

CHAPTER 14: GLIMPSES INTO THE DAILY LIFE OF NEW ARKHANGEL

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Scattered throughout the immense domain of Russian America were settlements, for the most part characterized by their smallness and isolation from the rest of the world. Located primarily on Alaska's coastline, these settlements depended on supply from outside sources as well as on the resourcefulness of those working and living there. The colonial capital of New Arkhangel (present-day Sitka) was the exception. Established in 1799 and destroyed in a Tlingit Indian attack in 1802, the colony was reestablished at a nearby location following military action against the Tlingit two years later. In addition to the abundance of work associated with founding a new settlement, Russian American Company (RAC) workers at the site were tasked with shipbuilding almost from the beginning. In 1808 the colonial capital was moved from Paul's Harbor (present-day Kodiak) to New Arkhangel. New Arkhangel was to become the largest, most sophisticated settlement in Russian America, and would have frequent contact with the outside world through the Russian and foreign ships visiting there.

Because of the archaeological excavations at *Noow Tlein* - Castle Hill in downtown Sitka, it was thought that glimpses into daily life in New Archangel would help the reader have a fuller appreciation of what was uncovered (also, see Antonson 1990).

At least 35 industries / work activities have been identified in Russian America, and many were represented at New Arkhangel. Among these were the fur trade, shipbuilding / boatmaking, charcoal production, horticulture, carpentry, the ice trade, coppersmithing, machine working, lumbering, lumber milling, coopering, ropemaking, painting, joining, turning, observatory work, health care, teaching, religious work, defense, and munitions manufacture. These various industries suggest the residents of New Arkhangel were diversified in their skills.

In the beginning, the work at the new settlement was characterized by a rush of construction and work in the shipyard, along with logistical and defense concerns. Keeping the settlement provisioned and adequately defended against the Tlingit would remain chief concerns throughout New Arkhangel's history. In the early months of 1806, the people at the settlement were in dire need of food. Writing that year, Nikolai Rezanov noted "the prospect of continued famine" at New Archangel (Rezanov 1989:118). This caused Rezanov to sail south in search of provisions, and the purchasing of such from the Spanish in the San Francisco Bay area. Word of this food shortfall reached King Kamehameha in Hawaii; in 1806 he sent a letter to Chief Manager Aleksandr Baranov proposing to send foodstuffs in exchange for fairly-priced sea otter furs (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989a:lxv; Von Langsdorff 1989:44-45; Rezanov 1989:112). After its founding in 1812, the Russian settlement of Ft. Ross, in California, was a key supplier for the colonial capital, and a shipment of grain was sent yearly to New Arkhangel from Spanish missions in New California (Russian American Company 1989a:308; Lazarev 1989:375-376).

Early 1806 was an unhealthy time in New Arkhangel, and in Russian America in general. When Rezanov left New Arkhangel for points south in February 1806, 60 colonists were unable to work due to scurvy. Seventeen Russians died from the disease that year, but it is unclear whether they were stationed at New Arkhangel. Natives were

also affected. This situation began to improve on 22 March 1806 when the local herring run began, providing more fresh food. Residents doubled the number of private vegetable / potato gardens there; traders from Boston had provided Baranov with seed stock (Rezanov 1989:112, 142, 147).

Security concerns defined local needs and behaviors. At least during the first half of 1806, the Russians conducted their daily work under arms at all times, including cutting wood, burning charcoal, and going to the wharf and shipyard. Rezanov reported an aborted Tlingit attack on the colony in 1806, and wrote:

Even though the shipyards are not farther than three hundred sazhen from the fort, we always had loaded guns with us. Sentries are on the lookout on the hill and now we have a cannon ready in the shipyards, so that they do not set the ship on fire at nighttime [Tikhmenev 1979:226].

In April 1806 the settlement received news that the settlement of New Russia at Yakutat had been overrun and burned by Natives in October 1805, with the loss of all but eight men, two women, and three boys. These survivors were, at the time, being held by Natives for ransom (Rezanov 1989:143-144).

The critical need for security was impressed upon the populace by Chief Manager S.I. Yanovskii (1818 - 1820):

All watchmen must be reminded that anyone who falls asleep on duty or fails to keep a careful watch, especially anyone who leaves his assigned post, will be severely punished. The watch should be subjected to even greater supervision if they have failed to carry out their duties. Everyone knows that we have enemies who watch every minute to see if we will make some mistake, and should that happen, then we would all perish [Khlebnikov 1976:103, 104].

By 1826 New Arkhangel had been supplied with 77 guns and carronades, 15 falconets, 205 rifles, 95 additional rifles with bayonets, 53 carbines, 43 muskets, 291 pistols, unknown numbers of sabers and broadswords, and 1368 unspecified military weapons. In addition, munitions were produced in the settlement, specifically rockets, flares, powder, and ammunition (Khlebnikov 1976:95-96). The manpower needed to defend the walls, however, was in short supply. In the summer of 1826 the situation was such that even sick men and boys were assigned defensive positions, with "only a few of them ... familiar with how to handle heavy weapons" (Khlebnikov 1976:103). A detailed description of the community's fortifications is given by Tikhmenev, who writes:

The armaments and fortifications at New Archangel, although insufficient for protection from an attack by large vessels, are nevertheless adequate against any hostile attack by the savage native tribes, who, ever since Muravev managed the colonies, have lived under the very walls of the fort. There are about sixty cannon on all the forts and batteries at New Archangel, among them several for shooting explosive bombs. Another eighty-seven are in reserve, ranging from cannon capable of shooting bombs of two puds down to one pound falconets. ...The garrison is made up of all the male adults in the settlement, numbering 550. This includes about 180 soldiers from the Siberian infantry regiments and

about 90 sailors from the navy and the merchant marine. Every man knows his duties in case of alarm and has firearms [Tikhmenev 1978:418-420].

On September 22, 1854 the NIKOLAI I arrived at New Arkhangel with soldiers assigned to Siberian Line Battalion No. 14. From 1854 to 1855 there were two senior officers and 99 lower ranking troops at the settlement. The presence of these troops turned out to be timely, for on March 10-11, 1855, New Arkhangel was attacked by the Tlingits. The attack was repulsed, with two Russians killed and 19 wounded, and total casualties for the Tlingit at 60 to 80 (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989b:500, 502, 504). One Siberian infantry officer, Second Lieutenant Baranov, distinguished himself during this action and was awarded the Order of St. Anna of the Fourth Degree. Five other defenders were also selected for medals from the Tsar (Tikhmenev 1978:492).

In 1857 there were three officers and 187 soldiers (ranks unknown) in Russian America, and a year later there were a total of 166 lower ranking Siberian line battalion soldiers led by four senior officers (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989c:505). Assignment to the isolated settlement had its benefits. The RAC, responsible for paying the soldiers, doubled their salaries and provided other benefits (Tikhmenev 1978:371). In addition, most of the soldiers increased their incomes by doing extra work around the community (Golovin 1979:39-41; 139). Soldiers would continue to be stationed at New Arkhangel until the transfer of the colony to the United States on October 18, 1867.¹

Building construction and repair were important activities at various times in New Arkhangel. One of these times was in 1823, when Governor Matfei I. Muraviev reported that extensive construction was taking place in the community. Major construction was apparently underway in the early 1850s (Dilliplane 1990:137-138). During 1854-55, two sloop sheds were constructed, along with a steam-driven lumber mill (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989b:503).

Shipbuilding and repair were especially important in the settlement. Rezanov believed that shipbuilding would pay rich dividends (Tikhmenev 1979:186), and he saw to it that a shipyard was established soon after his 1805 arrival in New Arkhangel. Work on two vessels commenced - one, a tender, was hoped to be ready in May 1806 (Tikhmenev 1978:95; 1979:176). Shipbuilding continued in New Arkhangel until the sale of Russian America to the United States in 1867. In 1834, Governor Ferdinand Wrangell directed that all shipbuilding activities take place in the capital (Bancroft 1970:691). Shipwrights, coopers, woodworkers, boatwrights, ropemakers, and painters were needed to support this industry (Khlebnikov 1976:76). On 1 January 1825 New Arkhangel had 21 shipwrights and carpenters, along with 10 boatwrights, joiners, and turners (Khlebnikov 1976:41). New Arkhangel had two master shipwrights in 1833, both of whom were Creoles. One, Osip Egorovich Netsvetov, trained in Russia and served faithfully as a shipwright in Russian America for 32 years (Wrangell 1980:4; Netsvetov 1980:xvii, 51). Shipbuilding in New Arkhangel included the construction of two vessels for the American-Russian Trading Company, repairs to the whaling ship AIAN, and

¹ Perhaps the residents' concerns over adequate food supplies and military issues can explain, at least in part, instructions sent to the Chief Administrator of the colonies, Matvei I. Muravev, in January, 1820. The new governor was directed by the RAC to "not allow any servitor to leave, to the detriment of the Company, unless an urgent matter of justice demands that he be allowed to do so" (Russian American Company 1989d:324).

repairs to RAC ships. Also produced at the shipyard were masts and spars (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989b:503).

By 1817 the need in New Arkhangel for such "beneficial institutions" as a school and a hospital was recognized (Russian American Company 1989b:239). Both were established, the earliest school actually being set up around 1810 (Antonson 1990:170). At two schools in New Arkhangel in 1854-1855 40 students were being educated, 21 boys and 19 girls. There were also boys and girls schools in 1858 (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989c:506). The 1859 authorization by the Tsar to establish the Public School of the Russian American Colonies in New Arkhangel specified a required curriculum; among the subjects were catechism, geometry, geography, Russian history, and penmanship (Russian American Company 1989c:514). Also in 1854 - 1855, the settlement's hospital administered to 1,295 patients, and recorded 15 deaths (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989b:500). It is interesting to note, as analyzed through archaeological evidence, there is reason to believe the patients in the New Arkhangel hospital were primarily in the lower class (Blee 1986:440-441).

Religious activities were also important in the colonial capital, and included church functions and seminary studies. In 1858 the seminary closed its doors, with the students and some of the faculty being transferred to Yakutsk in Siberia (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989c:508).

A rather unique activity at New Arkhangel, and for a time one of its key businesses, was cutting ice for sale in California. Also done on Lesnoi (Woody) Island near Kodiak, the idea was to fill the demand for ice in California considerably quicker than ice could be obtained from Boston. In New Arkhangel the work entailed marking, cutting, and dislodging squares of lake ice, and hauling them, with the help of a wood rail system, to ice houses for storage, and later to vessels for transport south. The company hired Creoles and Natives for this purpose (Dilliplane 1990:141). However, temperatures did not favor the New Arkhangel operation: an ice thickness of 11 inches was the best that could be hoped for, and even that was only obtainable for a maximum of 10 days each year (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989c:511).²

Recreational activities were important, and of all the settlements in Russian America, New Arkhangel had the most to offer. Company employees there were given time for rest and recuperation; there were 84 non-work days in the settlement in 1858 (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989c:510). Off-duty time in the community was for holiday activities; official, officer, and special activities; and relaxation options for everyone (Dilliplane 1993:2-11). Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, the anniversary of the crowning of the Tsar, the Tsar's birthday and name day, the name day of the heir to the throne, and the name day of the community's patron saint were observed (Hagemeister 1984:119; Nedelkovich 1860:52). The individual's own name day (the day on the church calendar honoring his/her patron saint) was honored. All could involve special meals and the consumption of spirits.

² The Lesnoi Island operation was supplied from New Arkhangel. Lumber, workmen, and a supervisory assistant for ice-house construction were transported, via the brig SHELIKHOV, from New Arkhangel to Lesnoi Island in 1854. It wasn't until 1858 that lumber needed to finish the job was delivered (Dmytryshyn et al. 1989b:501; 1989c:508).

In the category of "official, officer, and special activities" were balls. In 1842-43, the Chief Manager and his wife held a ball and a banquet every month. The invited guests were primarily the officers of the settlement and their families (Plummer 1991:114). Others also hosted balls. Lesser parties also took place, some hosted by the Chief Manager and some scheduled at the Club, a building used for card-playing, dining, and lodging. A popular card game among the officers seems to have been one known as Preference, reminiscent of Whist (Dilliplane 1993:5).

The common worker in New Arkhangel was not usually invited to these affairs. They relaxed by drinking tea and using tobacco. In 1860 each Russian in the capital was estimated to drink, on a yearly basis, 10 pounds of tea (Fedorova 1973:238).³ Chief Manager Hagemeister ordered tobacco to be ready for disbursement as labor payments to RAC employees (Hagemeister et al. 1984:35). Later, "fine Manila cigars" were said to be available in the town at a less expensive price than in St. Petersburg (Nedelkovich 1860:44).

The consumption of alcohol was another diversion, although official restriction and logistics could at times make it hard to find. During New Arkhangel's early years, Baranov allowed a special feasting / vodka-drinking area to be developed. The bark-covered party huts were located somewhat away from the settlement (Hagemeister et al. 1984:86-87).⁴ Along with vodka, rum was popular. Dr. Georg Schaffer, working for Baranov, noted that there was food enough for everyone in the settlements provided that the purchase of rum by the colonists didn't interfere (Pierce 1976:189). The popularity of rum with New Arkhangel residents in 1840 was noted by Lt. Zagoskin when he wrote "it is impossible to live in Sitka without rum--this is the only currency for which you can obtain anything at the 'right' price" (Zagoskin 1967:74). Ensign Nedelkovich also noted the social importance of rum in New Arkhangel:

So that if you need to have something made in the workshop, although this is forbidden, they ask secretly for either ten rubles assignatsii, or a bottle of rum, which many often give to avoid personal expenditure. As a result, particularly on holidays, there is a great deal of drunkenness (1860:45).

The estimated average annual rum cost for a RAC resident of New Arkhangel in 1860 was at least 18.72% of his yearly salary. This translates to 104 cups of rum at the RAC price of 63 paper kopeks per cup (Fedorova 1973:237).

Another recreation option for leaving the rigors of work behind was taking a stroll. Other options included the community's library and museum. Sleigh-riding and ice skating were found in the colony as well as well (Golovin 1983:98). Several special activities for the New Arkhangel laborer and his family included a theater "for the

³ An extreme of tea drinking can be seen at the far-removed and isolated colony at Nulato. Here each Russian sat down to four "tea meals" per day, drinking a daily total of 40 cups (Adams 1982:130).

⁴ The consumption of alcoholic spirits at New Arkhangel could get in the way of orderly work production. An example of this occurred in the early days of the settlement when Rezanov prohibited workers from drinking more than one bottle of vodka per day. The shipyard workforce mutinied and, along with others, threatened to attack New Arkhangel and take both Rezanov and Baranov prisoners. The attack and capture apparently never took place (Tikhmenev 1979:195, 196).

ordinary people" to celebrate Christmas in 1860, and mask parties (Nedelkovich 1860:55).

In its activities, New Arkhangel was the busiest, most diversified settlement in Russian America. The daily business of its residents ranged from simple to complex, as did the recreational outlets. The evidence of workplace activities found during the excavations at Noow Tlein / Castle Hill fits into the purposes of the community and provides a glimpse into long-lost facets of New Arkhangel's history.