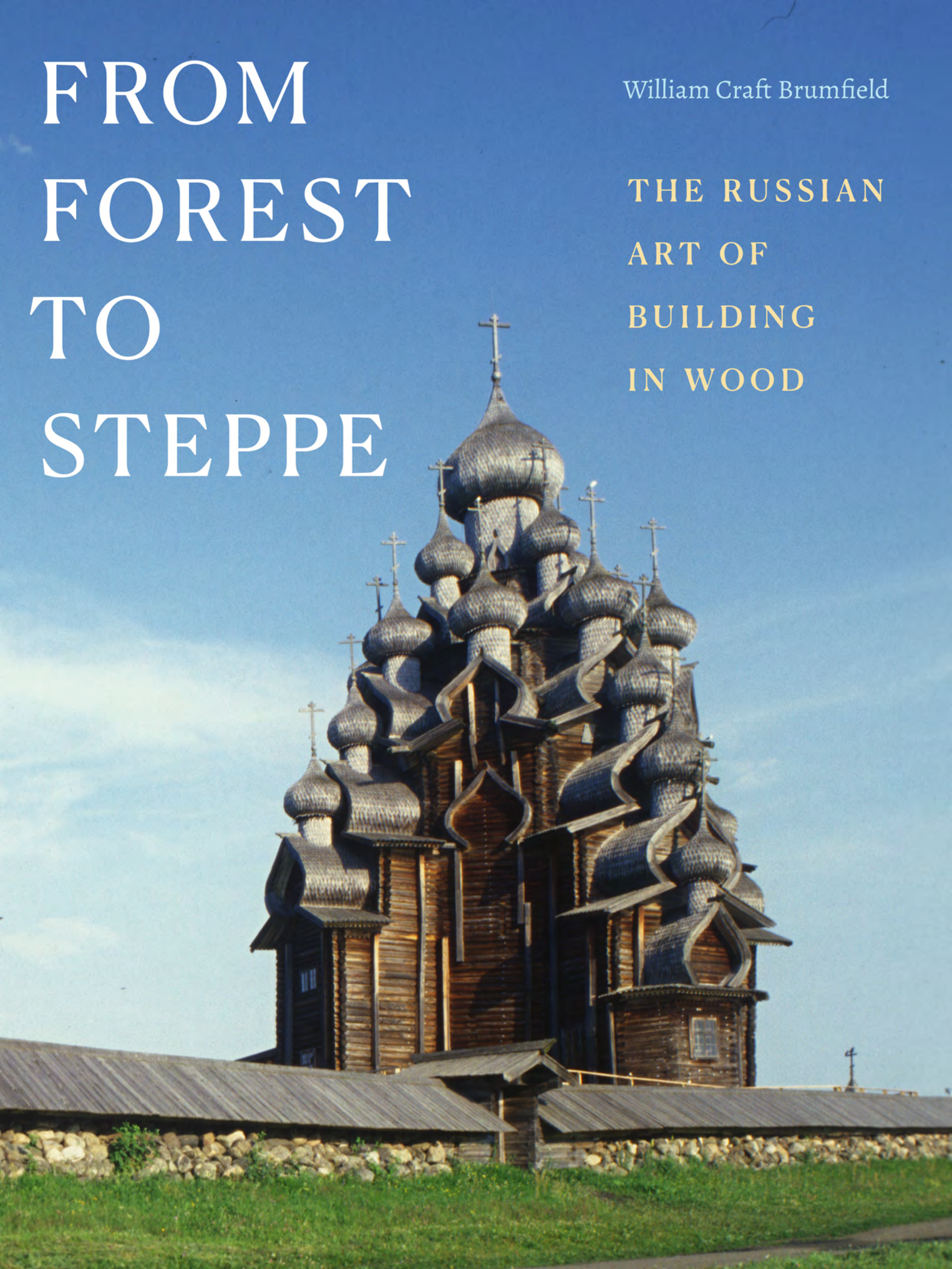
FROM FOREST TO STEPPE

William Craft Brumfield

THE RUSSIAN ART OF BUILDING IN WOOD



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Text and photographs by

William Craft Brumfield

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Cover art: (*front*) Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior, (*back*) Church of the Intercession, bell tower, Khizhi Island. Photo: William Craft Brumfield, July 13, 2007.

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Frontispiece: Pediment, wooden house, Khmelnitsky Street 38, Blagoveshchensk. Photo: William Craft Brumfield, June 14, 2002.

TO THE MEMORY OF ELIZABETH HEDREEN (1936–2022),

whose devotion to the fine arts was amplified by her

compassionate, sustaining generosity.


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Acknowledgments

FOR A BOOK COVERING SO MUCH TIME AND SPACE, acknowledgments can only occur on the most general level, yet there are certain colleagues who moved beyond the essential to the existential in supporting my Russian work: the late James Billington, Librarian of Congress; Dan Davidson, former president of American Councils for International Education; Blair Ruble, former director of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies; and David Godine, publisher nonpareil, and the only person on the planet who would have published my first, magnificent book, *Gold in Azure: One Thousand Years of Russian Architecture*. In one way or another, they enabled my work on Russia and provided the means to bring that work to a global public. I am also indebted to students and colleagues at Tulane University who have assisted my archival project over the decades. Students have been my lifeblood, and certain of them contributed far more than they perhaps realized to the arduous work of archiving my photographic collection, which is the basis of this book. The main part of that archive is housed in the Department of Image Collections (formerly the Photographic Archive) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, which began acquiring my photographs in the spring of 1985. Colleagues at the National Gallery have played a fundamental role in preserving my documentation of architecture in Russia and the former Soviet Union. I am again delighted to acknowledge the collaboration of Miriam Angress, who has edited two of my recent books for Duke University Press. Her judgment and professionalism have worked miracles. And I am again deeply grateful to the generosity of Richard and Elizabeth Hedreen, whose enlightened patronage has done so much to support the publication of my work. This book is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth (Betty) Hedreen. As for the Russian friends and colleagues who contributed so much to my work in that vast Eurasian space, I call out to them in the Exordium.

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Author's Note

THIS BOOK IS A PERSONAL VIEW OF THE BROADEST possible topic in Russian architecture: building in wood. In the most literal sense, it is a view of wooden structures through photographs spanning five decades (beginning in 1970), seven time zones, and latitudes from 47° (Rostov-on-Don) to 70° (Norilsk). It is also a personal view in its selection. Those readers who have already delved into the topic might wonder why this or that favorite building or town was not included. The process of selecting the photographs (slightly more than four hundred out of many thousands) was a special form of agony. Others might ask why the geographic range was so broad or the sites so numerous. Would it not have been preferable to focus on fewer places in greater detail? In a sense I did that in my book *Architecture at the End of the Earth: Photographing the Russian North* (2015), half the length of this one but also including ancient cathedrals of brick and stone. In this book I intend to show both variety and continuity across many places (authentic examples are often situated in little-known backwoods), including outdoor museums of wooden architecture. The choice was mine and the details were difficult. Not everything could be included, much less discussed.

The book is also personal in its approach. There are countless volumes on Russian wooden architecture, exhaustively examining variations on the form of the traditional log house (*izba*) or the wooden church. Although there is a general bibliography at the end, the book does not pretend to explore the topic at the same level of detail as many of its predecessors—nor should it. There is no point in reinventing the wooden wheel. In the introductory sections I give an overview of construction practices, but my hope is that many of the specifics are best shown in the photographs. As for sources of information, most of them are from decades of field notes, conversations with museum specialists, and Russian guidebooks for general audiences, as well as scholarly sources. I should repeat that this volume takes a view as wide as Russia itself. Detailed analysis can be instructive, yet my primary goal is to show the sweep of what I have seen.

One of the unique features of the book is the precision of the image dates (day, month, year) based on concise daily records that I have been keeping since the late 1960s, well before the first trip to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1970. I have placed the date of the photograph at the end of each caption, information that is particularly important because many of the buildings photographed no longer exist. I have tried to note these vanished structures in the captions, but I cannot keep up with the pace of destruction, particularly in urban areas. At least the photographs, preserved in my archival collection at the National Gallery of Art, record their existence and as such have gained a life of their own: It is my wish to share them as broadly as possible. Speaking of that collection, I should

add that before switching to digital cameras, I often photographed on black-and-white film, a medium that I greatly admire aesthetically. My first major exhibit in Russia (in 2001) was in black-and-white. But color photography adds valuable information, particularly with decorative detail, and for the sake of consistency it is used throughout this book.

Books on Russia often begin with a note on transliteration from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet. In this work I decided to use a system easily accessible to the nonspecialist public. I trust that any minor inconsistencies will not impede an understanding. In a few cases, I have given a pronunciation guide.

Exordium

HOW SHALL I BEGIN? LET ME NAME THEIR NAMES, the friends and colleagues, the drivers who got me through some of the worst roads on earth, the friends and strangers who gave me shelter, a shot of vodka, a warm meal, a jar of cloudberries (*moroshka*): Tomochka, Vanya, Olya, Lyuba, Tanya, Ira, Misha, Vasya, Alyosha, Andrusha, Dima, Masha, Galya, Nadya, Sasha, Boris, Vera, Tamara; Oleg Samusenko, Olga Bakhareva, Mikhail Karachev, Valery Esipov, Irina Samsonova, Mikhail Dmitriev, Irina Velieva, Nelli Belova, Irma Komladze, Arkady Levin, Alexey Komech, Sergey Miturich, Father Andrei Kozlov, Rafael Khakimov, Oleg Glushchenko, Dmitry Shvidkovsky, Igor Shurgin, Alexander Popov, David Sarkisiyan, Tatiana Shchepetkova.

Two of you in particular represent the polarities of our Russian-American intersection. Oleg (Samusenko), your boundless generosity led to the most insanely improbable trips through the Vologda and Kostroma territories—trips usually in third-hand white Volgas. Any one of those cars could have killed us: faulty brakes, clogged carburetors, broken fan belts, shot ignitions, worn tires. And yet we made it from Cherepovets to ancient Soligalich in the Kostroma forests; Ustiuzhna to the west; and Vytegra and Saminsky Pogost in the north. You were neither a careerist nor "a pillar of the community," and your broad historical knowledge was, I felt, often ignored. But there were those who understood your deep wisdom and would help when you asked on my behalf. Your wife, Olga—by profession a librarian and by character the soul of endurance—sustained us and kept our spirits up.

Ghena, I am forever grateful for your generosity in bringing me to places that I would not otherwise have seen. In July 2012, your small, bright-green Zhiguli got us to distant Yurevets on the Volga River. And we saw so much in between. But at other moments, over a late dinner, you made no secret of your animosity toward America as a global power and resentment at the collapse of the Soviet Union. You were a believer in alternative approaches to medicine and every morning religiously prepared a blender cocktail of vegetables fresh from the summer garden for your wife, Sveta, who was living with advanced-stage cancer. Sveta, I remember sitting next to you at the train station in Kineshma, a brief conversation, then touching your emaciated arm in parting, your wan smile and glittering, tired eyes hungry to know health. We stayed in touch a few more months when both of you returned to Moscow for the winter, but then Ghena sent a message saying that he could no longer associate with me, an American. Sveta, unfailingly kind and gentle, passed away soon thereafter.

Will I see any of you again? The tragedy of war separates us, but what we did remains, on my film and in memory.

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Introduction
Getting There

During more than five decades of study and documentation of Russian architecture, my primary focus has been stone and brick, from eleventh-century churches to twenty-first century office towers. Yet wooden structures have always been in my field of view, and their story has played a part in several of my books. The time has now come to place them in the center, to recapitulate the experience of years of fieldwork and thousands of photographed sites, to trace a path linking barns and windmills, and houses and churches in the Far North with Buddhist shrines in the Transbaikal region and elegant eighteenth-century palaces on the outskirts of Moscow—all underneath log constructions. Although the identity of the builders is rarely known, their ingenuity and creativity have formed an essential component of the country's heritage.

Russia's wooden architecture is a creation at war with itself. The myth of wooden architecture as the purest expression of the Russian national genius—a myth that I accept—collides with a reality of flight and neglect. For centuries Russians lived in a wooden environment, from the smallest hamlets to the largest cities. Even in the middle of the twentieth century, a large part of the population in Russia—including Tatars, Buriats, Yakuts, Evenks, and many other ethnic groups in a territory roughly equivalent to the contemporary Russian Federation—lived in wooden dwellings.

Yet, during the half century that I traveled and photographed in an area extending from the White Sea to the Sea of Japan, vast swaths of wooden buildings have been demolished (in towns and cities) or abandoned (in villages). For this, there are many reasons—demographic, economic, social, political, cultural, lack of ownership, lack of conveniences, lack of financial resources, fear of fire, urban regulations, and reconstruction. This book is not based on data sets, but throughout the photographs and text illustrate a simple fact—given a choice, most Russians cannot

leave the wooden habitat fast enough. With few exceptions, the commitment to preserving a viable form of wooden habitat in urban areas rings hollow. It is far easier—particularly for families—to move to a masonry (brick, stone, reinforced concrete) building, however faceless, with the conveniences that modern life demands.

As for the persistent myth of wooden Russia, those who pine can visit the open-air museums of wooden architecture that have been assembled on the outskirts of so many Russian cities, from Arkhangelsk to Ulan-Ude. There they will see not only superbly crafted log homesteads with barns, bathhouses, and mills but also log shrines ranging from small forest chapels to soaring multidomed churches—a fraction, however, of those existing even a century ago. Those churches, like log dwellings, have often been abandoned by the communities they once served in rural areas. A few have been reopened for service at museum sites, many new log churches have been built in suburban areas—a relatively inexpensive way of expanding church presence and at the same time summoning the aura of cultural traditions. But the sources of those traditions are rapidly disappearing at their original sites.

Must it be that way? Wood is a durable, natural material, and the threat from fire can be managed and contained. I live in a city whose neighborhoods consist largely of wooden houses, thousands of them—shotguns, bungalows, Victorian mansions, Carpenter Gothic caprices. Although New Orleans is unique in the scale and cultural significance of its wooden housing, many American cities have neighborhoods with wooden houses from a century or more ago. However, they are frame (post-and-beam) constructions whose weight is balanced on masonry supports, in some cases despite the treacherous local subsoil (quickly recognized by anyone traversing New Orleans streets, for example). They are not massive log structures.

Let it be emphasized at the outset that wooden architecture in Russia means a log structure. It can be covered with plank siding or plaster over lathing, but the buildings are underneath constructions of solid logs tightly fitted and laid in horizonal courses. The reasons for this centuries-old practice are several, including a severe continental climate demanding a reliable self-insulating material. Logs were readily available (the territory of Russia being the largest forested zone on the planet) and could often be purchased precut for market sale in urban areas. Furthermore, equipment for milling timber was rare until the latter part of the nineteenth century,

VITOSLAVLITSY (Novgorod region). Master carpenter working pine log with an ax. Note hewn roof gutter at upper left. He told me: "Pines don't grow the way they used to." May 27, 1996.

and even then, sawmill production was used for finishing details such as floor planks, roofing, and decorative details. Hence the ubiquity in Russia of the log house, whether the *izba* (pronounced eez-BAH) in the countryside or simply the "wooden house" (*derevyanny dom*) in towns. Wood was also commonly used by the gentry for their estate houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as for the suburban dachas (cottages) that began to proliferate later in the nineteenth century. All these types will be illustrated in the chapters that follow, but regardless of external appearance (with or without plank siding), they were all solid log structures.

USTIUZHNA (Vologda region). House of the merchant Nikolay Kurbatov, Ustiuzhna Lane 4. Built in the late nineteenth century by a true enthusiast of log construction, the richly decorated house included a three-tiered tower visible in the photograph. In 2009, the upper two tiers were dismantled. The house is now in critical condition. May 22, 2001.

The *izba* has been praised by many for its "authentic" rough-hewn materiality, but such buildings weigh heavily on the surface in a literal sense. In towns, wooden houses were typically supported by brick foundations, or even a masonry ground floor. In the countryside, larger structures (log churches, in particular) rested on fieldstone foundations, but wooden dwellings often were built directly on the ground, especially for impoverished households. Lower logs were subject to decay, and the ground itself might shift with freezing and thawing. Before the late nineteenth century, milled lumber (including planks) was relatively expensive and labor intensive, and therefore the basic *izba* known to generations of peasant serfs often had a floor of tamped clay mixed with manure as a hardener.

Whether the *izba* or a wooden house, these structures were generally not expected to last more than a few generations—rarely more than a century. Depending on the area (climate), size of the structure, and socioeconomic factors, log dwellings were regularly replaced. With the spread of

limited prosperity in the nineteenth century, families came to expect new dwellings as generations passed. To this natural process of regeneration must be added the fires that not infrequently swept Russian towns. For most Russians, logs were as common as air or water. What was destroyed or abandoned could always be rebuilt quickly.

Similar conditions also affected log churches, which were both a common, everyday fact of life and a crowning glory of native Russian culture, particularly in the Russian North. Log churches, of vastly different sizes and structural complexity, were everywhere—in monasteries, in towns of all sizes, and in villages. In fact, there are two basic terms for "village" in Russian—*derevnya* and *selo*. The former generally referred to any small group of rural households designated with a toponym (for example, Ivanovka). In distinction, *selo* referred to a household grouping sufficiently significant to have a church—almost always of logs. Frequently, log churches—like log houses—could be disassembled and taken to another location, whether by purchase by another village or because a community moved to another location.

Log churches could be expected to exist for a longer period than houses, but like any log structure, such churches had to be maintained if they were to survive; decaying logs had to be replaced. Perhaps the greatest threat to log churches was fire. Because of their height, they could be destroyed by lightning strikes; their interiors had votive candles; or a fire could spread from a nearby structure. Fires took (and still take) a heavy toll on log churches, whether in villages or towns, and if the village survived, the church was rebuilt either of logs or, in many cases, as a masonry (brick) structure if local resources permitted. With the demographic and sociopolitical upheavals of the twentieth century, village churches were abandoned on a massive scale. In urban areas, log churches had long since disappeared because of the fire hazard that they posed. Ironically, there has recently been a surge of log church construction in large urban housing developments, both for their relatively lower cost and for their appeal to Russian tradition.

The widespread twentieth-century impulse to preserve traditional wooden buildings as cultural objects had two points of origin. As Russian nationalism assumed prominence in Stalinist ideology during and immediately after the Second World War (known in Russia as the Great Fatherland War), the state on various levels began to promulgate the concept of preserving wooden architectural monuments, whether secular or sacred,

as a worthy expression of Russian identity. One of the earliest examples was the 1945 designation of the original church ensemble on the Karelian Island of Kizhi (under Finnish occupation for much of the war) as a state preserve. The establishment of outdoor museums dedicated to wooden architecture gathered strength with the adoption, on January 30, 1964, of the state decree "Concerning Measures for the Improvement of the Preservation of Monuments of Wooden Architecture." More will be said of Kizhi and other outdoor museums throughout part 2 of this book.

Yet the movement to create these museum preserves focused almost entirely on rural structures. In urban areas, a second impulse, less statist in its origins, gathered strength in the post-Stalinist era when wooden buildings were rapidly becoming less essential for providing basic housing stock. If in the middle of the twentieth century provincial towns and cities still had extensive areas of wooden houses (log structures), the trend was inexorably in another direction. Alternatives—primarily mass-produced apartment buildings—became increasingly available after the 1940s at a time when people were beginning to leave the countryside in droves. To take one example from a site that will appear later in this book: the Bolsheboldinsky *raion* (county), which contained an estate belonging to the family of Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837). In 1939 the population was some 38,000; in 1959, 29,000; in 1989, 14,000.

This trend was not exceptional, and those who left rural areas often abandoned wooden houses for which there was little or no demand. I have photographed villages that consisted entirely of abandoned log houses. Furthermore, those who moved to towns and cities were generally not inclined to move into another wooden dwelling with a privy in the yard. Most anyone who could angled for an apartment with at least minimal conveniences in a brick (or, increasingly, prefabricated concrete-panel) building. From being an object of local pride, the log house acquired for many the stigma of backwardness, its darkened walls a point of shame.

Within many rapidly changing provincial towns, however, there were those who, as a matter of local pride, wanted to preserve wooden houses for what they represented to Russian history and culture. There are numerous reasons for the urban preservation of traditional wooden buildings, which are often marvels of construction ingenuity and superb design. I have not only photographed beautifully maintained wooden (log) houses but have in some cases followed the painstaking process of historically accurate restoration. But restoration requires, in the first place, clear title

to the property (by no means a given after seven decades of Soviet power) followed by commitment, skill, knowledge, and substantial financial resources just to maintain the structure. Modern amenities require still further resources. Unfortunately, those who live in large wooden houses in charming provincial cities such as Vologda are often those with few means and less *blat* (clout). Multiple tenants are crammed into dwellings that either were not designed for this use or can no longer bear the weight of prolonged neglect. There are few incentives to maintain such houses, whether on an individual or municipal level, and cases of arson are not uncommon. Municipalities can adopt zoning regulations that include preservation of areas with wooden dwellings, but enforcement measures are weak and widely flouted.

In a context of dilapidated and unsightly buildings, city planning agencies, contractors, and local boosters have every reason to level swaths of wooden houses and replace them with office or apartment buildings with a modicum of stylistic trappings that say "postmodernist," "neoconstructivist," or simply "jemenfoutiste" (a piquant French-derived term perfectly suited to bland confusion). Isolated wooden buildings remain, often wedged between much larger structures that deform drainage and other properties of the ground on which the wooden structure rests. Street expansion pushes against the house frontage, increasing noise, pollution, and degrading vulnerable foundations. If not placed in a special preservation zone or street (such as one in the center of Arkhangelsk), the fate of isolated survivors is destruction. I have witnessed this process directly in cities such as Kazan (the capital of Tatarstan on the Volga River) and have confirmed it more recently in street-level views provided through Yandex, the Russian counterpart to Google. Many of the wooden houses that I photographed in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s no longer exist. In isolated cases, losses will be noted in the captions, but I cannot pretend to keep pace.

Getting There

This book is unique for its photographs, archivally recorded over a period of five decades, and it seems appropriate to provide readers with certain information about this process. Field research and photography in Russia is an arduous undertaking that often requires access to remote areas where even a graveled road is considered a highway. Such areas are reachable only

by rugged vehicles operated by experienced drivers. I have never driven a car in Russia; it is too hazardous. I was also concerned about how to keep the cameras operative and deciding where to go. Basic research determines the reasons and the directions. Vehicles for my fieldwork have been provided either by local administrations (often at the recommendation of the Ministry of Culture) or by others—usually friends but also generous strangers—who were intrigued by the peculiarities of my work. I am endlessly grateful for their knowledge of the territory and the conditions, which for professional drivers is an ordinary working day. In the winter there is less light, but in many areas—whether the North or Siberia—packed, ice-hardened snow makes a better travel surface in areas served by boggy tracks.

For difficult terrain the four-wheel drive Uazik is the ubiquitous vehicle of choice, Russia's closest equivalent to the classic Jeep. The name derives from the acronym for Ulyanovsk Auto Factory, located in the city of Ulyanovsk on the Volga River. The version that I knew had two gear sticks, two gas tanks (left and right), taut suspension, high clearance, and four-wheel drive, but the front axis could only be engaged from outside. Seat belts? Don't ask. The top speed was one hundred kilometers an hour, but only on regional asphalt, not the rutted tracks and potholed back roads for which it was designed. Comfortable it is not, but an experienced driver can take this machine over rutted ice tracks in the middle of a snowstorm and not miss a beat. No place in Russia has more of such roads than Arkhangelsk Province, a vast territory that extends from the White and Barents Seas in the north to its boundary with Vologda Province to the south. A combination of poverty, government default on both the local and national levels, and distances that exceed those of most western European countries have created some of the worst roads in European Russia. Yet, as part 2 will show, this area contains the greatest concentration of traditional wooden architecture.

For regional fieldwork, a sturdy vehicle in whatever form (including motorized quadricycle) is indispensable, but for longer distances between regions, there is the Russian rail system, massive and reliable. In the Russian North (northwestern part of the country) and Siberia, this network covers hundreds of kilometers between launching points to the "backcountry." (The favored term in Russian is *gloosh*, a word whose very sound evokes oblivion.) Yet, rail travel can be exhausting, not only for travel in a rattling third-class open-bunk sleeper known as *platskart* (why pay

FEDKOVO (Velsk region). Driver engaging front wheel drive of Uazik. June 14, 2000.

more to be cooped in a sleeping coupe with a snorer?) but also the waiting for long-distance trains arriving in the middle of the night.

Consider, for example, Nyandoma Station, serving a nondescript railroad town (population about 18,000) settled in the late 1890s and once known for its poultry-processing plant. Located some five hundred kilometers south of Arkhangelsk on the mainline to Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Nyandoma is the portal to one of the richest areas of Russian traditional culture and wooden architecture, centered around the medieval town of Kargopol, sixty kilometers to the west; yet the station has little to distinguish it—a brick box with a plate glass wall facing the tracks. I passed through it many times—the first during a snowstorm in late February 1998—and paid little attention. Get in, get out.

But there was one episode that provided in the most prosaic of settings an unexpected insight into the mysteries of human communication, an experience both ordinary and surreal. The antiquated, straining evening bus from Kargopol (standing room only) arrived at the Nyandoma Station on a late Monday evening (August 9, 2010), and a few of us stumbled into the gray-blue-green waiting hall. The Saint Petersburg train (009A) was not due for another six hours. I found a row of empty plastic seats and attempted to stretch out, but the glare of the florescent light, the seat contours, and the background noise made anything resembling sleep

MEZEN RIVER BANK (Arkhangelsk Province). Author in tractor adapted for human conveyance. August 3, 2000.

NEAR POGORELOVO (Kostroma Province). Clearing forest track for quadricycle. Author with camera in mirror. May 31, 2016.

impossible. I thought of the friends, Olga and Oleg Samusenko, who would meet me just after noon at the steel town of Cherepovets. I thought of the fieldwork we would do in this underexplored area of the Russian North. The hours dragged, the florescent light turned every face ashen.

Around midnight, two women—struggling with travel bags and dressed in the no-nonsense slacks and pullover attire that Russians adopt for train travel—entered the waiting room. Each had a small girl, a two-year old and a four-year-old. The two-year-old was tired, cross, and let everyone know it. Trying to placate the infant, her mother went to the trinket booth and bought a small green plastic music box (for want of a better word), undoubtedly made in China. It played one thing, a single line of notes from the beginning of "Ode to Joy" in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Everybody knows it: "Freude, schöner Götterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium." What could be more appropriate in the Nyandoma Station waiting room in the middle of the night? FREUDE! JOY!

But the two-year-old was not pleased; the green plastic box regularly hit the cement floor and erupted in a series of tinkly Beethoven notes, endlessly repeated. The two mothers tried to communicate with the whining child, to no effect. She was clearly asking for something and frustrated that she could not be understood. Soon, the four-year-old came to the fore. She had a rapport with her playmate, and both mothers, exasperated and leaning over in anticipation, asked the four-year-old what the two-year-old was saying. She turned to the two-year-old, posed a question, received a reply (incomprehensible to adults), and confidently relayed the message to the mothers. Situation resolved (temporarily). The little drama was absorbing, yet toddlers frequently talk among themselves. The greatest delight in the unfolding transaction—repeated until the infant dozed off—was the two-year-old's appreciation of her companion's linguistic skill, the eager nod of approval when her syllables were processed. "Yes! That's it!"

At 4:03 a.m., the Saint Petersburg train rumbled in from Arkhangelsk, and dawn had already appeared in the northern summer sky. Groggy with fatigue, we clambered aboard *platskart* sleeping cars. No rush, Nyandoma is a crew change, and we had half an hour to find our places, step across snoring bodies, and spread out the bunk bedding. I never saw them again, those tiny, energetic daughters of Elysium. They should be in their late teens now, and I wish them whatever joy life can bring. For my part, I still pause over the mystery of comprehension when one small child transformed the words of another—anagogical, indeed.

Upon arrival at the research sites in the Russian regions—whether the Kola Peninsula in the north or the Urals or Siberia—successful implementation of field photography depends on an additional critical factor: the ability to defend against the mosquito (*komar*) and other biting, sucking plagues related to the general category *gnus* (gnat). Indeed, their presence is so detested that the common Russian word for "repulsive" (applied to people or situations) is *gnusno*. There are, of course, synonyms, but none is quite so succinct and emphatic an expression of disgust as *gnusno* (for example, *gnusnoe povedenie*—depraved, intolerable behavior).

In the Russian North, with its innumerable lakes and bogs, the plague is compounded by the *moshka*, a biting midge similar to a no-see-um. Small and difficult to see, the female of the species requires warm blood (usually mammalian) for propagation. Physically more damaging than a mosquito insertion, the abrasion of the *moshka* not only itches but can pustulate and become infected. This is particularly a problem for rural pensioners in the North who depend on vegetable gardens and are exposed to the *moshka* on hot summer days while working in the garden. Not wanting to use a lotion (or to buy one), they typically wrap their face and neck in cloth and protect their hands with old gloves. Nonetheless, the *moshka* gets through, and I remember one elderly woman showing me splotched traces of bites on her hands. A genuine bedevilment.

I have encountered those who say mosquitoes do not affect them, and no doubt there are those who develop natural resistance or are less susceptible to allergic reactions. After all, communities have endured this environment for centuries. One monk at the Monastery of Saint Antony of Siya near the Northern Dvina River told me that the eponymous Saint Antony did not kill mosquitoes and proclaimed, "They, too, are God's creatures." And there are folk remedies, such as the one I saw in the Krasnoyarsk region of Siberia: strips of birch bark were heated in an open pot over a fire. The extruding moisture was gathered and mixed with a paste of what seemed to me rotten fish. The resulting salve works not only for humans but also for household animals such as dogs, who suffer from bites during the worst of summer.

One might assume that as a long-time resident of southern Louisiana, I would be used to the mosquito. Nothing of the sort. Although New Orleans controls the breeding habitat and sprays if infestation reaches a certain level, they remain omnipresent. Furthermore, there are many varieties of mosquito (more than 3,500 species), and the severity of reaction

USTIUZHNA. Former City Council (*Duma*) building with fire watch tower. The entire wooden structure of this national landmark, built in 1887, burned at the end of 2000. March 10, 1998.

to the bite (swelling, itching) can depend on the type of mosquito as well as prior exposure (or lack thereof) to a specific type. Mosquitoes have been remarkably successful in occupying their evolutionary, ecological niche, and they are an essential food source for other fauna. I still remember the delight in seeing swallows and nightingales dart into the open passageway of a large log house in the Kostroma region to feed on mosquitoes in mid-flight. Attempts to control them by chemical means in the United States led to alarm—notably in Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*—over the widespread use of DDT in eradication campaigns. Such considerations, however, are quickly forgotten during fieldwork in Russia. The overriding task is to repel, by whatever means, the swarming hordes.

And they swarm, indeed. The one genuine panic attack I have experienced occurred a half century ago during an early period of my work in the northern forests. I had forgotten to carry repellent and returning in the late afternoon from a sunlit site into the forest shade, I was attacked by a cloud that had not even begun to bite. (I was moving and waving my hands furiously.) Their intense humming and hitting my face propelled me in total panic toward a small lake with an old, blackened rowboat at the edge. Jumping into the boat, I grabbed the half-rotted oars and pushed away with such force that one of the oars snapped. With the remaining oar I managed to maneuver out a short distance (the mosquitoes did not follow over the fresh, rippled water) and stayed there until friends arrived at the shore with salve. I paddled back, left the oars (one broken) in the boat, and made it out of the forest. Some three decades later, in the late 1990s, I experienced similar swarms while working on Large Solovetsky Island, but at that time I was prepared and took pleasure in the sound of mosquitoes veering from my DEET-slathered head.

Whatever the local circumstances (and there have been moments of transcendent beauty), the photographs in this book and the field notes that underly the text span half a century of work throughout Russia. In presenting this vast range, which includes thousands of photographs of wooden structures, I have defined two parts. The first, "Wooden Architecture as Cultural Environment," begins with the chapter "From Palace to Dacha," which illustrates the place of wooden architecture in high culture. The grand eighteenth-century summer pleasure palaces of the elite, such as Kuskovo and Ostankino, built for the fabulously wealthy Sheremetevs in the northern suburbs of Moscow, were basically sturdy log constructions, skillfully crafted to resemble neoclassical masonry structures. Although

they are not usually thought of as log constructions, these imposing monuments are among the earliest log dwellings to survive in Russia. I have also included—if only as a telling cultural curiosity—the recent re-creation of the grand, rambling wooden palace originally built in the seventeenth century for Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich at the royal estate of Kolomenskoe.

Evidence as early as the twelfth century indicates that Russia's potentates had long preferred to live in wooden dwellings, although none of them has survived. Wood was readily available, as were master carpenters, while stonework was costly, rare, and reserved primarily for a few major religious buildings. Bricks were produced, but not until the late fifteenth century were brick production and technology brought to the advanced level visible in the Moscow Kremlin and its walls (designed primarily by Italian engineers). Logs also possessed material properties that mitigated the effects of extreme cold. There is something reassuring in the aroma, the touch of a warm log interior in the middle of a snowstorm.

The first chapter further explores two seminal country estates—Abramtsevo and Talashkino—that became cultural laboratories for exploring, preserving, and extending Russian folk traditions in artistic culture, both high and low, secular and sacred. Here irony rests upon irony. Both estates were supported by fortunes made from Russia's fitful industrialization, which threatened the economic viability of crafts workshops. Furthermore, local villagers who had been compelled to abandon the rural folkways were encouraged—even taught—to maintain the folk crafts traditionally associated with a rural way of life. And at Talashkino, a notable attempt was made to reimagine the traditional design of a Russian log dwelling. Such conceptions were formed by a sophisticated, Westernized, wealthy elite who defined the authentic as originating in rural (peasant) culture.

Striving to preserve traditional crafts and then transferring them to *haute culture* (with its commercial ramifications) became a major force in nineteenth-century Russian design and cultural history. The result is a wondrous interchange in a search for the authentic, an interchange that could involve entrepreneurs of peasant origins assimilating urban intellectual conceptions of how peasant culture (in architecture and design) should look. Who, then, is authenticating whom? In a further irony, one must also mention the profound influence of a non-Russian, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, the renowned French architect, medievalist, and theoretician who in 1877 published his book *L'art russe: Ses origines, ses elements*

constitutifs, son apogee, son avenir (Russian art: Its origins, its constituent elements, its apogee, its future). This seminal work shocked by elevating the value of traditional Russian art, notably expressed in wood, as the basis of an authentic national culture for architectural design.

A splendid illustration of the creativity emanating from an urbane reinterpretation of traditional design, the first chapter includes two magnificent log mansions built at the villages of Astashovo (Ostashovo) and Pogorelovo in the Kostroma forests near Chukhloma. Improbable both in their construction and preservation, they were built by peasants—peasant master craftsmen—who were permitted to go to Saint Petersburg in the mid-nineteenth century to work in the urban building boom. Both then acquired substantial wealth as contractors and returned to their native countryside to build large houses that reflected not only their acquired status but also urbane conceptions of the "authentic" in the design of a Russian dwelling. The first chapter concludes with a survey of landmark wooden dachas built in the northern suburbs of Saint Petersburg.

The second chapter, "The Wooden Ambience of Russian Literature," explores telling examples of wooden dwellings as they appeared in the lives of some of Russia's greatest writers, from Alexander Pushkin to Vladimir Nabokov. These houses varied widely in form, but all had some form of classicizing elements, whether a portico, a pediment (the Russian word is derived from the French *fronton*), or a rotunda. Sadly, many of these sites were destroyed in the twentieth century, from the chaos in the countryside leading to the Revolution of 1905 (called by some the First Russian Revolution) to the destructive frenzy of the Russian Civil War and its aftermath to World War Two. Some houses photographed in this chapter were rebuilt from the ground up as cultural shrines. Are they "authentic"? I decided to include certain rebuilt structures because they give a reasonably accurate view of the original, and they demonstrate a willingness to expend significant resources on the reconstruction of wooden landmarks when cultural circumstances are favorable.

Part 2, "Where the Folk Live: From Forest to Steppe," encompasses a broad survey, arranged in a geographical progression, of traditional vernacular architectures that housed most of Russia's population. In exploring intriguing intersections of rural traditions and urban(e) interpretation, there will be noticeable differences in design between the village *izba* and urban wooden housing, which acquired a certain standardization of form beginning with the reforms of Peter the Great. Peter and his imperial

successors periodically undertook campaigns to give Russian towns something like an ordered, "civilized" appearance, primarily with the application of certain minimal features of neoclassical architecture. To that end they encouraged construction in brick (in part to mitigate the devastation of fires that periodically swept Russian towns) and promulgated plans for the standardized design of urban buildings.

Yet, with such notable exceptions as Saint Petersburg, the drive to increase the tempo of masonry construction had limited success. It was so much easier and quicker to build in wood, yet at least for urban dwellings, the standardized plans seem to have had an influence. If the house was not built of brick, it could resemble one that was. At a minimum the house would be clad in plank siding, which obscured the "primitive," village connotations of a log structure. In many cases, particularly in Moscow, log walls were covered with lathing to support stucco, thus making the structure indistinguishable from a masonry building. This increasing tendency to obscure the log structure is evident in all chapters in part 2. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the wooden ambience of Russian towns yielded to demographic, economic, and planning pressures that accelerated the demolition of wooden housing, whether in the Russian North or the Far East.

All the developments described above appear throughout part 2, beginning with chapter 3, which surveys the log houses and churches of the Russian North (Arkhangelsk Province, Vologda Province, and Karelia). The distinctive feature of northern wooden architecture—secular and sacred—is the size that dwellings and churches often achieved. This unrivaled scale can be traced to the relative prosperity of peasant free holdings in the north (where serfdom was uncommon) and to an exceptionally harsh winter climate that led to the creation of structures large enough to accommodate everything under one roof—large families, livestock, forage, food supplies, and implements. The growth of provincial towns such as Vologda and Arkhangelsk created its own form of wooden habitat for merchants, craftsmen, and officials of all ranks (*chinovniki*); but underneath, these houses, too, were log structures.

The second chapter in part 2—chapter 4, on the heartland, or central part of European Russia—covers a territory extending from Novgorod in the northwest to Kazan and Samara on the Volga. Throughout this enormous, diverse space, there is a general diminution in size of the rural *izba* in comparison with the North. The more densely populated urban areas

POGORELOVO (Kostroma Province). Poliashov mansion. May 29, 2016.

created new variations on urban wooden houses for individual household and multifamily dwellings. Chapter 5 crosses the Ural Mountains from Europe to Asia and moves longitudinally from the northern areas of the enormous Perm region to the southern reaches of the Chelyabinsk territory, which borders on Kazakhstan.

The greatest span geographically is chapter 6, on Siberia, extending from the first Russian settlements in the Irtysh River basin to the remarkable merchant houses of Tomsk and Irkutsk that give new meaning to the term "Carpenter Gothic." Several of the Tomsk mansions belonged to Siberian Tatar merchants, thus illustrating the multicultural range of wooden architecture in Russia. Beyond Lake Baikal, the survey moves into the Far East (loosely considered by some to be a part of Siberia) with chapter 7. Prerevolutionary merchant culture is reflected in the *style moderne* mansions of distant Chita and Barnaul. The multicultural aspect of wooden architecture reappears in my documentation of wooden shrines within Buddhist lamaseries in the Transbaikal territory and of preserved Indigenous log yurts in the same area.

Of special interest are the challenges faced by wooden buildings in the permafrost zone of Sakha-Yakutia, whose capital—Yakutsk on the Lena River—still had many prerevolutionary wooden buildings at the time of my visit in late May 2002. But climate change has not been the only threat to the preservation in Yakutsk and many other sites in the Russian Federation. On May 26 I was able to photograph the last remaining log tower of the late seventeenth-century Yakutsk fortress (*ostrog*). Three months later, on August 22, the tower burned to the ground during an unusually hot summer. Possible causes include arson by disgruntled former employees or simply carelessness with fire in an open public space. My photographs are the last recorded documentation of that major, uniquely surviving monument to the history of Russia's expansion to the Pacific Ocean. And this is far from the only case of historic wooden structures that now exist only in my photographs. Much that I have photographed no longer exists, and in some cases, the caption will indicate a destroyed building; but I cannot answer for the current condition in every case.

In addition to houses of diverse configurations, the survey will present utilitarian log structures, such as barns, sheds, barracks, schools, and several windmills, their forms delighting the eye. During the lifetimes of these buildings, Russia has witnessed profound social change and every possible tragedy. I dare say this is the only book—at least in English—that

SARGATSKOE (Omsk Province). Family selling forest mushrooms on a Siberian roadside. September 17, 1999.

contains photographs of wooden houses that served as places of exile for both Vladimir Lenin (at Shushenskoe, in the Russian Far East) and Joseph Stalin (Solvychegodsk, in the Russian North). And at the end of the book, in Arctic Norilsk, there are wooden echoes of the Gulag, echoes of the wooden Cross. Throughout all, the wooden house and the wooden shrine have provided a refuge, like the forests that surround them.