

The One Hundred Twentieth Season of

The Chicago Literary Club

commences on Monday, October fourth

at The Fortnightly of Chicago

"A River Runs Through It Also"

**will be the inaugural address of
President Ralph Fujimoto**

please reply

**cocktails at six
dinner at seven**

The Chicago Literary Club
A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT ALSO
Presented by Ralph Fujimoto
October 4, 1993

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A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT ALSO

"In rivers the water that you touch is the last of what has passed and the first of that which comes: so with time present" --
Leonardo da Vinci.

On July 12, 1991, we arrive at the Leningrad International Airport as a Russian band greets us playing the Star Spangled Banner. A bus ride takes us to a Russian Cruise ship which is to be our home for the next eleven days on our journey into Russia's past.

(The city was known as Leningrad while we were there, but its original name St. Petersburg was restored in late 1991 after we left Russia.)

Traveling through the waterways of Russia, the voyage takes us from St. Petersburg to Moscow. These two cities symbolize the rivalry of the old conservative ways of Muscovite ideology opposing forces attempting to Westernize Russia. The founding of St. Petersburg by Czar Peter the Great is a decisive manifestation of this rivalry.

Peter Alexeevich was born on May 30, 1672 in the Kremlin Palace. His father was Czar Alexei, second of the Romanov Dynasty, who married Maria Miloslavkaya and had 11 children by her. Among them were a daughter Sophia, a son Fedor III and a son Ivan V. After the death of his first wife, Alexei married Natalya Naryshkins and fathered a son, Peter and a daughter, Natalya.

Czar Alexei died when Peter was only three and a half years old. Fedor III, Peter's half brother, was Czar for a very short time until his death due to illness. This left the question of succession between the two half brothers, Ivan V and Peter. Ivan was 16 years of age at the time, but he was also lame, nearly blind and suffered from speech difficulty. In contrast, Peter at the age of ten, was tall for his age, healthy and very active.

A line was now drawn between the two families -- the first was headed by Sophia, the older sister of Ivan V. and the second was headed by the new Regent, Natalya , Peter's mother. Events that followed were to have a profound effect on young Peter's mind and on the course of Russian history.

The unsettled political situation between the two families provided Sophia with an opportunity to gain the support of the Streltsy, a regiment of professional soldiers composed of simple Russians ignorant of politics. She convinced them that the Naryshkin family had poisoned Czar Fedor. In a savage rampage, the Streltsy murdered relatives and close friends of Natalya Naryshkin including her brother.

The people had declared Peter as the Czar. However, the Streltsy now demanded that Peter and Ivan rule as Co-Czars. The Patriarch and the Boyars, then, declared that Sophia would replace Natalya as Regent. The revolt of the Streltsy and subsequent events left a

mark on his young mind. Peter grew to hate the Streltsy, Sophia and Moscow.

Sophia ruled for seven years, from 1682 to 1689. Peter enjoyed his passive role as Co-Czar, serving only at official functions while Sophia and her ministers governed the country.

Peter now developed an interest in war games and the military. He began to spend more time with his mother at their country residence where the open fields would allow him to engage in military exercises. Although these exercises began as childhood games, he eventually organized two regiments at full strength.

Peter also acquired an interest in crafts of all kinds and soon became qualified as a stonemason, smith, carpenter and printer. A Dutchman, Franz Timmerman became his tutor in math, geometry and military science. This close association between the two was the beginning of Peter's exposure to Western ideas and tastes.

Once, in a village outside of Moscow, Peter caught sight of a discarded English boat which was unlike the flat-bottomed Russian boats. He was told that, with proper masts and sails, the English boat could even sail against the wind. This fascinated him. He outfitted this boat and learned to sail it on a nearby river.

He then engaged two Dutch boatbuilders from Moscow's Foreign Quarter and began to build three yachts and two small frigates on a

lake fifty miles from the city. His interest in boat building became a passion. and Peter spent his time away from Moscow working on the project. The discarded little English boat had served its purpose --for it had fired his imagination to create a Russian Navy.

Eventually Sophia lost her position as Regent and Peter became the ruling Czar. However, he left the affairs of state to his mother and ministers. He had become increasingly interested in the ways of the West and spent more of his time frequenting Moscow's Foreign Quarter. Here he would learn more about modern science and ways of the West.

Foreigners were mistrusted in, the then xenophobic, Russia, but Peter formed friendship with two men who were to have a strong influence in his future. One was Patrick Gordon, a Scot, who had served as a General in the Russian Army when Peter's father Alexei was Czar. Gordon was a cultured and scholarly man in his fifties and he instructed Peter in all aspects of warfare. The other was Franz Lefort, the son of a wealthy Genevan merchant. He came to Russia in search of adventure and had served meritoriously under Gordon. A pleasure-loving high spirited man, Lefort became Peter's drinking companion.

Peter also attracted many different tradesmen with diverse background and spent time with them in pursuit of military and naval experience. During the winter of 1690 and the summer of

1691, Peter and the group spent time in conducting maneuvers and planning mock battles.

Peter took every opportunity to help his team of boat builders complete the building of the two frigates and three yachts. He worked himself from dawn until late at night. He personally laid down the keel for a warship he wanted to help build.

In those days, the Russian empire had only a single seaport--the Port of Archangel located about 1000 miles north of Moscow. It was only 130 miles south of the Arctic circle and therefore was not accessible for trading with the rest of Europe during the Winter. After the ice broke in the Spring, Archangel became a busy sea port crowded with ships from England, Holland and other countries. The sea men worked frantically against time before ice closed the waters to navigation.

Peter first visited Archangel in the Summer of 1693. Having only limited experience sailing on the small rivers and inland lakes, he was fascinated by the sight of the large number of English and Dutch merchant ships escorted by warships sailing into the harbor from the open sea.

This trip increased his passion for ships and the sea, and he made several more trips to Archangel. Each time he learned more and more about foreign ships and navigation on the sea. He ordered a forty-four gun frigate from a Dutch shipbuilder for delivery the

following summer.

By mid-summer of 1694, Peter had completed construction of the warship for which he had personally laid the keel. He had also received the forty four gun frigate from Holland. Creating a strong Russian Navy was now his prime ambition, for there were incentives beyond his personal passion for the sea.

The port at Archangel near the Arctic was Russia's only route to the seas. Two other bodies of water with access to Western trade routes were the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. However, Sweden controlled the Baltic and the Turks ruled the Black Sea.

Although Russia was still formally at war with the Turks, it had taken little action against them. Its allies, Poland and Austria, were unhappy that Russia was not waging a more vigorous war. Peter's own Cossacks were also becoming restless.

It was time for him to move south against the Turks. He calculated that by gaining access to the Sea of Azov, he could build his navy in the warmer climate. He could then challenge the Turks for control of the Black Sea.

Peter eventually gained control of the Sea of Azov and built a harbor fortifications near the mouth of the river Don. However, access to the Black Sea was still blocked by a Turkish fortress at the Strait

of Kerch. Russia could not fight the Turks without a larger Navy and help from its Allies.

Thus, in the late 1696, Peter embarked on a project designed to renew alliance with Russia's friends. It was called the "Great Embassy to Western Europe." No other Czar had ever traveled peaceably to other countries before.

A group of 250 ambassadors comprised the official Russian delegation as they visited the capitals of Russia's allies and other maritime powers. They were commissioned to recruit capable seamen and experienced shipwrights. They were also instructed to purchase navigation instruments, cannons, anchors and other items to be brought back to Russia, copied and reproduced there.

Peter studied shipbuilding at the East India Company's shipyard in Amsterdam for four months, without the intrusion of public and royal responsibilities. He went to London to further his knowledge of shipbuilding and spent time in Greenwich and in Deptford, the center of important docks and shipyards.

Upon returning to Amsterdam, Peter learned, with disappointment, that Vienna and Venice, the two city-states remaining on his Embassy schedule, were discussing peace with the Turks.

Thus, his effort to forge a strong alliance against the Turks had collapsed. His insatiable appetite for learning, even of such unusual

crafts as coffin-making, had drawn him away from the primary purpose of the journey. However, he had gained much in the way of knowledge and acquisition of military equipment.

The Great Embassy to Western Europe had opened Russia's eyes to the technological and economic vitality in the Western world. Peter had also come to appreciate the modern way of life in the West. He admired the wealth, the intellectual life and the cultured world of England, Holland and Austria.

Peter was determined to transform Russia into a modern country. He began by outlawing the growing of beards and encouraging the wearing of Western style clothes. He soon realized, however, that it was better for the country's economy to impose a "beard tax," so he did that.

Since his early years, Peter remembered the Streltsy's rampage in the Kremlin in 1682 and their brutal murder of his close friends and relatives. He saw the Streltsy as the remaining symbol of the old conservative Muscovy and as a threat to his plan to modernize Russia. Peter rounded them up for interrogation and prepared fourteen torture chambers. About 800 Streltsy were hanged, beheaded or broken at the wheel. Peter conducted this bloody purge over a one month period from mid-September to mid-October, 1698. He disbanded the remaining sixteen Streltsy regiments and scattered the men and their families to less populated places in Eastern

Russia.

Having ended the domestic threat to his modernization plans, Peter decided to seek access to Western Europe by gaining dominance of the Baltic Sea. He mounted his first campaign against Sweden, an old enemy of Russia.

He began by attacking the port city of Narva along the Gulf of Finland. The Russian forces, however, suffered a crushing defeat in the hands of 32,000 seasoned Swedish troops led by Charles XII. Confident in his victory, the Swedish King led his army south and spent the following six years occupying Poland instead of marching on to Moscow. This gave Peter time to build his forces in strength and experience.

In time, Russian troops gained strength enough to recapture Narva and other strategic points along the Gulf of Finland. In October, 1702, Peter captured the Swedish fortress of Noteborg which the Swedes had used as a barrier preventing Russia from access to the Baltic Sea.

Even with the recapture of this fortress and other points along the Gulf of Finland, Russia's access to the Baltic Sea remained insecure. The Swedes mounted frequent attacks against Russian occupation of land that technically belonged to Sweden. Peter now needed a fortification at the mouth of the River Neva.

An island in the river was to be the site of Peter's fortification. .
The place was a low marshland, wet and soggy, where, in the spring, strong south-west wind would blow in from the Gulf of Finland and back up the waters, sometimes inundating the small islands in the river. Neva is a Swedish word for Swamp. It would hardly be a place fit for human habitation. For Peter, however, it was a "VISION THING" -- a base for naval operations and a world class commercial port built along the silent and swift flowing river.

The building of the fortification required much human labor. Workers had to be recruited from surrounding villages. Skilled craftsmen from Moscow and other parts of the Empire were drafted for six month terms. Material also had to be imported. Timber was brought from the forests surrounding Lake Ladoga. Stones were brought from places throughout Russia. In 1714, Peter even decreed that stone houses could no longer be built in Moscow because of the shortage. The Neva delta could not grow enough food for its people. and provisions had to be brought in from the outside.

However, as the settlement grew, Peter envisioned the birth of a new city. On May 16, 1703, the first digging began for foundation of the city he named St. Petersburg, in honor of the Patron Saint. Peter encouraged people from throughout the land to settle there. Even members of the nobility were coaxed and they came reluctantly to populate the desolate wilderness city.

Little did Peter envision that some day his successors would transform the mud and log settlement into a city whose architecture was once described as " a breathtaking baroque of pampered imperialism."

Peter the Great had encouraged Russia's close link with European cultural traditions and this was continued by his successors Elizabeth and Catherine, the Great James H. Billington, in his book "THE ICON AND THE AXE", states that "If Peter had opened the window to Europe and Elizabeth decorated it with roccoco frills, Catherine threw open the doors and began to rebuild the house".

George Hamilton, in his book--THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF RUSSIA says--"It was during the reign of Catherine ,the Great, the art of architecture lost the last vestige of provincialism and became, if not a decisive, at least a fully valid contribution to the history of European art."

Alexander Pushkin (1799 -1837) paid tribute to St. Petersburg, by a line in his poem THE BRONZE HORSEMAN (titled after the equestrian statue of Peter the Great which was built by Catherine) --

"I love thee, daughter of Peter's genius; I love thy noble and severe face, and the mighty Neva flowing between its granite banks. I love the mysterious transparency and the pensive brilliance of the moonless nights, when I write and read in my room without a lamp, as the sleeping silhouettes of the streets stand out against the sky and the spire of the Admiralty gleams."--

In northern Russia, "white nights" occur at the end of June when there is no real darkness but merely a prolonged twilight.

The Admiralty naval base is the symbol of Peter's interest in naval affairs and his desire to show his mastery over the Baltic Sea against the Swedes. The square on the west side of the Admiralty is called the Decemberist's Square where, on December 14, 1825, some guards led an unsuccessful rebellion against the Czar Nicholas I.

Across the river from the Admiralty stands the Peter and Paul Fortress that remains the chief monument to the reign of Peter the Great. "HOW TO BUILD A FORTRESS, a book once belonging to Peter is on display in a small hut where Peter lived during its construction.. As we approach the entrance to the fort, a small brass band is playing "Swanee River." A Cathedral named after the Saints is located within the walls of the fortress. Its 400 feet tall spire was the tallest point in the city of St. Petersburg until television towers were erected. Inside the Cathedral, we view Peter the Great's tomb flanked by the flags of his elite regiment and of his beloved Russian Navy. Nearly all his successors are also buried in the Cathedral excepting the last Czar of the Romanov Dynasty, Czar Nicholas II.

We are familiar with his tragic demise. Following the Bolshevik Revolution of March 17, 1917, the Czar and his family were held under arrest in the Royal Palace at Tsarskoe Selo (a city now called Pushkin) about 25 kilometers from St. Petersburg . In the Spring of

1918, the family was taken to a place called Ekaterinburg, and kept as prisoners in a house with the ominous name of the "House of Special Purpose". At midnight on July 16, 1918, Czar Nicholas II, his wife and five young children were brutally murdered, their bodies mutilated and thrown down a mine shaft.

Although Czar Nicholas II had abdicated on March 17, 1917, the actual takeover of the government took place on the evening of October 25 when Lenin's Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace which was built by Empress Elizabeth to serve as the Royal Residence. In the Winter Palace, we see the White Dining Room that has been preserved as it was on the night when the Ministers of Alexander Kerensky's provisional government were arrested. The clock on the mantle is frozen at 2:30 to memorialize the event. Adjoining the Winter Palace, is the Hermitage built by Catherine the Great to house the ever-growing Imperial collections. Its collection of art remains a monument to Catherine the Great's contribution to the Age of Enlightenment. The works of European masters, Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Ruben, among others, are housed in the 355 room State Hermitage Museum.. There are almost three million exhibits in all, ranging from the Stone Age to the present.

In his book **THE 900 DAYS -- THE SEIGE OF LENINGRAD**, Harrison E. Salisbury describes how the museum's precious treasures were packed and shipped out of the city by trainloads in semi-darkness.