually peaceful" with "a common interest in the neutral rights," which he believed Alexander alone could maintain.

Jefferson's letter to Alexander I in 1808 bore the President's appointment of William Short to the post of Minister Plenipotentiary. Napoleon's institution of the Continental System coupled with Britain's blockade of France and its satellites were disastrous for American merchants, who had their cargoes impounded by both sides. Furthering American concerns, Russia signed an agreement of peace with Napoleon at Tilsit in 1807. Jefferson's letter indicated that Short was sent as "the bearer to you of assurances of... sincere friendship, and of [the] desire to maintain with Your Majesty and your subjects the strictest relations of amity and commerce."

But Short's mission was severely undermined when the Senate rejected his nomination. Jefferson was surprised by the decision. Short learned of his rejection after he arrived in Europe in 1809. Many reasons have been suggested for the surprise rejection of Short as ambassador to Russia. The most likely reason, according to Russian historian Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, was the Senate's "dislike of diplomacy," which was "a relic of the old colonial status when America had been dependent on Europe - a prejudice rising chiefly from an uneasy sense of social disadvantage."⁸

John Quincy Adams was next sent to Russia in March 1809 to serve as ambassador, and his confirmation was won from the Senate in June, 1809. It is likely

⁸ Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations*, 203-205.

that the precarious state of American commerce at the hands of the Continental System and the British Orders-in Council convinced the Senate of the need to finance an official ambassador in Russia. Adams had been in Russia previously, as Francis Dana's assistant and French interpreter during the 1780s. Adams quickly presented his credentials to Rumiantsev, the Russian Chancellor and former Minister of Commerce.⁹ As early as 1806, Rumiantsev viewed potential relations with the United States as a counterbalance to over reliance on Britain, and favorably received the American ambassador. Shortly after his arrival, Adams was presented to the Emperor. He was well received by Alexander, and served in St. Petersburg until April 1814.

Once Jefferson appointed official American diplomatic representation to the Russian court, Alexander I nominated Count Andrei Dashkov as General Consul. Dashkov was to set up a consulate in Philadelphia to protect Russian commercial interests in America in June, 1808. The Tsar also named Count Fedor Pahlen as Russian minister plenipotentiary, but the latter was almost immediately transferred to the Portuguese court, then in Brazil because of the Napoleonic Wars. Dashkov acted as Russia's ambassador to the United States until officially named as such in 1811. Within a month of his arrival, Dashkov was also nominated as *Charge d'Affaires* at the U.S. Congress by the Russian College of Foreign Affairs.

According to his instructions, signed by Rumiantsev, Dashkov was: "1) To look after the interests and affairs of his Imperial Majesty; 2) To give all assistance in your power to every Russian vessel that happens to be in said regions and to every Russian arriving there in service or for his own business; 3) To provide reliable and exact

⁹ David W. McFadden, "John Quincy Adams, American Commercial Diplomacy, and Russia, 1809-1825" *The New England Quarterly* 66 no. 4 (Dec 1993): 619-22.

information concerning noteworthy matters in that place, and also on the condition of local trade...; 4) To report to the College of Foreign Affairs concerning all noteworthy events and domestic institutions...”¹⁰ In addition, Dashkov was named “Honorary Correspondent” of the RAC. The company sought Dashkov’s support in discouraging American merchants from trading guns to the Tlingits, a point of contention in the colonies since the first Russian contact with the Tlingits and Yankee merchants.

On both sides of the Atlantic, discussions shifted to concerns over the Pacific Northwest soon thereafter. In a meeting with Rumiantsev, Adams articulated U.S. hesitance to impose a prohibition on trade with the natives along the Northwest coast, as it would be impossible to enforce and the British would just as likely fill the void. Rumiantsev attempted to persuade Adams to see the harmful effects of trading guns to the natives, while also seeking to avoid fixing a boundary for Russia’s holdings in the North Pacific, as it would, “be most advisable to defer that to some future time, for the sake of avoiding all possible collision, and even every pretext for jealousy or uneasiness.”¹¹

Negotiations with Dashkov in America proved even more difficult for the Russians. First, like any great Empire, the Russian government and the RAC refused to precisely define the southernmost point of Russian influence or expansion, a condition the American government considered important. Not wanting to limit the Russian scope of activity, nor risk a rupture in relations with the Americans, the precise borders of Russian Alaska were left vague. American negotiators also wanted to know if Russia

¹⁰ Bashkina, *The United States and Russia*, 518-521.

¹¹ Charles Francis Adams ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams* (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott & Company, 1874), 178-9.

considered the native Alaskans as Russian subjects or as independent tribes in a region of Russian influence – as this would define whether or not distribution of arms was considered hostility against Russia, or private trade between independent peoples.¹² Russia similarly failed to define the status of these natives. Finally, during the negotiations, it became evident that Dashkov was not authorized to resolve any of these questions. But when state-based negotiations between the Russian and American governments broke down on this issue, Dashkov turned to a private solution.

Stealing a page from the Yankee trader playbook, Dashkov pursued Russian goals outside of government contexts. Recognizing that he was unlikely to prevent the Americans from trading in furs (regardless of whether or not the weapons trade was halted), Dashkov began “negotiations between the chief management of the Russian-American settlements and a certain merchant from New York.”¹³ John Jacob Astor, owner of the American Fur Company, expanded his efforts by starting the Pacific Fur Company in 1811. Its primary operating center was to be at the mouth of the Columbia River. By working with a private company, Dashkov hoped that Astor’s company would ward off independent merchants, work exclusively with Russian “factories” in Alaska, and squeeze out British commercial interests in the area.

In 1811, with the full support of Thomas Jefferson, John Jacob Astor established the first permanent U.S. settlement on the Columbia River. As one historian noted,

¹² Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations*, 256. American burgeoning territorial and economic interests following the Lewis and Clarke expedition made it unlikely that the US would accept Russian hegemony in the region. In fact, Secretary of State Robert Smith sent instructions to Adams in St. Petersburg to initiate negotiations to limit Russia’s southern reach in the Pacific Northwest.

¹³ “Dispatch from Andrei Ia. Dashkov to Nikolai P. Rumiantsev” in Bashkina, *The United States and Russia*, 615.

Jefferson recognized that if America were to claim lands along the Pacific, “it must be on Astor’s settlement near the mouth of the Columbia.”¹⁴ Jefferson saw Astoria as a “germ of great, free, and independent empire on the other side of the American continent.”¹⁵ Astor set about fortifying the colony immediately by drawing up contracts for its provision and settlement by American employees.¹⁶ In 1809, he sent the *Enterprise*, under the command of John Ebbets, to establish initial contact with Baranov, and to shore up the details of the partnership between the two companies. Ebbets had tremendous experience in the Pacific Northwest, and aided Russian survivors of the 1802 Tlingit sacking of Fort Mikhailovsk at Sitka.

By opening a dialogue between Astor and the RAC, Dashkov also succeeded in escalating discussions of a comprehensive commercial treaty between the United States and Russia. These talks ultimately broke down as a result of the political instability prevalent in Europe and America in mid-1811. Dashkov was more successful on the private front. While negotiations between the Pacific Fur Company and the RAC dragged on for nearly two years, by December 1812 they reached an agreement that would have proven to be mutually beneficial. The outbreak of hostilities on the American and European continent prevented much actually being done. The agreement did not resolve America’s interest in defining Russia’s holding in the Northwest, nor did it completely eliminate the sale of arms to the natives in Russian controlled areas.¹⁷ But it eventually *did* provide the Russian trading posts with valuable

¹⁴ Ronda, “Astoria and the Birth of Empire,” 22-35.

¹⁵ Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations*, 259.

¹⁶ John Jacob Astor Business Records. Baker Library Historical Collections. Harvard Business School. *Articles of Agreement, Pacific Fur Co., 1810*.

¹⁷ These problems remained unresolved into the 1840s – even while the Russians were

supplies carried on Pacific Fur Company ships.

1812 as a Turning Point

For Russian America, changes came abruptly in 1812. The United States declared war on Britain seven months after the *Juno* sank. According to William Dane Phelps, a veteran of the Pacific Northwest fur trade, Boston merchants, “sent out fast sailing schooner Tamaahmaah to the Pacific to warn Boston merchants of the outbreak of War of 1812.”¹⁸ Ships that were already in the Pacific had to wait out the war in neutral ports like Hawaii or in Russian America. Baranov exploited the situation by buying a few American ships, like the *Atahualpa*, and continuing the Pacific trade with the American crews under a Russian flag. With more ships, the RAC was in a much better position to control the fur trade when American merchants re-entered the Pacific waters in 1814.

As we have seen, Russian America frustrated the expectations of its first chroniclers. John DeWolf never returned to the Pacific. He spent several years engaged with the Russians via the Atlantic, and continually recounted his travels to his family. DeWolf died in 1872, at the age of 93. Georg Langsdorff also never returned to Russian America, though he continued in the service of the Russian crown. In 1813, he was named Consul General in Brazil, replacing Count Pahlen. During his time in Brazil, Langsdorff continued to pursue natural history. In 1822, he organized a scientific expedition to travel up the Amazon River. For six years, he explored the Amazon and many tributaries, before returning to Europe in 1830, and died in Freiburg in 1852.

abandoning their outpost in northern in California.

¹⁸ Busch and Gough, *Fur Traders*, 80-81.

Even Baranov, whose tireless efforts were at the heart of the RAC's success, was frustrated by his experiences in the area. By the summer of 1811, the Chief Manager was looking forward to a replacement arriving from Russia so that he could retire. But his replacement died while enroute.¹⁹ A similar circumstance occurred in 1812-1813, with the *Neva* crashing into the Edgecombe promontory, underscoring the continuing dangers of travel to and from the colonies even for a ship of her size. The situation certainly looked bleak for Baranov by 1812, when the British seized Astoria during the war with the United States. With supplies dwindling due to losses from Russia and the absence of American ships, Baranov must have been reminded of the lean years before 1806. Nevertheless, he kept up regular trade with Canton through various intermediaries, keeping the colonies profitable.

In November 1817, Captain Hagemeister returned to Sitka, this time with the authority to take control of the Russian colonies, or appoint someone else. After insinuating himself into the operations of the Russian colonies, and ensuring that Baranov's men would not leave if the Chief Manager was replaced, Hagemeister assumed control of Russian America. From that point forward, the colonies' leadership remained in the hands of Russian naval officers. Baranov left Sitka in 1819 aboard a ship that was returning to St. Petersburg. Tired and bitter over his unceremonious exit, Baranov died in Java on April 13, 1819. While the Russian colonies were run successfully until they were sold to the United States in 1867, the only expansion that occurred after Baranov's 27-year tenure was into the interior of mainland Alaska.

¹⁹ Chevigny, *Lord of Alaska*, 247.

Alaska as an American Frontier

Another curious phenomenon that traced its origins to the North Pacific at the start of the nineteenth century was the rise of literature and lectures from American ship captains in the 1830s and 1840s. As we have seen, between 1787 and 1825, Yankee merchants availed themselves of the opportunity to profit by exploiting the natural resources of the Pacific Northwest coast. While they often kept the details of their voyages secret to protect profitable practices, political interest in the area grew during James Madison's administration. Thomas Jefferson advocated strongly for the establishment of Astoria and exploiting the discoveries of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Thus, even as early as the 1820s, Russian America began to be viewed as both a US and a Russian frontier.

The War of 1812 initially changed US trajectory in the Pacific. Some historians have noted that the waning influence of Boston merchants and Federalism as a result of the conflict, coupled with the increasing influence of manufacturers and merchants from New York, had a profound impact on Pacific trade.²⁰ Despite this trend, popular and political interest in the North Pacific revived for two reasons. First, Alexander I issued an *ukaz* in 1821, defining Russian possession of lands north of the fifty-first parallel along the Pacific coast and banning foreign ships from approaching within 115 miles of Russian colonies. The Secretary of State at the time, John Quincy Adams (America's first ambassador to Russia), encouraged President Monroe to respond boldly by asserting American rights to limit further encroachment of European powers in the Western hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine, as it came to be known in 1823, was thus

²⁰ Katherine H. Griffin and Peter Drummey, "Manuscripts on the American China Trade at the Massachusetts Historical Society" *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Third Series* Vol. 100 (1988): 128-139.

heavily influenced by Russian actions.²¹ Russia eventually negotiated a settlement with America in 1824.

Second, former American captains that were involved in the Pacific trade began to discuss their experiences in print and at lectures during the 1830s. After the diplomatic kerfuffle of the 1820s, New England merchants began to tell of their adventures on the commercial frontier of the Pacific Northwest. William Dane Phelps, who traded in Pacific sea otter furs in 1820s, was perhaps the first American to document the history of the trade. His unpublished manuscript, *Solid Men of Boston in the Northwest*, had a profound impact upon subsequent histories of the region and Boston maritime history. But more importantly, as maritime historian Barry M. Gough pointed out, Phelps “saw the enterprises of the Boston mariners in the Pacific and on the Northwest Coast as part of an imperial and cultural destiny whereby on the North Pacific shores from the Gulf of California to the Bering Sea would be extended a civilization, energetic and advancing, announcing a new age of progress.”²²

In 1822, William Sturgis responded to Alexander I’s *ukaz* of 1821 in his article “Examination of the Russian Claims to the Northwest Coast of America.”²³ Sturgis defended American actions along the coast and took great exception to Russian claims that American ‘illicit trade’ destabilized the region. As late as the 1840s, Sturgis lectured and wrote a great deal about his time in the Pacific. He urged a more nuanced understanding of the natives along the Pacific coast, long maligned by other Americans

²¹ Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, “*Russkaia amerika i provozglashenie doktriny monro*” in *Istoriya russkoi ameriki 1732-1867, tom II*, 396.

²² Busch and Gough, *Fur Traders*, 11.

²³ William Sturgis, “Examination of the Russian Claims,” 370-401.

that traveled to the region. Such stories of the early Yankee fur trade gained popularity in the mid-nineteenth century.

These tracts competed with edited natural historical literature from voyages of exploration and trade; as well as with harrowing (and often fictional) stories of those held in captivity by native populations in North America and Africa. Americans that visited the North Pacific produced all three types of literature. John Rodgers Jewitt, who spotted the *Juno* in 1802 while being held in captivity by Maquinnah near Nootka Sound, wrote a play and a book about his experiences and traveled throughout America to sell it. Jewitt's story was popularized in newspapers by Captain Sam Hill, who eventually rescued Jewitt and used the tale to boost his own popularity.

Thus, even as Yankee participation in the events along the Pacific Northwest diminished in the 1820s and 1830s, cultural memory of their exploits continued to be produced through lectures, newspapers, novels, scientific treatises, and plays. These seeds were sown in fertile ground, as public and political sentiment about America's Manifest Destiny gained traction. They played a fundamental, though underemphasized, role in the assumption that America was destined to reach across the continent; because it had already sailed around it to trade and explore.

Alaska continues to serve as a frontier for Americans today. In 2012, conservative activists and bloggers accused the Obama administration of secretly ceding Wrangel Island (and several smaller "Alaskan" islands in the Arctic Ocean) to Russia. The accusation centers on ambiguous claims to the islands from the late nineteenth century and the fact that while no American administration has specifically claimed the islands, they have not rejected American claims either. The failure to ratify

a maritime border treaty between the Soviet Union and America in 1990, which recognized the islands as Russian based upon Russian settlement, exploration, and geographic position, reinforced the idea that the islands *could* be claimed by America. While diplomatically, the islands have never really been in contention, the inherent instability of maritime borders reinforces conceptions of Alaska as a frontier that can be expanded or given away, rather than an integral part of the national body.

Domestically, this instability often manifests itself humorous way. Sarah Palin tapped into this sense of uncertainty when she cited the proximity of Russia to Alaska when asked about her foreign policy experience. In March 2014, a “We the People” petition entitled “Alaska Back to Russia” was filed on the official White House website. The posting of the petition coincided with the Russian annexation of the Crimea, and was likely written by a Russian patriot, who wrote in broken English:

Groups Siberian russians crossed the Isthmus (now the Bering Strait) 16-10 thousand years ago.

Russian began to settle on the Arctic coast, Aleuts inhabited the Aleutian Archipelago.

First visited Alaska August 21, 1732, members of the team boat "St. Gabriel »under the surveyor Gvozdev and assistant navigator I. Fedorov during the expedition Shestakov and DI Pavlutski 1729-1735 years

Vote for secession of Alaska from the United States and joining Russia.

The petition received 30,000-40,000 anonymous “signatures,” far short of the 100,000 required for an official White House response. But it *was* picked up by major news outlets, reinforcing the idea that Alaska is a potential frontier in diplomatic conflicts between Russia and the United States. Similarly, in 2014 several visual memes made their rounds on social media detailing Russian interest in Alaska. One shows President Vladimir Putin crossing objectives off a list that includes the Central Asian Games, the

Olympics, the Paralympics, annexation of the Crimea, and, finally (still unchecked) Alaska. What is intriguing about these circulated images is the unconscious connection between international conflict and anxiety over the status of Alaska as a frontier – both in America and in Russia.

Domestically, Alaska has replaced the “Old West” as the site of America’s imagined frontier. The growth and popularity of reality shows about Alaska on channels like the *Discovery Channel*, *The Learning Channel*, and even *The Home and Garden Channel* present audiences with various ways this frontier beyond our continental borders is exploited, colonized, and domesticated. Alaska is often portrayed on these shows as the last refuge of self-reliance, where hard work can *potentially* turn tremendous profit by exploitation of natural resources – an idea that was popular among America’s first merchants to visit Russian America. As historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote in 1921,

Maritime commerce was the breath of life for Massachusetts. When commerce languished, the commonwealth fell sick. When commerce revived even a little, the hot passions of Shay’s Rebellion cooled just enough to permit a ratification of the Federal Constitution... The Yankee mind, engrossed in the struggle for existence, neglected things spiritual and intellectual during the Federalist period of its history; and the French Revolution made thought suspicious to a commercial community. Yet thought there was... the thought that opens up new channels of trade, sets new enterprise on foot, and erects a political system to consolidate them. By such thought, no less than the other, the grist of history is ground.²⁴

Thus for America, as a nation founded upon the primacy of commerce, it is perhaps necessary to have a frontier like Alaska; even if it is an imagined one.

²⁴ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston: 1921), 41-42.

CHAPTER 8
EPILOGUE: THE CURIOSLY LONG LIFE OF A SHORT-LIVED SHIP

On June first, 2010 Andrei Voznesensky died in Moscow. In the West, Voznesensky was one of the best-known dissident poets from the post-Stalinist thaw. During the height of his popularity in the 1960s, Voznesensky's poetry hearkened back to the Russian futurists. His verses challenged Socialist Realism with brief, vibrant stanzas. The American press noted his frequent sparring with the Soviet Writer's Union in the late 1960s, a feat presumed to be possible only because of his association with international figures like Arthur Miller, Allen Ginsberg, and Robert Kennedy.¹

In his 1970 poem *Avos*, Voznesensky interspersed stanzas of poetry with quotes from historical documents referencing Nikolai Rezanov's round-the-world journey from St. Petersburg to the Russian-American colonies, and then onwards to Spanish San Francisco. Voznesensky heard about the Rezanov-Concepcion love-story while on a trip to Vancouver. There, he read about their courtship. Voznesensky's use of historical documents and metered poetry in *Avos* impresses upon the reader a simultaneous sense of tragic reality and romance. Although named after the vessel that was built while Rezanov was in the Russian colonies, the *Avos* did not actually take part in the expedition to Spanish America. Voznesensky was delighted by the name (best translated in English as a mixture of *possibility* and *hope*). He playfully used it in his opening stanzas to capture a sense of the adventure, hope, and tragedy that accompanied Rezanov's voyage in the New World.

¹ Jim Heintz, "Andrei Voznesensky; Poetry Drew Threats," *Boston Globe*, June 3, 2010 and Raymond H. Anderson, "Andrei Voznesensky, Russian Poet, Dies at 77," *New York Times*, June 2, 2010.

Voznesensky drew upon a rich poetic and historical cannon about Russian America while composing *Avos*. In the forward to the second edition of *Avos*, translated in English under the published name *Story Under Full Sail*, Voznesensky illuminated Rezanov as a friend of great statesmen and poets in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Derzhavin was certainly familiar with Rezanov, Khvostov, and Davydov's tales. As we have seen, he wrote a eulogizing poem for the hot-headed Russian naval officers, and allegedly penned the inscription on Rezanov's tomb. Rear-Admiral Alexander Shishkov, founder of the literary circle *Beseda Liubitelei Russkago Slova*, similarly tried his hand at memorializing Khvostov and Davydov. In the introduction to Davydov's travel journal, Shishkov included a poem honoring the adventurers. He also included a poem by sentimentalist poet Anna Volkova, an honorary member of his literary circle.

But, for Voznesensky, Davydov and Khvostov were more like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern than heroes of the Russian Empire. Their parts in *Avos* cut away from the main story – Voznesensky depicts them as fighting, drunken gossip-mongers. While they successfully navigated Rezanov to San Francisco, they were nevertheless an embarrassment for the Rezanov presented by Voznesensky. They were a mouthpiece for incredulity at Rezanov's plan to marry Conchita and expand Russian operations in the New World, and their deaths were little more than “a capricious echo of the fates of great men.” Like Hamlet's friends from school, Voznesensky's Khvostov and Davydov suddenly disappear from the story. But, when the Russian Senate hears of Rezanov's tragic death in March 1807, we learn:

They were fascinated. Pondered. Branded him.

Pondered. Rewarded him. Exalted him.

Pondered. Burned with jealousy. Forgot him.

God bless us all!

And Davydov and Khvostov? -

They went to the lockup.

The *Juno* on Stage

At one point in his career, Voznesensky read poetry to packed stadiums. But he is perhaps best known today for his collaboration with Alexei Rybnikov on the rock opera *Yunona i Avos*. His libretto to the opera connected Russians with their American past in a way that few others managed. Soviet historians such as S.B. Okun and N.N. Bolkhovitinov uncovered and analyzed most of the documents related to Russia's American colonies, including the ones used by Voznesensky. But unlike historians, Voznesensky used them to craft an opera that combined Russia's vague cultural memory of an American legacy with modern, American theatrical and musical styles. The brash message of the opera - a sincere call for a de-escalation of US-Soviet hostilities – also resonated with audiences. Disregarding the advice of colleagues in both the Writer's Union and the Composer's Union, Rybnikov and Voznesensky crafted their opera based upon American-style rock music, and used modern tilted Plexiglas stage accentuated by the bow of the *Juno* hanging overhead along with scandalous choreography (by Soviet standards).

A *Time Magazine* article entitled *Lenin's Rockers* covered the July ninth, 1981 premier, noting that, "Rybnikov called for electronic instruments - including a Multimoog synthesizer - rarely used before in the USSR. The opera is a bold blend of hard-rock

rhythms, shimmering folk melodies and traditional Russian Orthodox Church chants.”² Initially, the production ran afoul of Soviet cultural bureaucrats, who held up release of the album version for over a year. But it was an instant success with audiences, and has sold out Moscow’s Lenkom Theatre continuously since its opening. The choreography, staging (with the bow of the *Juno* overhead in the background), and message have changed little since the premier, transitioning from the Soviet to the post-Soviet era without losing its relevance among Russian audiences.

The tragedy of Rezanov’s death on March 1, 1807, while traveling through Siberia on the way back to Moscow, and Conchita’s long wait for his return before joining a convent, became for Voznesensky an allegory for the estrangement of Russia from America during the twentieth century. The drama and passion of Rybnikov’s musical score thrusts Rezanov and Conchita into the role of a modern Romeo and Juliet. But Voznesensky took the additional step of casting the US and the Soviet Union as the Montagues and the Capulets. In the epilogue of Voznesensky’s libretto, which was the basis of the final musical number *Hallelujah to Love*, he wrote,

Residents of the twentieth century	Жители двадцатого столетия!
Rushing towards the end of the millennium	Ваш к концу идет XX век.
Still without an answer	Неужели вечно не ответит
to the question all people share?	На вопрос согласия человек?
Two souls, traveling through space,	Две души, несущихся в пространстве,
A hundred and fifty years alone,	Полтора ста одиноких лет,
We implore you to come together,	Мы вас умоляем о согласии,

² Patricia Blake, “Lenin’s Rockers, Moscow Sings Hallelujah,” *Time Magazine*, July 1981.

Without harmony,

Без согласия смысла в жизни нет.

there is no meaning in life

Hallelujah Love! Hallelujah!

Аллилуйя любви, аллилуйя!

Yunona i Avos premiered during a tumultuous year. The assassination attempts on Pope John Paul II and Ronald Reagan, along with the killing of Anwar Sadat made the international diplomatic environment tense.³ In addition, the election of Ronald Reagan brought a new freeze in US-Soviet relations that was unforeseeable while the musical was being written. The opera's message of hope and unity through love was well received by Muscovite audiences. By 1983, the musical had caught the eye of Pierre Cardin. A friend of Voznesensky's, Cardin brought *Yunona i Avos* to his avant-garde Espace Cardin Theatre in Paris, where it was also well received.

Six years after its Moscow debut, plans were being made to perform the opera in America. Its American debut proved to be far less successful. In a February 1987 article, the *New York Times* reported that attempts were being made by Joseph Papp to perform the opera in New York with a mixed US and Soviet cast.⁴ Papp argued at the time that there was no flourishing drama movement on Broadway, and hoped that "Juno and Avos" would offer something different to theatre-goers.⁵ Ultimately, it was Pierre Cardin that brought the musical to New York for a month-long run in January-February, 1990. It played at New York's City Center for Music and Drama.⁶ Cardin told the AP in

³ Leonid Parfenov, *Namendi: Nasha Era 1981-1990* (Documentary), Moskva: Kolibri, 2010.

⁴ Enid Nemy, "Broadway," *New York Times*, February 27, 1987.

⁵ Joseph C. Koenenn, "Papp: Filling a Void in Classical Theater," *Newsday - Long Island, N.Y.*, Aug 19, 1987.

⁶ *Central Opera Service Bulletin* 29 no. 4 (Fall/Winter 1989-1990).

1989 that he believed the opera “was kind of an allegorical cry for more mutual US-Soviet understanding.”⁷

New York did not prove a particularly hospitable environment for the opera. Cardin ran into a number of logistical hurdles. “The American unions are very sticky,” he said, “about all-foreign productions... [But] the whole Russian cast and crew of 86 will be there. This is a great moment. Americans have seen Russian ballet, folklore, and the circus. But they've never seen anything like this.” Nevertheless, the *New York Magazine* lambasted the production for lacking “all kinetic continuity, dramatic conflict, and psychological finesse.” With vitriolic flair, John Simon noted, “It’s always fun to watch the competition come to grief, especially if they are making the same mistakes you have made. So it is delightful to see our Soviet friends come over with a rock Musical, Junon [sic] and Avos: the Hope, that evokes the awfulness of American rock concerts, rock musicals, and discotheques vintage 1968 or thereabouts.”

Rather than appreciating the revolutionary notion of a Soviet rock opera promoting US-Soviet connections, American reviewers saw the opera as melodramatic troupe set to a score that was 15 years past its prime by American standards. Critics failed to grasp the opera’s significance, and how subversive the message and production were in 1981. As John Simon flippantly put it, “It’s a good story, if only Andrei Voznesensky, the Russian poet, and the Lenin Komsomol (Lenkom) Theatre knew how to tell it.”⁸ While the *New York Times* review was a little more positive, it also

⁷ “Cardin bringing Russian rock musical to NY,” *Bangor Daily News* (from Paris via AP), Oct 9, 1989.

⁸ John Simon, “From Russia with Schlock,” *New York Magazine*, January 22, 1990.

noted that the rock opera was, “actually less of a rock musical than an elaborately staged pop pageant.”⁹

Russia’s Memory of Its American Moment

After the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, Russia seemed to forget its plans for hegemony in the North Pacific. But Stalin revived interest in Russian America during the 1920s. According to Grinev, in 1927 Stalin asked a Soviet official who was heading to America to research Russian America if the opportunity arose.¹⁰ Soviet interest in the lands of the Russian empire persisted throughout the Soviet period. As A.E. Sokol pointed out, L.S. Berg, the president of the All Union Geographic Society in 1949, stated that “Russia never renounced its rights and the Soviet government never gave anyone its authorization to dispose of territories discovered by Russian seamen.”¹¹ While such brash statements might seem like posturing, the idea of a Russian connection to her former colonies in the North Pacific persisted.

One interesting manifestation of this phenomenon is the persistent Russian myth that Alaska was actually leased to the United States rather than sold outright. This urban legend is still prevalent today, and occasionally comes up in relation to negative feelings towards the United States for failing to give it back. A popular song by the Russian band *Lub’è* played on this sentiment in the 1990s. Their song “*Ne Valyai Duraka, Amerika*” combined Soviet anthems with modern rock instrumentation. While somewhat playful, the song requests the return of Alaska, since it is as much a part of

⁹ Stephen Holden, “Review/Theater; A Soviet Musical That Mixes Romance and Idealism,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1990.

¹⁰ Andrei Val'terovich Grinev, “A Brief Survey of the Russian Historiography of Russian America of Recent Years.” *Pacific Historical Review* 79 no.2 (May 2010): 268.

¹¹ A.E. Sokol, “Russian Expansion and Exploration in the Pacific.” *American Slavic and East European Review* 11 no.2 (April 1952): 85.

Russia as banyas, vodka, and accordians. Grinev attributes the persistence of these myths to (1) gaps in Soviet and Russian historiography of Russian America, and (2) myth creation on the part of some Soviet researchers.

Yunona i Avos's popularity in Russia is thus a recurrence of the trend of re-remembering Russia's American past. In Russia, the show resonates despite periodic criticism over historical accuracy from both tabloids and academic journals. In August 2006, *Moskovskii Komsomolets* ran a full-page expose entitled "Anatomy of Love." The article focuses upon a "recently discovered" document from the Manuscripts Division of the Russian State Library written by Rezanov that revealed the deep dissension between himself and the military personnel and sailors aboard the *Nadezhda* on the way from St. Petersburg to Japan. Instead of a tragic Russian romantic, Rezanov appeared as an "emaciated, humiliated commander." The researcher that found the document, Anna Surnik, believed that there was little chance for an actual heartfelt romance. Instead, she thought that Rezanov and Conchita were far more calculating in their desire for marriage, with the former hoping to cement Russian-Spanish relations in the Pacific Northwest, and the latter looking to escape the Spanish backwater that was San Francisco in 1806.¹²

Viktor Lopatnikov, a member of Russia's upper house of Parliament, and an official in Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also wrote an article in the December 2006 edition of *Mezhdunarodnii Zhizn*, wherein he attempted to describe the real-life Rezanov as opposed to the one depicted in *Yunona i Avos*.¹³ Faced with uncertain

¹² "Anatomiia Liubvi," *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, August 11, 2006.

¹³ Viktor Lopatnikov, "Yunona i Avos," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, no. 12 (December 2006).

trading prospects in Europe due to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, Rezanov was among those that looked to strengthen Russia's position in Asiatic trade.

Lopatnikov examined diplomatic instructions found in Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive to show that Rumiantsev wanted Rezanov to depict Russia as a strong country capable of balancing power in Europe, Persia and Turkey, while incorporating several Asian kingdoms into its dominion. When Rezanov arrived in Russian America, desperate circumstances forced his voyage to San Francisco aboard the recently purchased *Juno*.

But attempts to correct Russian perceptions of Rezanov or Russian America are an uphill battle. As we have seen, Russians now seem to have a fondness for particular remembrances of their colonies in the New World – regardless of the actual events. Russian tabloid press frequently run stories detailing America's theft of Alaska from Russia.¹⁴ In an article reviewing Bolkhovitinov's *Istoriya Russkoi Ameriki*, Vladimir Ponomarev argued that study of the sale of Alaska to the United States was more or less deliberately avoided during most of Soviet history. Such willful ignorance of the subject, he argued, greatly contributed to the spread of the myth of a 99-year lease that Americans allegedly failed to honor by returning Alaska.¹⁵

¹⁴ In a May 10, 2010 issue of *Ekspress Gazeta*, author Vladimir Kazakov wrote an article about debt owed to Russia. The byline read, "If Russia were repaid the money that we are owed, we would be the richest country in the world." One of the sections detailed Alaska, for which the author claimed Russia was never paid. See Vladimir Kazakov, "Otdajte Nagrablennoe!" *Eksprecc Gazeta*, May 10, 2010.

¹⁵ See V.N. Ponomarev, "*Istoriya russkoi ameriki: 1732 – 1867*," *Otechestvennaia Istoriia*, 5 (October 2003): 163-171. And Andrei Val'terovich Grinev, "A Brief Survey of the Russian Historiography of Russian America of Recent Years." *Pacific Historical Review* 79 no.2 (May 2010): 268.

The yearning for, and memory of, Russian America cuts across imperial, soviet, and now post-soviet history and culture. At first glance, these memories of Russian America appear to be a hodge-podge of historical anachronisms and half-truths. But they might be better understood as a desire to unite nineteenth and twentieth century Russian cultural memory. *Yunona i Avos* appealed to its audience precisely because it prominently featured traditional Orthodox chants, modern Russian dance, and Western rock music with a theme of love and redemption. The Lub'e song *Ne Valyai Duraka, Amerika* similarly merged cultural memory by fusing traditional Russian musical instrumentation with Soviet military anthems and rock and roll. The lease myth itself seems to rest on the idea that a deal struck with Imperial Russia should be valid under subsequent regimes.

Eurasianist historians might view this phenomenon as further evidence of Russia's imperial, as opposed to national, culture. Russian America was an intellectual and literal frontier that represented the *potential* for personal and cultural growth. It was the furthest point of Russian imperial expansion, unique because the colonies were literally detached from the Russian mainland. For Voznesensky, the *Juno* (and poetically, the *Avos*) became the medium of escaping the "prison" that Russia had become for Rezanov – a theme readily recognizable for the opera's soviet audience. Russian America also held out the *potential* for US-Russian reconciliation: a common bond that could unite the countries in the twenty-first century. This is why the theme of Russian America recurs in literary, historical, and cultural memory. Poets, authors, and musicians laud the heroes that traveled to and from the New World. Historians have argued over the significance of Russia's colonies along the Pacific Northwest. And

Russians seem to have a cyclical interest in their American past. These factors routinely combined with impressions of freedom and liberty associated with the New World to periodically rekindle Russian interest in its American past.



Figure 8-1. Dave Granlund's satirical cartoon on the Crimean annexation by President Putin.



Figure 8-2. Russian meme that circulated on social media shortly after the Crimean annexation shows that Russians had similar thoughts about the annexation and Russian connections to Alaska

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Tobin Shorey has long been interested in Russian history. He received his BA (with Highest Honors) in 1997 from the University of Florida. His undergraduate thesis examined the conflict between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin in the First International Workingman's Association. As a full-time University employee, Tobin completed his MA in 2003 with a major in history. His master's thesis was entitled *The Kronstadt Rebellion: the Struggle for Self-Representation and the Boundaries of Bolshevik Discourse*. From 1998-2012, Tobin worked for the University of Florida's Office of the University Registrar. In 2012, he became the Director of Curriculum Monitoring and Analysis for UF's Office of Undergraduate Affairs.