

Walking through the places of Russian America in Irkutsk

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In this report I will be talking about Russian America historical and cultural monuments in Irkutsk related to an important period in the history of Russia, Siberia and the United States. This period is associated with development of the North American coast by Russians since the middle of the 13th century till the middle of the 19th century.

As a result of working with different materials I came up with this guided tour, tailored for different categories of listeners. The purpose of this trip is defining of role of Irkutsk in the process of settling the coast of North America in the 13th-14th centuries, bringing up patriotic feelings, learning history of Russian America. The inscription on the monument over the grave of Grigory Shelikhov in Irkutsk tells: "Do not forget, the child, that your Russian ancestor is famous far in the East" (poet Ivan Dmitriev).

In this report I will present a virtual version of the tour of Irkutsk and route over the plan of the city of Irkutsk.

The following objects are:

1. Spassk Church 1706-1710.

This is the oldest stone building of Irkutsk and the oldest orthodox temple of Irkutsk. This church was built into a southern wall of last Irkutsk jail. It was named in honor of the Sacred Savior Icon ("Spas Nerukotvornyi"). Above altar are the frescos with main plot depicting Christening. Spassk Church has passed through the centuries of Irkutsk history, including the period of history of Russian America.

2. Court Yards of Irkutsk

Near the Spassk Church and the Cathedral of Epiphany was built a wooden court yard. "Merchants are trading in spacious, yet wooden court yard, constructed on shore of the Angara River." Stone court yard was designed by Giacomo Quarenghi and built later on the Gostinodvorskaya Square, now Kirov Square. It burned down in the fire of 1879. By the way, Giacomo Quarenghi was well known architect, who designed many buildings in St. Petersburg.

3. Tikhvin Church

It was built with money of merchant Ivan Bechevin in 1754. Bechevin resided in the Tikhvin church, and he was buried on its territory. He made several voyages. In 1760 Ivan Bechevin's vessel for the first time had reached the Alaska Peninsula. With his money the stone church Znamenskaya was built. He died from tortures of the auditor of Russia Krylov. In the Tikhvin congregation there was also one of the Shelikhov's houses in Irkutsk.

4. Cathedral of Epiphany

It was second stone church in Irkutsk. As well as the Spassk Church it was built during the era of Peter the Great, in the beginning of the 18th century. Per Peter's order the Kamchatka

expeditions were organized. Vitus Bering received orders to verify whether Asia converges with America, and also to build the Okhotsk Path. All structures of the cathedral are decorated by color tiles. At present time the cathedral is undergoing restoration and repainting of its iconostasis.

a) In this building the missionary priest Iosaf Bolotov in 1799 was imposed to an honorable title of Kodiak Bishop. Prior to that he was working on Aleutian Islands, where he opened a school. After the imposition coming back to America on a ship he had gotten into a storm and perished.

b) In 1859 here the first Novo-Arkhangelsk Archiereus Peter Ekaterininskiy was named into a Bishop.

c) During his visits to Irkutsk "the Apostle of Alaska" Innokenty Veniaminov had several services here: in 1841, in 1854, in 1859, and in 1868. He read the Gospel in 11 languages, including Aleutian.

5. Irkutsk Seminary

The Irkutsk annals have records of the seminary opening in 1780. "A stone house was started to be built for it". In 1790 this construction was completed. During the years of 1807-1818 it was attended by Ivan Popov, later known as Innokenty Veniaminov, Bishop of Kamchatka, and then Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna. The seminary was located on the shore of the Angara River in a court yard of the Archiereus' house. Presently the building has been restored and belongs to the Eastern-Siberian Academy of Education. One of the Academy's Departments is located in the building.

6. Moscow Gate / Triumphal Arch

It was constructed in 1811 for the 10th anniversary of reign of Alexander the 1st by the provincial architect Kruglikov. It was located on the shore of the Angara River, not far from the seminary and the Vladimir Church, marking an entrance to the city from the Moscow Path.

7. Vladimir Church

This wooden church was constructed with money of Yakov Protasov. From 1761 through 1791 he and his partners were sending ships to the Aleutian Islands. His ship "Ioann" was burnt off on Unalaska and the crew was killed. The ship "St. Zosima & Savvatiy" had gone to voyages three times and each time it had returned with a valuable cargo. In 1775 the Vladimir Church was rebuilt from stone.

8. Road to America

Road to America is a former Yakut high road, now it is called "Rabocheho Shtaba Street". Road to America consisted of three stages: 1) road from Irkutsk to Kachug, located on the Lena River, 2) route by the Lena River on karbazas (fishing boats) or via winter road to Yakutsk, 3) road from Yakutsk to Okhotsk located on the coast of the Okhotsk sea. That was the route of Irkutsk merchants to America. As the Irkutsk annals stated, they were traveling there with ease "as to their own home."

9. Female Monastery of Znamenskaya Church

This stone church was constructed in 1757 with Ivan Bechevin's money. In 1760 on the ship "St. Gabriel" with 42 Russian industrialists and 20 Kamchadals (native people of Kamchatka) he went for harvest. The ship returned with profit, and the part of it was spent for construction of the

temple. Presently Znamenskaya Church is a cathedral temple of the Irkutsk eparchy. Once again nuns live and work in the monastery. The monastery was located at the exit of the city to the Yakut Path; therefore, it was passed by everyone who was traveling to America.

10. Tomb to Grigory Shelikhov

It is located at the Amber wall of the Znamenskaya Church of a female monastery. It was executed from the Ural grey marble. The tomb was placed on the Shelikhov's grave in 1800 by his widow Natalia Alexeevna, cost of the monument was 11 760 rubles. Grigory Shelikhov died and was buried in 1795.

11. Fence of the Female Monastery of Znamenskaya Church

The fence of the Female Monastery of Znamenskaya Church was also constructed with money of Shelikhov's widow, Natalia Alexeevna.

12. Irkutsk Admiralty

The Irkutsk Admiralty command was founded in 1754. The Irkutsk Admiralty was responsible for the Baikal affairs, and also took care of the Okhotsk Maritime Command. It supplied sea merchant's expeditions with sails, ropes, assisted in recruitment of sheep crew members, etc. Place for the Admiralty was allocated at the shore of the Ushakovka River running into the Angara River.

13. School for Girls of Elizaveta Medvednikova

The building was constructed with money of Medvednikova as an educational institution for girls from poor families. Here worked after the sale of Fort Ross in 1842 as the head mistress of the school the wife of the last commandant of Fort Ross, Elena Rotcheva, or "Princess Elena", as she was named by the residents of Fort Ross.

14. Kuskov's House

This is the house of Kuskov family descendants in Irkutsk from where the portraits of Ivan and Elena Kuskov have been transferred to the Totma Museum.

The house was located at the address 18 Laninskaya Street, now the house's address is 27 Zhelyabova Street. That is the house where descendants of Ivan Kuskov have lived until recently. Ivan Kuskov was the founder of Fort Ross in California. Ivan Kuskov and his wife Ekaterina had no children. His relatives on his brother's side lived in Irkutsk. The surname Kuskov from this side of the family was interrupted in Irkutsk in 1970's. Last resident of the house from Kuskov's family, Yuri Kuzmin, passed away in 2001. The descendants of this family with other surnames live In Sverdlovsk District of Irkutsk City.

Upon arrival to Irkutsk from Totma City, in the north of Russia, Ivan Kuskov in 1790 reached agreement with Alexander Baranov for work in the Shelikhov's Company. In 1812 in northern California on the coast of Pacific Ocean he had built the Fort Ross as a food supply base for northern Russian settlements. He returned back home to Totma through Irkutsk in 1823. In 1925

Ivan and Ekaterina Kuskov's portraits in frames made of American mahogany have been transferred from Irkutsk to the Totma Museum.

15. Blagoveshchenskaya Church

It was located at the corner of Karl Marx Street (former Bolshaya St.) and Volodarskiy Street (former Blagoveshchenskaya St.). Here started to serve as a priest Innokenty Veniaminov, from here he had left for Russian America. The Blagoveshchenskaya Church was built partially with Ivan Bechevin's remained capital. He was a merchant who also carried out trade expeditions to America.

16. White House

This building was constructed in 1804 with money of Michael Sibiryakov under the project design of the Quarenghi architectural school. Michael Sibiryakov participated in trade merchant voyages to many islands and Alaska. In 1837 the building's ownership was transferred to the treasury and used as a residence for general-governors. From that time the RAC representatives were able to work here on some of their issues. Presently the Science Library of Irkutsk State University is located in this house.

17. Mylnikov's House

Merchants Mylnikov were also organizers of expeditions to the American coast and competitors of Shelikhov. Among founders of the Russian American Company were four men from Mylnikov family: Nikolai, Peter, Dmitry, Yakov. Later in the house was a hospital, at the end of the 19th century there was a cadet school. Now this house is used by a military topographical unit.

18. Kharlampievskaya Church

This wooden church was built in 1738 with money of Emelyan Yugov. In 1750 Yugov went on a boat "Ioann" for trade activities. In 1754 the boat returned with huge harvest of 10 000 skins of arctic fox and marine mammals, but Yugov had died and was buried on the Bering Island.

Wooden church was replaced by stone church with Yugov's remained capital and 15 000 rubles of Vasily Balakshin who also participated in sea fur campaigns in 1770's.

The building of this church has resemblances with temples of northern cities of Russia: Totma, Great Ustyug, Solvychegodsk. This church had given to Irkutsk such names as: Trapeznikov, Sibiryakov, Baranov, Kuskov, Golikov, etc. This is the only temple in Irkutsk having in a decor cartouches or brand stamps, decorative elements in the form of a shield or a scroll with rounded edges, symbols of sea charts. In Irkutsk this temple is called a "sea temple". In 1903 here was married the Lieutenant of Russian Fleet Alexander Kolchak.

At present time the temple is been restored, nevertheless, church services are still been conducted. Senior Priest of the church father Evgeniy Startsev directs restoration and construction work, conducts services and holidays celebrations, and he also provides great educational work with local population and youth. He also is a member of the club "Irkutsk-Fort Ross".

19. Irkutsk Office of the Russian American Company

Among Irkutsk historians an unequivocal opinion exists about this building, nonetheless, all of them agree that the later structure is located in a historical location that is significant for the Irkutsk-American history. The house of Ilya Andreevich Sizykh was purchased by the RAC Office in 1807. Ilya Sizykh was a participant of the Shelikhov's company. The newspaper "Irkutskie Gubernskie Vedomosti" informed: "Office of the Russian American Company per order of the main Headquarters of the company, is closed, effective April 19th, 1868. This news is to be known to the general public." The building was damaged in the Irkutsk fire of 1879. There is a commemorative plaque on the building, stating that in the given building there was an office of the Russian American Company.

Now 12 Irkutsk families live in the building. In order to organize a museum of Russian America in this building it is necessary to provide other housing to these families and to restore the building.