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Research at the Provincial Archives of Arkhangel'sk, Russia – Oct. 2006

An archival adventure

BY MARGARITA CHOQUETTE

My visit to the Regional Archives of Arkhangel'sk, Russia, was preceded by several letters to announce my arrival and to request to research the records of the parish of Piyala, Onega, Arkhangel'sk. The letters were mailed, e-mailed, and faxed from various locations but never produced any response. Three weeks before my departure, I called the archive and got a vague statement about possible help, if I got there. When in Finland I called again and said I was going to visit their archive, but they did not guarantee any co-operation. I decided to take the chance.

I had made an agreement with a second cousin that if I ever went to the Arkhangel'sk archive, she would go with me. My cousin's name is Vera and she is from Russia. On Sunday night October 8, 2006, we flew from St. Petersburg to Arkhangel'sk. Every morning, October 9-13, at 9:30 when the archive opened, we were there and stayed till it closed at 4:30.

When I got to the archive I requested to meet the director of the archives, Vladimir Kirillovich Ananin, whom I had talked to on the phone. He was on vacation the whole week. Next I was led to the deputy director, Olga Ivanovna Korneeva. She took Vera and me to the head of the Department of Publications and Use of Documents, Tatyana Anatol'yevna Sanakina. The two ladies looked at us and told us that the public may not use the church books. For 10,000.00 rubles (\$375.00) their



Margarita Choquette in the Arkhangel'sk archive.

researcher would do all research for us and mail it to us. Then we got to meet the researcher, Natalia Nikolayevna Parishina. In view of the fact that I had come from so far away, I would be allowed to see the books, but only Mrs. Parishina was to handle them. Also I would have to pay the 10,000.00 rubles. I agreed and went and paid in a bank. Then we were led to a desk in a space next to the reading room and close to the elevator that brought the records from the storage. There were huge bun-

dles, like books, waiting for us. They were confession lists (census-like records, listing family members together) from the district I had ordered!

In 1994 I had visited the village where my Russian grandfather was born. At that time I got a compilation of pedigrees from confession lists of four villages in Piyala parish, including grandfather's village of Cheshyuga. I tried to tell Natalia Nikolayevna that I already had the information we were going through,



Arkhangel'sk. The tall building is the archive.

but she was “doing her job.” We also went through the Revision Lists (tax lists, grouping family members together) for 1811, 1816, 1834, 1857, and I did end up with many more names than I originally had.

The greatest surprise of the archive visit was when Natalia Nikola-

yevna brought out the 1897 all-Russian census for Arkhangel'sk *Gubernia* (province before 1917). According to Western understanding, the population information of this census was destroyed, except for Vyatka *Gubernia* and some areas of the Baltic Provinces.



Shopping cart full of yearly bundles.

After the census-like records and the one actual census, I was, on the second day at the archive, ready to see the church records of births, marriages, and deaths. They told me to begin with that the Piyala parish records did not extend farther back than 1842. As time went on they brought out records older than that, without explanation. It was very exciting to actually see the birth entry for my grandfather. I knew of five of his siblings and thought that was all. He was, however, one of ten children. I was able to gather information on 170 persons.

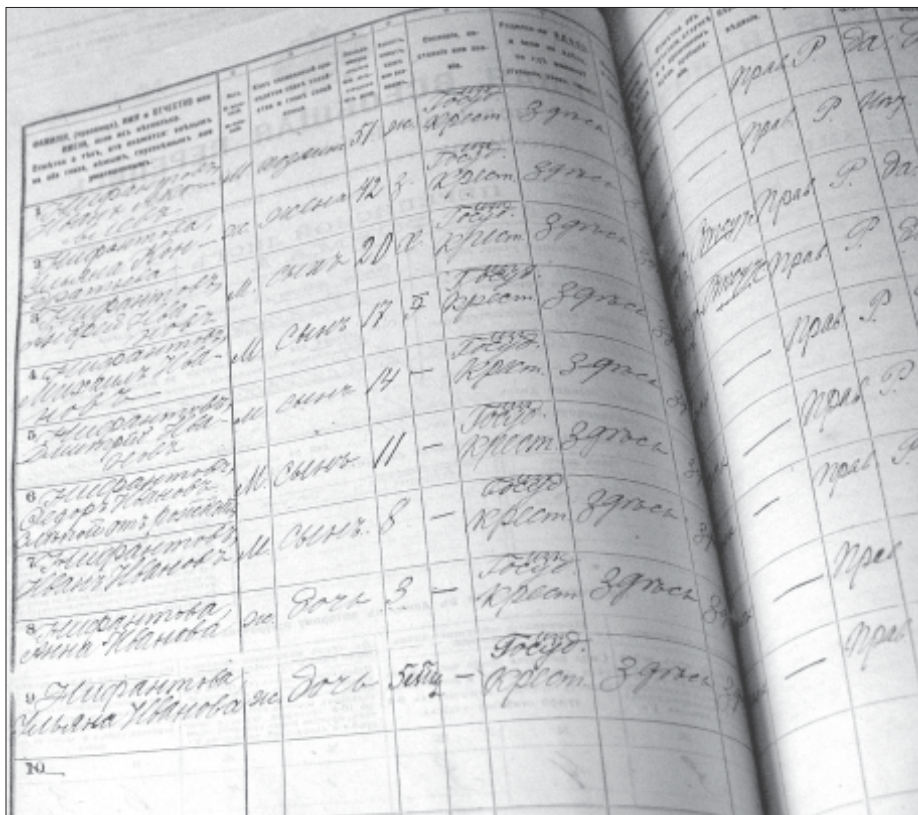
The records were nicely written but often incomplete. Commonly, children were found in death records or census-like records but not in the birth records. The huge sewn together yearly bundles of records were worn around the edges. Other than being sewn, they were also tied at the bottom of the page with thick string. Opening the pages made them crumble. The camera I had to photograph the entries with was used without the flash. I had to cover up, with sheets of paper, all the information on a page that did not pertain to an entry of a relative of mine.

On our final day at the archive both Vera and I were presented with books about the Lomonosov family. (Mikhail V. Lomonosov, an 18th century Russian scholar, was born in the Arkhangel'sk *Gubernia*.) I also received a copy of the book for the Family History Library. They showed some books they had for sale which I bought, and our farewell seemed cordial and their invitation to come again seemed sincere.

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Page beginning a family listing in the 1897 Russian census.



A family listing in the 1897 Russian census.