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First Ladies

The province of Siberia, 19th century

The second most important person of West Siberia after her husband.

A contemporary about the general-governor's wife

In Western Europe and in America, the so-called *women's studies* formed into a separate branch of knowledge as far back as in the late 1960s — early 1970s. Today, looking at a historical epoch with women's eyes will not surprise anyone. Having freed itself from radical feminism, so characteristic of women's studies at the onset, this branch of learning has been progressing quickly, and you can see it on the curricula of hundreds

of educational institutions. In Russian historic literature, "women's theme" has been present for over 200 years, but in the last two decades these investigations have witnessed a real boom (Pushkareva, 2002).

A distinguishing feature of Soviet historiography was that for many years the women's question was considered in the context of women's emancipation, which not only reflected the objective reality but, above all, met the ideological and political requirements of the time. On the other hand, many works dwelt on associated subjects — women's legal and economic status, their role in the family, the possibility of their professional education and carriers, and the government's policy — in a word, on everything that has become the subject of today's women's studies. Also, there are a number of demographic, sociological, and literary studies dealing with the life of Siberian women in the 19th century (Goncharov, 2004).

The market economy that rushed into our life in the early 1990s ruined a lot of national stereotypes. In the first place, these changes affected our values including the ideas of women's role in the family and in the society. However, the juxtaposition of modern, intrinsic to the globalization epoch, and traditional models of women's behavior, so typical of our days, partly derives from complete ignorance of the national historical background.

Depictions of ladies in fashionable outfits of the 19th century are from the book *Pink Ksandreika and Dradedam Scarf: Clothes — Things and Images in Russian Literature* by R. M. Kirsanova (Moscow, 1989), in which pictures from the fashion magazines of that time were used

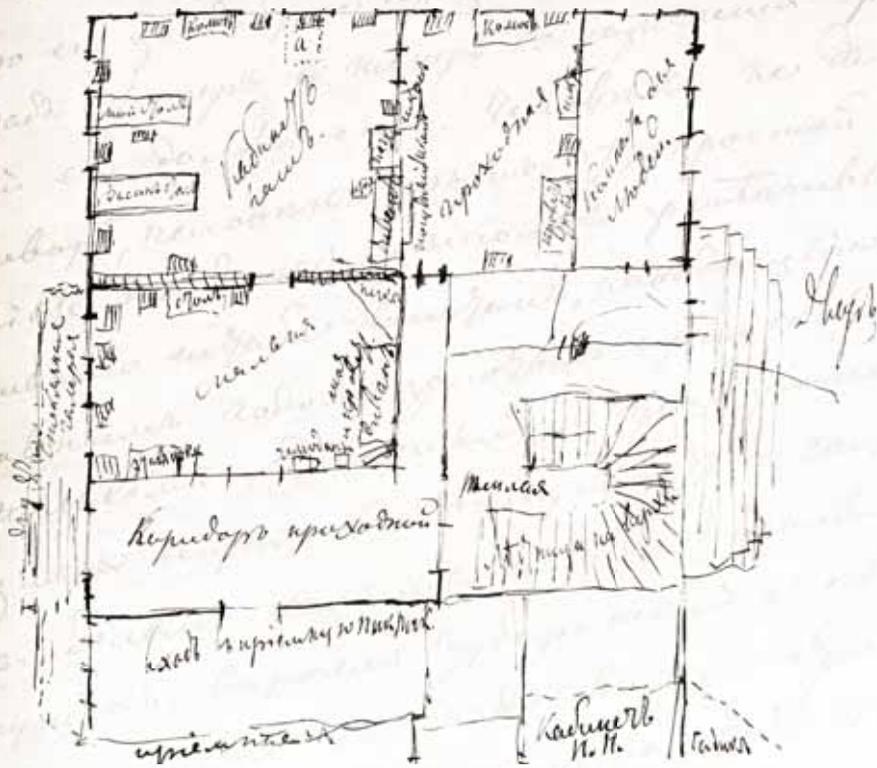
The History of First Ladies in Memoirs

The 19th century Russia and Siberia had a few bright, independent and dynamic personalities, in particular, wives of heads of local administration, governors and general-governors (a general-governor was in charge of a vast region consisting of a few provinces, like East or West Siberia). Women began to participate in social life long before the end of the 19th century, when women's emancipation, first in vogue with the intelligentsia, spread precipitately to the aristocratic circles of the Russian society.

Regretfully, the historic evidence of everyday lives of these women, wives of high-ranking officers, of their responsibilities and relationship with their husbands is scarce. The reason is trivial: in the "men's society" of our ancestors, women's life and activities were not supposed important, even though throughout most of the 18th century Russia was ruled by empresses.

Most valuable in this respect are memoirs: they contain lively stories about the past and can convey the atmosphere of the years gone by better than any other source. Memoirs are irreplaceable if you need to get an insight into the people's frame of mind, morals and psychology — in general, when you turn to the human component of any historical process.

Memoirs written by the Russian women of the 19th century are very few. According to our estimate, out of 3, 585 diaries and memoirs known today and referring to the years 1801—1856 of Russian history, only 248, i. e. less than 7%, were written or dictated by women. Among Russian women autobiographers there were some citizens of Siberia.



Plan of a part of the house of East Siberia's General-Governor N. N. Muraviev from M. S. Korsakov's letter. Manuscript Department of the Russian state library

And yet, the life of women belonging to the top circle of Siberian military and civil administration can be reconstructed primarily on the basis of memoirs belonging to men – their husbands, relations and friends. The biographers who wrote about women paid special attention to the wives of high-ranking officers – and there was another reason for it, apart from the predictable interest in the life of big bosses, namely, the exclusive position these women held in the society.

The Lady of the “Big House”

Governors were transferred to Siberia from the European part of Russia on the Tsar's order. Their average term of service in the same place was four years (from a year to 15 years), and their families thus had to move often. And each time, the women had to adapt to the new climate, new way of life, new environment and sometimes to new responsibilities.

For instance, the General-Governor of West Siberia A. O. Dougamel recollected that when he was sent as an envoy to Persia, his wife mastered the Persian language and made friends with the wives of Persian dignitaries,

including the Shah's first wife, and got invited, together with her spouse, to see the Shah himself. However, after a few years of diplomatic service and then of quiet life in St Petersburg in the Senator's position, her husband was appointed General-Governor and sent to the far-away Siberia. One can only guess how different living conditions were in these diametrically opposite points of the globe: Persia, St Petersburg and Siberia!

Officers of high ranks who served in Irkutsk, Tobolsk, Tomsk, and Omsk had at their disposal special-purpose houses or were paid “accommodation” money. With rare exceptions, the governors' houses were roomy and comfortable: they had a ball room and a spacious drawing room for giving receptions, grand dinners and balls; the governor's study and reception room; and rooms for his closest associates (general-governor's adjuncts and special-duty officers even lived in the same house, as shows the plan of a part of the house of East Siberia's General-Governor N. N. Muraviev, drawn by his close associate M. S. Korsakov in his letter

to the parents). In addition, the house had a bedroom, wife's boudoir, her personal drawing room, dining room, children's rooms and rooms for the servants. Household buildings were placed in the yard.

Palaces of the general-governors of East and West Siberia have survived to this day. In Irkutsk, it is the so-called “White House” on the bank of the Angara River, now home to Irkutsk University's Academic Library. In Omsk, it is the building of the Vrubel Art Museum of the Omsk oblast.

Officers' houses in the remote parts of Siberia looked very different. For example, stoves of the governor's house based in Chita were made in the wrong way, so it was impossible to keep the house warm in winter. In Blagoveshchensk and in Nikolaevsk-on-the-Amur, centers of the Amur oblast and of the Primorie oblast, respectively, the governors' houses were erected simultaneously with the cities' infrastructure. This is what a memoirist wrote about the early days of Nikolaevsk: “The city was built on a site covered with dense forest, and all the streets of the city (except the main one) were lined with tree-stumps; a witty sailor nicknamed the city “Saint-Germain-des-Pnes” (“pen” is the Russian for a tree-stump).

To Feed and To Warm

It was not easy to find good servants either: Siberia lacked for skillful housemaids, cooks, footmen, and valets. Sometimes, masters brought their servants along with them, but this practice stopped when servitude was abolished. As a rule, it was the women who were charged with the complicated task of hiring servants, and they had to take risks.

The daughter of Tobolsk Governor D. M. Frantseva wrote, “We chose our servants from the convicts. <...> They were then registered as residents of the city, which they valued highly” (Frantseva, 1888). Some of the convicts were real criminals; others were serfs punished for offences against their masters.

The servants' duties went beyond looking after the family. Top officers often invited a large number of their subordinates for dinner. In Irkutsk, the General-Governor used to treat at least ten people daily, that is, on week days.

Minusinsk district police officer A. K. Kouzmin remarked about the Yenisey Governor V. I. Kopylov, who was reputed to be greedy: “Everyone has the right to privacy when he is at home; but the governor, even at home, cannot enjoy his private life because he gets money for meals.” In far-away regions, this practice was dictated not by the etiquette alone – dinners in their boss's home were the only way for young unmarried officers to have regular and healthy meals.

The wives of Kamchatka's heads L. I. Rikord and Y. E. Zavoiko, and the wife of the head of the Amur Expedition E. I. Nevelskaya are known to have taken care of health, education and nourishment of junior officers, apart from their own families.

Yulia Egorovna, the wife of the first governor of Kamchatka V. I. Zavoiko, the daughter of a St Petersburg professor and niece of the famous traveler Baron F. P. Vranghel, recollected that about 30 military and civil officers would get together in the dining room – otherwise many of them would be starving. Yulia Egorovna had ten children; the family had to run a farm so as to feed not only themselves but also the governor's associates.

The life of this outstanding woman was, at times, dramatic. During the Crimean war, a year after the heroic defense of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky in 1854, Kamchatka's population, in-

cluding the governor's family, was precipitately evacuated. In Nikolaevsk, where they managed to bring only one cow, Y. E. Zavoiko, crying bitterly, had to divide a liter of milk between her ten children. Her memoirs written 30 years later reflect some of her bitter worries (Zavoiko, 1876).

Children's Education

Back in those times, women's life was marred with a high rate of children's mortality. Medicine was helpless in front of many diseases which have been overcome nowadays. In Siberia, lack for qualified doctors was especially acute. In fact, the general-governor had to invite to his home a state criminal, a Decembrist in exile, F. B. Wolf.

Organizing children's education was also a problem. In the first half of the 19th century there were only two gymnasias for boys: in Tobolsk and in Irkutsk; in 1868 another one opened in Krasnoyarsk; and in 1845 the East Siberian Institute for Girls was started. Highly-ranked officers did not often send their children to these establishments: sons were usually educated at cadet corps in Central Russia (for instance, the son of General-Governor V. Ya. Rupert attended the elite Pazhesky Corps), and daughters went to privileged institutes for noble girls located in the capitals, St Petersburg and Moscow. Up to the age of 11 or 12, the children, even boys, were educated at home.



The “White House”: general-governors' palace in Irkutsk (now the building of the Academic Library of the Irkutsk State University). Photo by V. Korotkoruchko



Building of the former East Siberian Institute for Noble Girls in Irkutsk.
Photo by V. Korotkoruchko

To prepare children and teenagers for studies at educational establishments, one needed tutors, governesses and teachers, who normally accompanied the family to Siberia or were ordered from Russia. One could manage to find quality teachers in Tobolsk or Irkutsk; but such remote places as Yakutsk, the Amur estuary, or Kamchatka had no teachers at all. The children of Kamchatka's General-Governor V. I. Zavoiko were taught by their parents. Sending children to gymnasias and cadet corps thousands of kilometers away was a problem, both from the financial and psychological point of view; therefore, a common reason given in applications for transfer to Russia was the necessity to give children education.

The situation began to change in the second half of the 19th century: girls' gymnasias were opened, boys' gymnasias became more numerous, and vocational schools emerged. The level of education grew: one could go to the Siberian Cadet Corps in Omsk; and in 1888 Siberia finally had its own university in Tomsk. Nevertheless, family education preserved its importance as a basis and pledge of the sons' future successful career.

In a Vortex of High Life

Governors' spouses had another primary duty: to manage the life of high society, that is, to hold balls, receptions, music concerts, and formal dinner-parties, in which guest-

performers from Moscow and St Petersburg often participated.

The wife of the first governor of the Amur oblast Ekaterina Matveevna Bousse, a graduate of the East Siberian Institute for Girls and an ardent music-lover, managed to turn her home into a center of social and cultural life. Apart from receptions and dinners, she organized amateur performances and parties with dances, "live pictures", and reading aloud — which meant that the governor's house (which belonged to the government) had to be "very beautiful, large and with various amusements", which included a winter garden and a spacious summer-house twined with ivy. Lots of attributes of civilized life had to be ordered from Russia and from abroad.

Governor N. V. Bousse complained to General-Governor M. S. Korsakov, "There is neither a piano nor a grand piano in Blagoveshchensk <...> The wife is aggrieved", and asked to purchase the instrument with the government's money "as this was done in

Chita and in Yakutsk" (archive 137, Manuscript Department, Russian State Library). This kind of activity required a lot of time and efforts. Applying for a permission to go to Irkutsk for a short holiday, Bousse wrote to Korsakov that his wife was tired of "colossal household activities she was not accustomed to, horrible servants", reception days and dinners.

Girls from noble families had been taught to be hostesses and centers of high life since early childhood, but not all the high society ladies managed to get command of this skill. For instance, the wife of West Siberia's General-Governor Natalia Dmitrievna Gorchakova was "a reticent woman; she was near-sighted and felt embarrassed to see a new face, so formal receptions held by the General-Governor were a torture for her. She preferred a more retiring and modest life, dedicated a lot of her time to children's education, often traveled to Russia, and finally moved there." (Frantseva, 1888, p. 391).

Social standards liberating aristocratic women from the rule of service hierarchy and widespread in the capitals as early as in the 18th century were not adopted at once in Russia's provinces. During her journey from St Petersburg to Kamchatka in 1817, Ludmila Ivanovna Rikord witnessed the following scene in the drawing room of Irkutsk Governor N. I. Treskin: "Ladies paying visits or coming on invitation entered the drawing room, where the governor's wife was seated on a sofa; they gave her a low bow, and

she remained seated and held out her hand, which they kissed" (Frantseva, 1888, page 391). The young lady coming from the capital did her best to avoid this shocking local practice.

Thirty years later, in 1848, a young graduate of the Alexandrovsky Lyceum, B. V. Struve, was passing through West Siberia. He left evidence of the astonishing behavior of West Siberia's General-Governor Prince P. D. Gorchakov at a ball. Willing "to show attention to a girl or a lady, he would do a turn of waltz with her and then, as though throwing her out of his arms to his aide, would say, 'There you go! Give her a whirl around.'" (By the way, twelve years later the Struve family had the son Peter who subsequently became an active member of the cadet party and founder of the famous dynasty of public figures and publishers.)

Social Life and Charity

Reforms of the 1860s brought radical changes to the life of this country and, among other things, affected women's participation in social life. In the 1850s—1860s, prison committees and charity societies taking care of the poor, invalids, orphans and elderly people sprang up in the central cities of gubernias (provinces).

Each of these associations had a women's department normally managed by wives of local administration heads. Also, these ladies were often guardians of girls' gymnasias and schools, orphanages and other charity establishments. Their duties included regular fund-raising for the benefit of their charges, personnel recruitment and similar responsibilities. This work was done in co-operation with governmental bodies: school boards, charity ministries, exile expeditions and construction commissions of gubernia departments.

Anna Mikhailovna Artsimovich, the wife of Tobolsk Governor, was known to manage the organization, by the Tobolsk Guardian Prison Committee, of seamstresses' courses in the women's transit prison.

In Omsk, they still tell stories about the young and charming wife of West Siberia's General-Governor G. Kh. Gasford Lubov Feodorovna, who impressed everyone with her kindness and sympathy. In 1851, M. S. Korsakov wrote to his relations, "the Lubinka Lvova you know is getting married and will be the most important person in West Siberia after her husband".

Gustav Christianovich Gasford, who was much older than his wife, brought her along with him on his rounds of "troops based in the steppe" or on visits to the "boundary Cossack settlements". The legendary image of the Governor's young wife — she died very early — was reflected in Omsk toponymy: the Lubinsky prospect (now Lenin street) and Lubinsky Garden were named in her honor.

The wife of the Cis-Amur General-Governor Varvara Feodorovna Dukhovskaya (née Princess Golitsina) was brought up in St Petersburg high society. In her memoirs, she dwelt on her activities in the charity society, drama circle, music society, women's school (future progymnasium), public library, public readings, and girls' orphanage, to name just a few.

Friend and Wife

The governors' spouses played an important role not only in the social, cultural and charity activities of their husbands. Also, they were mothers of honor at the weddings of their husbands' subordinates and godmothers of their children. Civil and military officers had to apply to their boss for approval before getting married. Such approval was only granted with the spouse's consent.

Sometimes the moral qualities of the "first lady" governed the official behavior of her husband and the ways and manners of his close associates. The wives of high-ranking officers took part in the discussion of many subjects concerning government.

S. I. Cherepanov left the following evidence about the wife of N. I. Treskin, the governor of Irkutsk in 1806—1819: "Treskin's wife was in charge of all the activities of her husband. Having hired such people as head of police Loskutov





The portrait of L. F. Gasford is one of the few depictions of Siberian general-governors' wives found in the archives of the Pereyaslavl-Zalesky State History and Architecture Museum.

This portrait was published in 1987 in the album *Watercolor and Pencil Portraits of 18th—19th cc. in the museums of Russia* and signed "L. F. Tasford". P. P. Vibe managed to attribute this portrait of Lubov Feodorovna Gasford kept in the Museum, where it had been brought from her sister's estate (Vibe, Dziubanov, 2004, pp. 54—55). This is the first time the wife of West Siberia's General-Governor G. Kh. Gasford is presented to the readers under her real name



The wife of Cis-Amur General-Governor V. F. Dukhovskaya had a wide range of interests and a bent for charity. Photo from the book *From my Memories* by V. F. Dukhovskaya — St Petersburg, 1900

В. Духовская
С. Степанов
1900 г.

and heads of the Governor's chancellery <...>, she set the task of collecting a pud (c. 16 kilograms) of banknotes for each of her eight children" (Excerpts from the memoirs by S. I. Cherepanov, 1876, p. 73). It should be noted, to be fair, that the governor's reputation, though compromised (which was mainly because of his domineering and greedy wife), was not completely tainted — modern investigators give him credit for improving the city and developing the economy of the gubernia.

The wife of Yakutsk Governor Y. I. Schtubendorf, Adelaida Karlovna, was made notorious by the well-known artist N. A. Stepanov, so the governor had to apply for retirement: the satirical magazine *Iskra* published a caricature depicting extortion of furs from the Yakuts by the governor's wife.

However, not all the first ladies had such wicked bents. For instance, nobody dared even to mention giving a present to Elena Vilhelmovna, the wife of Yenisei Governor V. K. Padalka (she was the daughter of East Siberia's General-Governor V. Ya. Roupert). The only person who managed to get round her strictness was Nikolay Miasnikov, the famous Siberian owner of a gold-mine, who gave her, as a souvenir, bast sandals made from gold (Excerpts from memoirs by S. I. Cherepanov, 1876, p. 79).

Memoirs contain a lot of testimony that not only the wives but mistresses of top officers interfered with their service functions. This is what M. D. Frantseva wrote about A. R. Shramm, a general's wife, who exerted a strong influence over West Siberia's General-Governor P. D. Gorchakov after the departure of his wife: "The governing of the region

was entirely in her hands; if somebody needed something, they applied directly to her, bringing her tribute to make the application successful" (Frantseva, 1888, p. 626).

In the 1840s Siberia had a "gold rash". Discovery of gold deposits and gold mine development (mainly in the Yenisei gubernia and partly in the Tomsk gubernia) not only revived the region's economy but brought about new ways of illegal enrichment. To oppose corruption, laws were adopted prohibiting Siberian officers to have their own mines and to be engaged in gold mining.

It did not take the officers long to learn how to get round this prohibition: they registered their property in the name of their wives. For instance, L. A. Piatnitskaya, the wife of Irkutsk governor, and Appolinaria Rodstvennaya, the wife of the head of the mountain okrug (district), became gold mine owners. By the way, the daughter of A. Rodstvennaya,

Caricature of the wife of Yakutsk Governor Yu. I. Shtubendorf by N. A. Stepanov (Iskra magazine, 1863, № 39, October 1, p. 539)



Жена Властельнаго лица вродила лхрными овощы и жорья своего дома.
 Якуть — Эго чубо, мяча?
 Она — Эго морковь, рѣпа, свекла.
 Якуть — А здать его, мяча?
 Она — Эдять, очень вкусно, лучше лошадиного мяса, а бакъ дешево: по бакъ за штуку.

a representative of the women's emancipation movement L. A. Shaniavskaya, invested virtually all the money she had inherited in the development of women's courses and in the famous Narodny (People's) University in Moscow, named after her husband A. Shaniavskiy.

The French Siberian

Back in the 19th century, one of the duties of top officers was frequent journeys through Siberia's vast expanse. Some of the first ladies were very enthusiastic about traveling; in the first place, we should mention Ekaterina Nikolaevna Muravieva and Lidia Konstantinovna Poltoratskaya, who were broadminded, well educated, curious, and courageous.

The wife of N. N. Muraviev-Amursky, General-Governor of East Siberia in 1847–1861, was born in France and belonged to the ancient aristocratic family de Richemond from Lorraine. She met her future husband during his trip abroad. The wedding was held on January 19, 1847 in the city of Bogoroditsk, Tula gubernia, where Muraviev was the governor. Before getting married, the young Frenchwoman adopted Orthodox Christianity and became Ekaterina Nikolaevna. A year later she followed her husband to Siberia, a remote and completely unfamiliar land.

The wife of Nikolay Muraviev, who played an important role in the history of Siberia and Russia, helped her husband in all his deeds. It was mostly thanks to the initiative and perseverance of this outstanding statesman that the huge Amur krai (region) became part of the Russian Empire and the present boundary with China was established, which earned Muraviev the title of a count and the honorary post-fix of Amursky to his name in 1858. Today, in Khabarovsk, you can see a statue of Muraviev-Amursky made by the sculptor A. M. Opekushin (this monument is depicted in the Russian five-thousand-ruble note).

Ekaterina Nikolaevna had to live in Irkutsk, in the general-governor's palace, and to run the huge house. They also had a greenhouse, which was "very good and was kept very clean". M. S. Korsakov devoted a few pages of his diary to its description: "The ivy twines beautifully over the walls. There are some trees: quite a big fig tree, and a lemon tree with a ripe lemon in it, grape vines, roses, carnations, mignonette, jasmine, and others." In a letter to his relations, Korsakov also mentioned that "next to the house, Nikolay Nikolaevich has a small garden he planted himself, with raspberries and other berries", and the greenhouse had some pineapple trees. In this garden, "they kept a wild goat and a hare". All this was not too exotic for Irkutsk: the city had long been famous for the huge greenhouse belonging to the educated merchant V. N. Basnin. And yet, keeping such a luxurious house required a lot of energy and attention. Nevertheless, the interests of the governor's young wife went beyond her household duties.



The wives of Siberian top officials often accompanied their husbands during perilous expeditions and dangerous journeys through unexplored Siberian lands. Photo of the early 20th c.

The wives of Decembrists, E. I. Trubetskaya and M. N. Volkonskaya, kept her company, as well as the cello player E. Chrisiani, who gave concerts in Siberia. When it was reported to the authorities that Muraviev had made friends with state criminals, he defended himself by saying that his French wife had to socialize with ladies who had a fluent command of her mother tongue.

Muravieva was a broadminded woman. In the 1850s she made a copy of the prohibited Siberian works by M. S. Lunin *Letters from Siberia* and *View of the Polish Affairs* "from the original kept by the Volkonskiye" (Matkhanova, 1998). (In 1841, the exiled Decembrist Lunin was arrested again and put in the Akatui prison, where he died.) Muravieva's guests discussed a lot of serious matters, including the colonization started in the Amur krai.

"Those who knew Ekaterina Nikolaevna personally", wrote her husband's biographer I. P. Barsukov, "stated that she was exceptionally beautiful, intelligent and educated; <...> also, she had a kind heart and loved her new motherland. Muraviev, infatuated with his wife, was under her influence <...> and we cannot fail to notice that this influence had unfailingly good results, sometimes pacifying." I. A. Goncharov, who visited Siberia in 1855, wrote about her favorably and with admiration (Count N. N. Muraviev-Amursky in *Memoirs*, p. 140).

Ekaterina Nikolaevna, an enthusiastic traveler, managed to talk her husband into letting her take part in his first trip to Kamchatka, in 1849, and swore "to bear all hardships without a murmur". B. V. Struve, who accompanied the

couple in that journey, recollected that the General agreed "because he was passionately in love with her" (Count N. N. Muraviev-Amursky in *Memoirs*, p. 56). "After the first 25 verst's (a verst is 3,500 feet) on horseback", wrote Struve, "she was so exhausted that she wasn't able to mount the horse at the time fixed. <...> Muraviev ordered to send his wife, together with the valet Flegant back to Yakutsk, where she could wait for the general's return from Kamchatka or go back to Irkutsk. Muraviev <...> rode on, and Ekaterina Nikolaevna would have returned to Yakutsk, had she not, having satisfied herself that her husband was unyielding, made a superhuman effort: with my and Flegant's help she mounted her horse and followed her heartless husband, crying bitterly. How could he be so cruel? His behavior was attributed to his experience: he knew that if one stayed in bed in the state his wife was in, the ailment would last a few days more; whilst if you mounted the horse again right away and continued to ride, the illness would go away, and no precious time would be lost. During that journey, we witnessed a lot of such dismal and depressing scenes, which in retrospect were looked back at with a smile" (Count N. N. Muraviev-Amursky in *Memoirs*, pp. 57–58).

In 1855, Mme Muravieva took part in the second Amur rafting and spent a few weeks on a vessel hardly fit for such a long and difficult voyage, thus making a few thousand verst's in the wild area which did not formally belong to Russia. A chance eyewitness wrote in his memoirs how, in the fall of 1855, Muraviev and his suite were traveling from Ayan — a port on the Sea of Okhotsk coast — to the



mountains: “I shortly saw a herd of dogs harnessed on to sledges, with Ekaterina Nikolaevna in the first sledge; and behind them a cavalcade of riders on deer, headed by Nikolay Nikolaevich Muraviev.” (Count N.N. Muraviev-Amursky in *Memoirs*, pp. 151–152).

Many fellow-travelers of the future countess remembered how she had interceded with the formidable boss for the guilty. “It was only thanks to the kind sympathy of Ekaterina Nikolaevna, the General’s spouse, wrote the participant of one of the first rafting trips along the Amur M. G. Demidov, that <...> unnecessary cruelty did not take place and the Cossack captain Medvedev was not left on shore on Muraviev’s order for having grounded a barge” (Count N.N. Muraviev-Amursky in *Memoirs*, pp. 156). E. N. Muravieva and M. S. Korsakov’s intercession helped the Cossack captain Imberg, whom the General-Governor ordered to shoot for abandoning positions without an order during the war.

Hard and dangerous expeditions undermined Muravieva’s health. Several times she received treatment at local mineral water spas, went abroad to restore her health, and in December 1857 she moved from Siberia for good.

Shortly, Muraviev took a long leave and went to France, and on January 27, 1861 left Siberia never to return. After his retirement he was appointed a member of the State

Council and moved, together with his wife, to St Petersburg, spending a few months a year in France. He died there in 1881, and Ekaterina Nikolaevna survived her husband by 16 years. Her remains rest in the family vault in the vicinity of Pau, France (Matkhanova, 1998).

Lady Traveler and Photographer

The second half of the 19th century in Russia, including Siberia, was marked by social changes. A bright emancipated representative of that time was the wife of the Semilpalatinsk military governor, Lidia Konstantinovna Poltaratskaya, the daughter of the well-known man of letters K. P. Masalsky.

Poltaratskaya accompanied her husband in his travels through the unexplored and little known places of the Altai. Up in the mountains, she had to ride a horse in a man’s saddle, wear a beshmet (a quilted Tatar semi-caftan, or a man’s long tight-fitting coat worn underneath a caftan) and chembary (wide trousers worn over a sheepskin coat, whose flaps are stuck into the chembary). For festivals and celebrations she changed from her Tatar man’s outfit into her “Tatar woman’s dress” (Poltaratskaya, 1871, p. 640).

“A noble lady, that is an officer’s wife”, wrote Lidia Konstantinovna in her notes, “having encountered us at a picket, later told everybody that she had met the General with his mistress; and would reject all the arguments of the postmaster who knew us and was trying to reason with her — her counter-argument was that a noble, educated lady couldn’t be traveling without a room maid” (Poltaratskaya, 1871, p.558).

Once, they happened to be alone with her ten-year-old boy on mountainous scree. “My Goodness, it was more than likely that I would slip down, and, above all, my dear Kostya, recollected Poltaratskaya. There was nothing I could do to help him, I only ordered him not to stop. <...> If, a few minutes before that, I had been sentenced to death for having exposed a child to such danger, I wouldn’t have uttered a word in protest” (Poltaratskaya, 1871, p. 598).

In the late 1870s, Lidia Konstantinovna, together with her husband and two children, accompanied the German exploratory expedition, one of whose members was the famous naturalist Alfred Brehm. Her notes show that she was skilled in battue hunting, with which they entertained the reputed travelers. Without any complaints, she enumerated the difficulties and hardships they had survived and even stated that that journey was among the most pleasant memories of their life in Siberia.

Lidia Konstantinovna was carried away with photography, and must have been the first woman-photographer in Siberia. Cameras convenient for trips appeared some

time later; in those days “the cameras and supports were very cumbersome; glass plates (there were no films yet) were difficult to transport because of their size and weight. One had to take along a bottle with liquid colloidine” and other solutions. Despite numerous limitations of landscape photography — it was impossible to combine foreground and background and to photograph when it was windy (the exposure lasted a minute or a minute and a half); greenery looked like a homogeneous dark spot, etc., — the pictures made by L. K. Poltaratskaya “were technically good. <...> She took into consideration the location of separate groups of plants and outlines of mountains, hills, and glaciers. She tried “to lift” the skyline, which improved the picture’s composition” (Morozov, 1961, p. 48).

The photographs she had taken during her journeys made part of *The Album of West Siberian Types and Species*, which contained over 50 depictions of Altai landscapes and its inhabitants; their everyday life and appearance. For this album, Poltaratskaya “was awarded the large silver medal at the Moscow anthropological exhibition of 1879” and was made “a member — organizer of the newly established Photography Department of the Russian Technical Society” (Morozov, 1961, pp. 33-35).

Having learnt some things about the life of the “first ladies” of the Siberian province of the 19th century, we can realize that the status of a spouse of a high-ranking dignitary set the woman a certain model of behavior.

Despite these bounds, however, she could reveal her personality, her nature, her bents and talents: among the wives of top officers of the Russian Empire you can find skilful managers and high society ladies, benefactresses and patrons of the art, sharks and bribe-takers, caring mothers to their own children and to their husbands’ subordinates, and participants of dangerous expeditions. It is more than likely that future researchers of women’s studies will repeat after us the following words: *Em di tus sinaris. Satilienimum ia?*

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