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Title: Alexander Gavrilovich Rotchev Biography- Excerpted from Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar

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Rotchev, Aleksandr Gavrilovich. Russkii biograficheskii slovar', vol. 17 (Petrograd, 1918), pp. 313-15.

ROTCHEV, Alexander Gavrilovich, writer. Born in 1806 or 1807, and from a commissioned officer's family, he obtained his higher education at the University of Moscow. However, he left the university before completing his degree, and on July 6, 1833, he entered the civil service as a copyist and translator in the Office of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres (under the directorship of Prince Sergei Sergeivich Gagarin).

Two years later he went to work for the Russian-American Company (April 2, 1835), and on August 2, 1835, he departed for the colonies as a Commissioner on the Company ship St. Helena. From July 2 to October 13, 1836, Rotchev visited such places in California as Bodega Bay and the ports of Monterey and San Francisco on the Company's ship Sitka. He was sent on a special mission by the Company's General Manager, in accordance with which he would serve until August 1, 1838. It was at this point that he was appointed Manager of the Company's settlement at Fort Ross, and between July 15, 1841, and January 1, 1842, he held the post of Commissioner for Company Affairs in California.

Returning thereafter to St. Petersburg, he presented a report to the Chief Director of the Company concerning his activities in America. On May 5, 1843, after the Russian-American Company colonies [in California] were sold to the United States [sic], he retired and remained in this situation until October 21, 1850. At this time he was appointed junior assistant to the Controller in the Tax and Customs Department; he served here for a year altogether - until October 4, 1851. He subsequently entered the Chancery of the Ministry of War, and ^{in January} he received a diamond ring for his work, The Truth about England. On February 28, 1857, he was transferred and promoted as an official bureaucrat to the Department of Artillery; in addition, he was also appointed, on December 11, as translator on the editorial staff of the newspaper Russian Invalid, where he continued to work until February 8, 1858. On July 20, 1858, he was awarded a diamond ring for his efforts on behalf of the Committee for Theatres and Literature, and on April 10, 1859, he was presented with [another] gift.

* (Translator's Note: This account omits mention of Rotchev's return trip to California in 1851-52.)

ROTCHEV, Alexander Gavri^llovich (continued)

Thereafter, Rotchev served on the editorial staff of the Northern Post, an official newspaper; later he became in charge of the printing house, as well as editor, of the St. Petersburg Municipal Police Gazette (from later 1862 to mid-1866). At this point he resigned from the civil service with the rank of Aulic Councillor. In 1867, he was briefly editor of the St. Petersburg Leaflet.

In 1870 Rotchev lived ⁱⁿ and Tashkent and participated in the publication of the Turkestan News. Finally, in 1872, he settled in Saratov and here he became editor of the Saratov Inquirer. Since Rotchev himself was not allowed to be editor, in ^{his} place of ~~him~~ A. Voznesensky, who served on the editorial staff, was officially confirmed "as editor." In 1872 and especially 1873 the Saratov Inquirer was distinguished by a great deal of literary life. Rotchev, who was a cultivated, lively, and compassionate man, in the estimation of his co-workers, was able to attract talented young writers to the Saratov paper. During Rotchev's tenure, the satirical writer, S. S. Gusev, gained fame for the first time (under the pseudonym of "Tutti Quanti") and others, such as I. P. Horizontov, Lyubomudrov, and Blummer, joined the newspaper staff.

Rotchev died in Saratov on August 20, 1873, and was buried in the cemetery of the Savior-Transfiguration Monastery. An inscription on the stone that covered his grave was carved according to his wishes: "He was human, and as a human he lost his way."

Rotchev wrote many articles in periodicals about ^{America and} his travels to and from there. Among them are the following: "Sketches of the Northwest Coast of America" in Son of the Fatherland (1838, vol. 1, no. 1); "A Scene at Sea" in Reading Library (1835); "A New Eldorado in California" in Notes of the Fatherland (1852: vol. 62, sect. VIII);* "A Russian Traveler's Reminiscences of the West Indies, California, and the East Indies," three articles in Notes of the Fatherland (1854, vols. 92, 94, 95);

* (Translator's Note: This date is actually 1849; see English translation in Pacific Historian, vol. 14, no. 1 (winter 1970), pp. 33-40).

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"Russian Letters from Europe, America, Asia, and Africa," in the Northern Bee (1854, no. 71); "England's Conflict with the United States in the American Northwest," in the Northern Bee (1856, no. 27).

Upon his return to Russia, Rotchev demonstrated that giving up our American territories to the United States was extremely disadvantageous and detrimental.* In this regard he had an article published in the Russian Invalid entitled "The Russian Invalid's Response to the Russian-American Company's Main Administration with Respect to Its Former Possessions in California" (Russian Invalid, 1857, no. 237 ff.).

.....

In 1825, while still quite young in Moscow, Rotchev stepped forth in the literary arena with the publication of his translation of Moliere's Self-Styled Cuckold** He subsequently published many poems: in Pogodin's almanac Urania (1825), in the Northern Lyre (of Raich and Oznobishin), and in Polevoy's Moscow Telegraph (1826-29, and 1831). Among these were "Sennacherib's Defeat," "An Imitation of Byron," "P^oetry," and "To Zhukovsky". He also published in Pavlov's Athena and in the Neva Almanac (1830, 1832, 1846, 1847-48), in the Theatre Almanac for 1830, in the Odessa Almanac for 1831, etc. Separate publications were An Imitation of the Koran (Poems), Moscow, 1828; Schiller's tragedy, The Bride from Messina, and his William Tell (Moscow, 1829); Shakespeare's Macbeth (Moscow, 1830); Victor Hugo's tragedy Hernani (St. Petersburg, 1830); and The Truth about England: An Account of the Extension of Her Possessions in All Parts of the World (St. Petersburg, 1st and 2nd editions, 1854 and 1855).

.....

A. G. Rotchev was married, from the [late] 1820's on, to the Princess

* (Translator's Note: The context suggests the sale of Fort Ross to Sutter in 1841 rather than the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867.)

** Sganarelle ou le Cocu imaginaire (1660).

ROTCHEV, Alexander Gavrilovich (continued, page 4)

Helena Pavlovna Gagarina, who in the 1850's was superintendant of the Medvednikov Home for Orphans in Irkutsk, and who published a booklet for children entitled The Little Naturalist, or Family Discussions about Animals, Vegetables and Minerals: A Work by Mme. Ulliak-Tresider (St. Petersburg, 1852, in two parts, and dedicated to Grand Duke Nicholas Alexandrovich).

Sources:

Golos (Voice), 1873, no. 240 (obituary).

N. Zatvornitskii. Handbook of Biographical Data relating to the Ranks of the Chancery of the War Ministry. St. Petersburg, 1909.

"The Recollections of A. M. Karatygina," Russkii Viestnik (Russian Messenger), March 1881, vol. 152, p. 590 (A note on problems of staging Rotchev's translation of William Tell, then prohibited by the censor.) - at Cal Library

"Letters of M. P. Pogodin to S. P. Shevyrev," in Russian Archive (Russkii Arkhiv), 1882, bk. III, pp. 106-07. (Comments on Rotchev's early theatrical career and his translations, his opposition to the sale of Fort Ross to the USA, sic!, and his move to Tashkent in the late 1850's, sic! Claims that Rotchev died in Saratov at the age of 63.) - at UC Berkeley library

"The Notes of R. M. Zotov," in Istoricheskii Viestnik (Historical Messenger), August 1896, vol. 65, p. 309. (The writer discusses Rotchev's early problems with the censor, his incomplete University career, his marriage to the Princess Gagarina against the wishes of her parents, and his appointment to the position of translator for the Imperial Theatres - due in part to the helpful intervention of Zotov himself. Rotchev's link with the Russian-American Company resulted from changing positions with one Prokofiev, whose father was a Company director in the Main Administration in St. Petersburg. After Rotchev went to California to serve as "governor," he returned to Russia, worked in the War Ministry, and his career ended with his being sent to Tashkent.)

f.e. born
in 1819

Primary Source:

Records of the Russian-American Company (National Archives). Former Russian Agencies (261), Microcopy 11, roll 38. Reports 381, 382 (June 19, 1836), p. 260B, 263A. (Rotchev leaves for California on the sloop Sitka, captained by Lt. Mitkov and in the company of Fr. Ioann Veniaminov. The priest from Sitka is sent to take care of various church and religious needs at Fort Ross, and Rotchev is to be used when necessary in translating foreign languages - mainly in commercial/^{grain}dealings at Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Francisco. Rotchev is expected to get acquainted with California affairs in general, and is to visit missions along the coast with Manager Kostromitinov. When the grain deal is consummated, Rotchev and Veniaminov are expected to return to Alaska on the Sitka.)

*A full printed (superior)
translation appeared
in Pacific Historian
winter
1970*

Alexander G. Rotchev, "A New Eldorado in California" (Novyi El'dorado v Kalifornii),
Otechestvennyia zapiski (Notes of the Fatherland), vol. 62 (1849), section VIII,
pp. 216-224. Excerpt from p. 216.

What an enchanting land California is! For eight months of the year the skies stay cloudless and clear. For the rest of the year, from late November on, it rains periodically. It never gets hotter than 25° Reaumur [77° F.] in the shade. In January everything returns to life, and vegetation is fully growing; everything is fragrant; and the friendly hummingbird flutters and glitters on a stalk, or shimmers above a flower like a precious gem.

California's virgin soil gives forth astonishing fruits: I happened to see a wheat harvest there that yielded 150-fold! And even with meager efforts applied. A pointed, twisted branch, whose tip is covered with some kind of share, serves as a plow. After scratching about two inches of soil, a farmer can finish his sowing. A branch of a bay [laurel] tree, tied to an ox, serves as his harrow. If you take a peach off a tree and toss the pit away, and it falls on the ground, and if you come back three years later to the same place, you will see an adult tree, cut fruit off of it, and enjoy it!

A giant evergreen tree - the redwood [chaga] (pinus Californicus) - grows in California. Look at this massive tree: eight or nine centuries have passed over it. Its hollow core, burned out by fires, may serve as a home for entire families! With my own eyes I saw a grain storehouse and a building with an office and two rooms for assistants built out of one tree. It was 180 to 200 feet tall, from top to bottom, and eight to ten feet across. One can imagine the deafening crash which such a colossus makes when felled by human hands! Other trees in the forests of California include the bay tree, chestnut and oak, and, along river banks, wild-grape stock.

Man has looked upon this land with cool indifference for a long time. But now, when gold has been discovered in the bowels of the earth, people have been pouring in: across the Rocky

Mountains, from New Orleans, across Panama, and around the Horn. Mineralogists and natural scientists have even gone there now. Each vein in this land of beauty trembles under the anatomical knife of science. The best years of my life I spent there, and I reverently carry the recollection of these days in my soul.

Sir George Simpson. An Overland Journey Round the World, during the Years 1841 and 1842.
Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1847. Excerpt from pages 84-85.

On the first of May [1842], the Constantine sailed with supplies for Atcha, in the Aleutian Archipelago, . . . thence to proceed . . . to Ochotsk. She had about sixty persons on board, including passengers, of whom some were bound for Ochotsk, and others for Europe. Among the latter was Mr. Rotscheff, already mentioned, with his family, who was recently in charge of Bodega, in California, with a salary of five thousand roubles a year -- an income on which, besides furnishing his house and entertaining visitors, he had to feed and clothe Mrs. Rotscheff and himself and three children. Mr. Rotscheff is a very good-looking man, in the prime of life, and is the author of several works of the lighter order, both in verse and prose. He had been doing very well in Petersburg, as a translator of foreign pieces for one of the principal theatres, when he was so fortunate, or so unfortunate, as to make a conquest of a daughter of Prince Gagarin, without the approbation of her family.

His wife, who accompanied him to the far east, is intellectual and accomplished, speaking several languages, conversant with many branches of science, and divinely musical. This poor lady, "reared in the halls of princes," and accustomed in early life to all the luxuries of society, meets her present difficulties and privations with a degree of firmness which does her infinite honor. There she sat with all the fortitude and cheerfulness imaginable, cooped up with her husband and seven children, four of them not her own, in a small cabin, with the prospect before her of a dangerous voyage to Ochotsk, and an equally dangerous ride of seven thousand miles to St. Petersburg. I sincerely trust that for all these hardships she may be rewarded by a reconciliation with her friends, who, notwithstanding their high blood and high titles, have no reason to be ashamed of this fallen member of their stock.

(today's
At Lea)