



correspondence

The Archangel Committee
The Greater Portland – Russian Sister City Project
P.O. Box 105, Portland, Maine 04112 USA

SUMMER 2014

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

Since the founding of our Sister City Relationship in 1988, there have been two programs that have been our constant strengths: our **Youth Exchange** and our **Photography Exchange**.

Our **Youth Exchange** has involved groups of up to 12 students exchanging between high schools in Greater Portland and in Archangel for a number of weeks at a time, groups of Archangel youth visiting Maine for a summer camp experience, individual high school students exchanging for a semester, and college students exchanging for various periods of time including a semester. Over the past 25 years, participating American schools have included Falmouth, Portland, Deering, Casco Bay, Gray-New Gloucester, Westbrook and Cape Elizabeth High Schools in Maine and Plymouth Regional High School in New Hampshire. Participating Russian schools have included School Number 117 from the Pinega region and Archangel School Numbers 3, 6 and 21. Most of these exchanges have been privately funded through the dedicated efforts of all involved to preserve this critical part of true citizen diplomacy. Records indicate that approximately 100 American students have traveled to Archangel since 1988 and approximately 180 Archangel students have traveled here.

Discussions and planning are underway to host a number of youth and student groups this coming Fall. We are hoping that Archangel School 21 can send Principal Tatiana Borovikova, teacher Olga Pravilova and 3 students to be hosted by Westbrook High School (special thanks goes to Westbrook School Superintendent Marc Gousse and Westbrook High School Principal Jonathan Ross). In addition, we are hoping that Archangel School 6 can send Principal Vladimir Utkin, 2 teachers and 6 or 7 students to be hosted by Deering High School and by Casco Bay High School (special thanks go to teachers Cyndy Martin and Sarah Shmitt). Finally, our friend and lawyer Tatiana Zykina hopes to bring a teacher and 3 students from Archangel's Law Institute to be hosted by the University of Maine School of Law (special thanks to Maine Law Professor Dmitry Bam). The actual dates of these visits are not yet decided and much work needs to be done to finalize these groups of young people; however, we believe that the dates will be in the late October/early November 2014 time frame.

Our **Photography Exchange** has been our other constant strength for over 25 years as Westbrook photographer Dennis Marrotte and Archangel photographer Nikolay Chesnokov have inspired groups of photographers from both communities to achieve great things. The Portland Camera Club and the Spoloki Camera Club in Archangel have exchanged countless artists and photographs; in addition, formal photographic exhibitions have been held at many venues throughout Maine and the Archangel Region. Exhibition titles have included "*Images of Archangel*", "*Beloe Morye – 90*", "*Pearls of the Russian North*", and "*Visions of Archangel – Land of the Pomor*".

We have plans for this coming Fall and thereafter to promote new Exhibitions at a number of venues utilizing various combinations of our already existing photographs **PLUS** a brand new 50 photograph Exhibition entitled "*Russian North*" that was recently sent to us by Nikolay Chesnokov and Julia Popova from a re-invigorated Spoloki Club. We hope to have shows at venues such as galleries, schools, public buildings, events and other places where our imagination takes us! In addition, we are planning to hold an event this Fall here in Greater Portland and in Archangel called "*One Day in the Life of the City*". This project will be open to young photographers at high schools here and in Archangel to take digital photographs during a specific time period that depict the uniqueness of their communities. Photographs will be exchanged and posted on websites and social media, entries will be judged and prizes will be awarded (both here and in Archangel). Special thanks to Visual Arts Teacher Matt Johnson at Westbrook High School for helping to coordinate this project.

THE SEASONS OF ARCHANGEL

AUTUMN

The autumns in the distant north are harsh, if brief. No Indian summers ever come to give some cheer before the winter. A moaning wind keep beating against the windows and rushes through the plundered garden, angrily flaying the last leaves still clinging to the branches. The leaden skies are pitiless – a steady drizzle, never ceasing, soon transforms the gravel paths into quagmires. The days are dark and dismal. But soon the scene changes. Frosts take over, followed by the first of the snows blanking out all that was bleak and ugly. Before the winter came, Kapochka wakened me early one morning. This was the beginning of my schooldays. She helped me to dress, braided my hair and tied the ribbons.

WINTER

By now the winter was closing in. The frost increased and the days shortened. The river was giving up her unequal struggle against the frost. For a few days the dark line of the swift current in midstream continued to defy the encroaching ice, but in the end surrendered. The Dvina became a mighty highway that stretched for hundreds of miles back to the south. The first to appear on the river were the small northern horses hurrying from the opposite shore pulling the flat sledges of the peasants laden with fresh provisions for the market. They were followed by different types of sledges travelling in all directions.

SPRING

Spring came back. The river lost its pristine whiteness and became tinged with a dull lilac hue. A fast-flowing stream like a dark ribbon appeared in the middle and widened. Suddenly, as if possessed by a wild fury, the river began to shatter her fetters. The broken floes, carried by churning waters, began their journey to the sea. With ever-increasing speed, clambering over each other, rising high on end and crashing down, colliding, sending showers of splintered ice, they rushed ahead carrying everything with them, destroying all obstacles. On their surface could still be seen the tracks of sledges, the discarded debris and circles of small pines surrounding the waterholes where only recently women gathered to rinse their washing. Gradually the pace slows down. The river, sparkling in the spring sunshine, now flows serenely on her way. A few small isolated floes, like swans, sail in the wake of others and vanish in the Arctic depths.

In the garden, the grass is pushing through the melting snows. Beside the steps of the summerhouse, clumps of Siberian anemones have struggled to the surface and are nodding their dainty heads to the sun. A tender green is intermingling with the black twigs of the birch; the buds of the wild cherry are swelling. Spring is short in the north. One week there are hard frosts and blizzards and the next the thaw arrives and moves swiftly. Snow on the rooftops begins to slide and crash onto pavements. Snowdrifts shrink and vanish. A merry bubbling can be heard coming from the torrents running below the wooden pavements. Everywhere there is slush, and streams hurry down to the river. All the back streets are quagmires, until the sun dries them out.

Inside the house, the inner frames of the windows are removed, and all the outside noises come in. Gone is the deep silence of winter, the gentle creaking of the sleigh runners. The wheels of carts trundle over the cobbled streets. The ears are assailed by a shrill chorus of chirping sparrows, cawing rooks and the excited sounds of dogs who in their joy appear to bark at nothing at all. The crowing of the cock awakens the whole household in the early hours of the morning. He his hens have been removed from their dark winter quarters to a more congenial habitation and are allowed to stroll in the courtyard. The hens, like fine ladies walking on tiptoe, step carefully, lifting their feet high over the lush grass of the drying green. They blink their amber eyes up to the sun and emit peculiar drawn-out sounds of sweet contentment.

SUMMER

My examinations were over. I danced and hopped on the wooden pavements all the way home. There would be no more lessons, no more Sashenka and slaps over my hands. I was free to play with my brother in the garden, free to go down to the river, to splash with my playmates and learn to swim, for the water of Dvina close to the shore was now warm, heated by the sun-baked boulders. In June the tender white nights returned. Sunset and sunrise met – there was no darkness. People strolled on the river front in parks where the bands played well into the night. Once again ships skirted the island of Solombala and the fishing fleet in full sail hurried seaward. Once again there were midnight picnics to the islands and the sounds of voices floating across the river.

Excerpts from: *The House by the Dvina* by Eugenie Fraser, 1984. A unique and moving account of life in Archangel around the time of the Revolution by a Scottish schoolgirl in a Russian-Scottish family.