

## Cultural Change vs. Persistence: A Case from Old Believer Settlements

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**ABSTRACT.** Scholars have described in detail the Schism (*Raskol*) of the Russian Orthodox Church (c. 1652-66) brought on by the Nikonian reforms. As a result of this schism, large segments of the population (*raskol'niki*, or people of *Raskol*) have evolved, members of which came to be known as Old Believers because of their insistence on worshipping according to pre-reform rituals. Persecution by the Russian tsarist government forced Old Believers into remote and undeveloped areas, where they quietly continued to practice the old rituals, periodically moving when threats of persecution caught up with them again. Several of these groups have recently immigrated to the United States, settling in the rural areas of Oregon and Alaska. Their obedience to the old 17th-century ways places them in conspicuous contrast to other residents of their new location. At the same time, elders complain that contact with modern American values is threatening the loyalty and discipline of their members, especially the younger ones. However, despite tendencies toward acculturation in some aspects of their existence, their continued observance of the old ways in many religious and cultural aspects, including appearance, religious conduct, and language, both Russian and Church Slavonic, is found to a large degree. This paper describes their present-day way of life and the continuing efforts to preserve and protect their cultural values.

**Key words:** Old Believers, cultural change, persistence, religious values

**RÉSUMÉ.** Les érudits ont présenté des descriptions détaillées du schisme (*Raskol*) de l'Église orthodoxe russe (vers 1652-66) entraîné par les réformes de Nikon. En résultat de ce schisme, de grands secteurs de la population surgirent (*raskol'niki*), dont les membres furent connus comme les "vieux croyants" en raison de leur insistance de poursuivre leur culte selon les rituels d'avant la réforme. La persécution par le gouvernement tsariste russe repoussa les "vieux croyants" à des régions éloignées et sous-développées où ils continuèrent à pratiquer discrètement les anciens rituels, déménageant périodiquement lorsqu'il se posait à nouveau des risques de persécution. Plusieurs de ces groupes ont récemment immigré aux États-Unis dans les régions rurales de l'Oregon et de l'Alaska. Leur adhésion aux anciennes coutumes du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle les mettent en contraste évident avec les autres résidents de leurs nouveaux milieux. Les aînés se plaignent en même temps que le contact avec les valeurs américaines modernes menace la loyauté et la discipline de leurs membres et des jeunes en particulier. Cependant, même aux tendances vers l'acculturation dans certains aspects de leur existence, on retrouve toujours l'observation des anciennes coutumes dans plusieurs aspects religieux et culturels, y compris l'apparence, la conduite religieuse et la langue, tant avec le russe que le slavon liturgique. Le présent article décrit le mode de vie actuel et les efforts continus de préservation et de protection des valeurs culturelles.

**Mots clés:** "vieux croyants", changement culturel, persistance, valeurs religieuses

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the chief concerns of the social sciences, and of ethnohistory in particular, is the study of cultural change and cultural processes in diachronic and synchronic terms (Steward, 1956; Sturtevant, 1966; Helms, 1978; Axtell, 1979), the reconstruction of ethnogenetic processes and ethnic history of the different peoples of the world, their blood and cultural relationships (Bromley, 1979; Gurvich, 1980, 1982).

The search for ethnogenetic relationships is the central problem of Soviet historical discipline and it comes into play in determining cultural areas and their spatio-temporal relationships. In short, the term ethnogenesis simply means a historical continuity or transformation of one cultural tradition into another in an attempt to discover the traits found in certain ethnic traditions and the historical origins of these traits (Dolgikh, 1964; Dolitsky, 1984, 1985).

The question of cultural change and stability is complex. Cultural change is the process by which some members of a society revise their cultural knowledge and use it to generate and interpret new forms of social behavior through innovation, social acceptance, performance, and integration processes. Briefly, cultural change means a revision of the knowledge used to generate social behavior (Spradley and McCurdy, 1975:570). In order for cultural change to occur, individuals must revise their present knowledge and create new ways of understanding experience. More than the mere learning of new information, cultural change involves the adoption of new forms of social

behavior. Only when new information is used to interpret experience and generate new behavior does it become cultural knowledge. Often, though people may have access to new information, they either fail to grasp its meaning, refuse to believe its content, or are unable to use this knowledge to reorganize their behavior. Sometimes the new information conflicts with deeply held values, and even though people acquire new knowledge, they may not change their traditional and other-worldly cultural patterns. Isolated communities or segregated religiously oriented groups are almost wholly static (Hostetler, 1965). Despite the occasional changes brought about by inventions or exploration of new territories, stable and conservative traditions are transmitted with little modification from generation to generation. Religiously oriented Amish farmers in North America, for example, have remained unmechanized and virtually self-sufficient in the past 200 years, while in rural America there has been a tendency to accept and use technical changes and inventions (Hostetler, 1965:11). Some anthropological theorists, however, state that the model of cultural stability of isolated societies is both artificial and erroneous. Keesing (1963:386) argues that the ". . . models of the dynamics of the completely self-contained culture and societies are necessarily inferential. No scientist can observe a completely isolated group in the contemporary world — he would not be there, or written records would not be kept, if it were so."

In dealing with cultural phenomena such as stability or acculturation, it becomes obvious that the value systems of the

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culture concerned (i.e., individual and group judgments of the worth of new and old elements as expressed in affectively charged choices) is the key to the understanding of short- and long-term social evolution and adaptive behavior (Wallis, 1952; Bennett, 1969, 1976; Frake, 1962). Values, particularly the nucleus values, act as "censors," permitting or prohibiting the entry and exit of cultural elements. Specifically, the members of the conservative groups are making their decisions not merely with regard to the present carriers of the culture but also for the next generation (Wallis, 1952:146). In other words, cultural value systems, as a "heterogeneous class of normative factors" (Albert, 1958:221), have a screening effect on stability and change and are the central concern for the understanding of cultural processes.

Our aim in this paper is to examine how far and rapidly an isolated society may change its basic value systems or social integration. This problem will be clarified in the light of ethnographic data obtained from Old Believer communities that still preserve their traditional style of life in Siberia and North America. This research is not intended as a detailed, spatial or comparative analysis of Old Believer society, but rather is a brief ethnohistoric survey of the people who became religious refugees and who struggled for the past 300 years in order to maintain and protect their traditional and religious values. There are a number of specific questions that, however, can be recommended for further studies, which may help us to understand the Old Believers' social structure better: Why do Old Believers today do what they do? What social control mechanisms do these communities have to enforce conformity? How does their introduction into a capitalistic cash-based economy affect their social organization and culture? How do they reconcile differing historical practices within a given community?

This paper is the result of preliminary studies of Old Believer groups in Siberia (Trans-Baykal) by Kuz'mina and brief, informal interview-surveys of Old Believers in Kenai Peninsula and Willow (Alaska) by Dolitsky.

#### THE GREAT SCHISM

In the mid-17th century (1652-66) the Russian Orthodox Church, and all of Russia, was shaken to its core by what has since been called the *Raskol* (the Great Schism). At this time, Patriarch Nikon, a strict disciplinarian and a scholar as well, introduced changes in the church books and the method of worship practiced by the masses. These changes dealt with revising the church books, where errors, marginal notes and mistranslations had become incorporated into the texts. They also included changes in rituals, which revised several of the actions that the faithful and illiterate peasants had internalized as part of the mystical context of their worship. The most obvious change related to the way in which one crossed oneself — a common action performed numerous times each day. The patriarch insisted on favoring the three-fingered configuration rather than the two-fingered method previously approved by the Council of 1551. This change became the symbol of those who held to the old ritual, the old belief. Labeled *Raskol'niki* by the reformers, they called themselves Old Believers and stubbornly pointed out that they were not splitting away from the church but that the reformers were drawing the church away from the true, orthodox ritual.

For the Russian masses, the organized religion of the Ortho-

dox Church was interwoven with superstition and confused with magic. Many opposed the changes in rituals simply because Nikon promoted them, but several others refused to conform to them, strongly questioning the authority of the patriarch to make such alterations. After all, the Orthodox Church, with the purity of its apostolic succession traced to Andrew, had protected itself from the "Roman Heresy" and had steadfastly remained untainted while Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium or the "second Rome," fell into the hands of the Moslems. Many favored the concept of Moscow as the "third Rome." Having preserved its purity, while the others had lost theirs, Russian Orthodoxy was believed by the Russians to be the only remaining survivor of the true church. Given these considerations, how could Patriarch Nikon dare to order changes? Opposition to the innovations was also tied to an important psychological factor, i.e., the traditional forms and familiar routines that gave an illusion of security. The people, insecure amid chronic religious disorders, bitterly opposed new and further efforts to uproot the old rituals (Kluchevsky, 1913; Zenkovsky, 1957; Vernadsky, 1969; Soloviev, 1980).

Though the schism was basically a religious phenomenon, it also involved other socio-political factors. In order to understand this historical event and its circumstances, we must realize that the church was not an isolated institution within the state but part of the ideological norms and values of 17th-century Russia (Pokrovsky, 1933; Zenkovsky, 1957). There were two distinct classes of clergy in the Russian Orthodox Church, which controlled socio-political attitudes within the state. The parish priests, known as the "white clergy" because of the white garments they wore, represented the interests of the people in many ways. They served two masters: the village commune that selected and paid them and limited their actions, and the higher ecclesiastics by whom they were taxed. The higher clergy, called the "black clergy," were all monks. They were the servants of the tsar, just as the white clergy were the servants of the villages. No member of the white clergy could hope for promotion to places of power and wealth, such as the bishoprics and archbishoprics, since these were the monopoly of the black clergy. Between the black and the white clergies existed an almost unbridgeable gap and constant controversies. Rebellions against the authority of the higher churchmen were not infrequent, and there was a persistent opposition on the part of the lower clergy toward efforts to increase and centralize clerical authority. These efforts climaxed during the Patriarchate of Nikon (1652-58), who sought to reform and revitalize the church. He was not, in fact, the first to attempt to adopt changes, nor did his efforts initially arouse opposition, but they became the immediate cause of the *Raskol*, partly because he had many personal enemies who were glad to use this as an opportunity to eliminate Nikon from the center of church authority.

The specific opposition to Nikon's reforms was at first confined to the higher clergy, but under the leadership of Avvakum the movement spread widely. Nikon lost the favor of Tsar Alexis, and his enemies removed him from control of the church, but still the quarrel raged between the supporters and opponents of the changes. Finally a church council called in 1666 accepted Nikon's reforms and punished those who would not agree. Tsar Alexis eventually approved the reforms, making refusal to conform not just an offense against the church, but a civil offense as well. The tsarist approval of the church reforms probably had political motivations, such as national independence from the Byzantium and Greek Orthodoxy influence,

governmental control of the ideological institutions, and continuing efforts of politico-economic centralization of Russian lands under the Moscow authorities. The schism and purge also weakened the church and later made it easier for Peter the Great to subordinate it in order to strengthen his autocracy and enforce new socio-political reforms in Russia (Kluchevsky, 1913; Pokrovsky, 1933).

Because the power of the tsar stood behind the council, the schismatics were in fact rebels against both church and state. Many were purged, but still the movement persisted. From this polarization evolved large segments of the population who risked persecution and death rather than give up the old ritual. Most, as individuals, families or groups, fled from the major population areas of the Russian Plain. Subsequent traces of the Old Believers can be found in historical references, although their protest was soon to be eclipsed by other problems that beset the growing and developing Russian national state. As Russia lumbered through its wars and social strife, the Old Believers took refuge in undeveloped areas of the country, avoiding persecution for their continued lack of obedience to the commands of the tsar. There were reprieves and attempts to re-incorporate these people from time to time as *Yedinovertsy* (monobelievers), but with only moderate success. Thus, Old Believers represent the groups that rejected the church reforms of the 17th century and found themselves in opposition to the established Orthodox Church.

MIGRATION OF OLD BELIEVERS

Refusing to accept new church reforms, some Old Believers escaped from Russia to neighboring Rumania, Turkey, and Poland (Vetka region) within a few decades of the schism. Others made their way to settle in Siberia (Altay Mountains) and the Far East (Fig. 1). Through the centuries, these remote groups, not necessarily in contact with each other and in spite of a certain level of modernization, acculturation and adaptation to new climate, not only survived but preserved and maintained their religious form of worship and their cultural ways intact.

All the groups of the Old Believers that settled east of Lake Baykal in the 17-18th centuries maintained contact with the Buryats, Evenks, and other neighboring ethnic groups engaged in hunting, reindeer breeding, fishing, and transport dog raising. Trans-Baykalian Old Believers whose ancestors were banished to East Siberia from Chernigov Province of the Ukraine and Vetka of Poland in the 18th century moved with their families and are known, therefore, as *semeyskiye* — from the Russian word *sem'ya* (family). The Russian newcomers found themselves in conditions radically different from their customary life. The long winters, bitter frosts, harsh environment, and a shortage of Russian women — all these necessitated urgent assimilation of the centuries-old experience of the aboriginal population in economic activities and in fighting with a severe nature. Although Old Believers of the Trans-Baykal fanatically followed the patriarchal traditions of the pre-reform Russian church, their members (including women) were better educated than their neighbors. Many of them were *Kuptyy* (commercial people), *cossaks* (free peasants), and *remeslenniki* (small manufacturers) (Bromley and Markova, 1982).

At present, in the area east of Lake Baykal there live 100 000 Old Believers and Orthodox Russians (Kuz'mina, 1982). The small villages of the early settlers have become large communities by now, with solid houses and with streets running the length of a few kilometers. According to Kuz'mina (1982, 1983), the settlements show that many of the conservative forms of life and religion are gradually subsiding into the past, together with such norms of everyday life as the prohibition of any communication with representatives of other faiths, to say nothing of intermarriage and the banning of wine and tea drinking, smoking, and beard shaving. However, the Trans-Baykal Old Believers continue to live and work in compact groups, and they try to preserve their traditional rites by marrying within their own community or converting an outsider into their religion. In contrast to the other Russian groups, they rarely come into economic (trade, exchange, contracts) or any other kind of social contact with the native Buryats. Despite

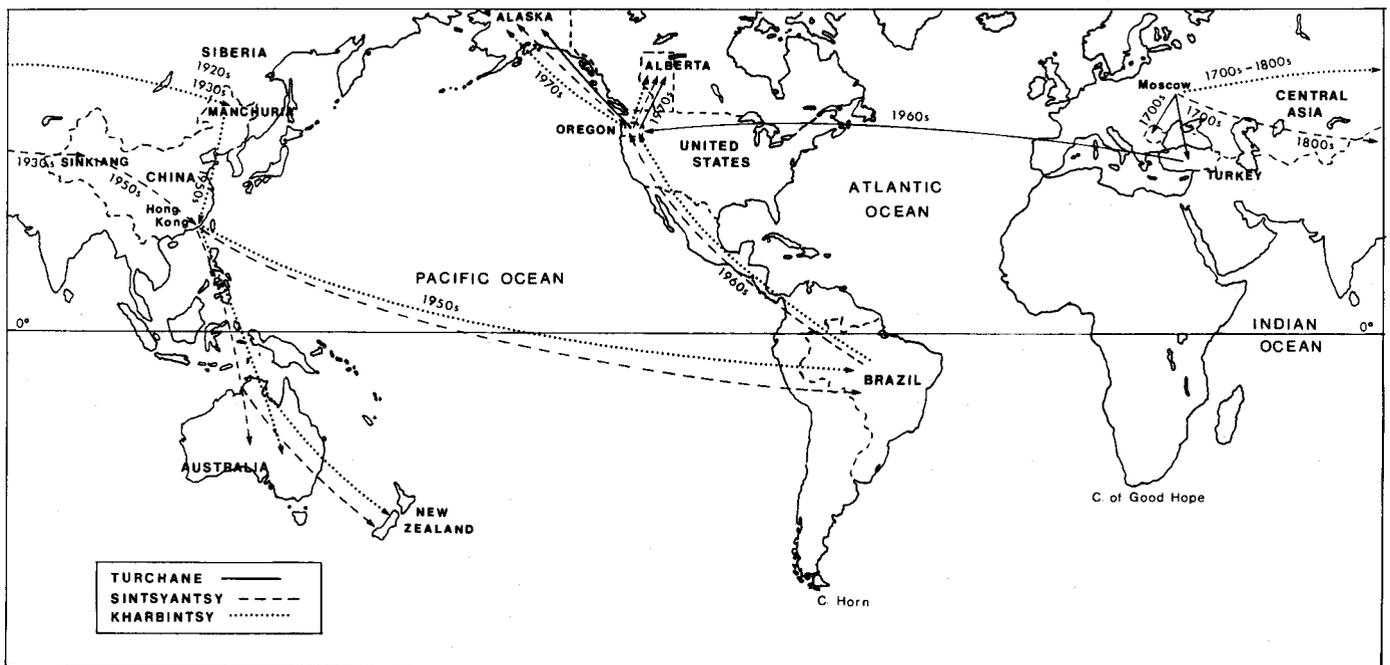


FIG. 1. Worldwide dispersion of Old Believer settlements.

considerable transformations in the traditions of contemporary villages, the Old Believers of Trans-Baykal still maintain many aspects of their original traditions. A manifestation of these can be seen in the planning of their modern villages. The strong houses, decorations, and paintings remind one of the feudal farmsteads of the nobility described in the Old-Russian chronicles and folk tales. The maintenance of their tradition can also still be seen in the brightly colored women's clothes, consisting of multicolored *sarafans* (variation of skirt) and jackets of unusual cuts, and headwear that displays many traits in common with the clothes and decorations of the 17th- and 18th-century Russian women. The traditional singing, based on a great number of rhythmically complex voice parts, has been reflected in the repertoire of the choir *Kunaley* from a *semeysky* village (Kuz'mina, 1982, 1983; Dorofeev, 1980).

In estimating the cultural tradition of the Old Believers one should not neglect its contemporary state among those of the Trans-Baykalian Old Believer community who moved to Manchuria during the construction of the East Chinese railroad and the city Kharbin, which gave rise to the Old Believer community called Kharbinskaya. After the socialist October Revolution in 1917, the Old Believers faced the atheistic Soviet government bent on discouraging all forms of religion. During the 1920s, in desperation, most of the Siberian Old Believers escaped over the border to China, where they once again lived in isolated and remote areas of Manchuria and Sikiang. As a result of the Chinese socialist revolution in 1949, they were herded into collective farms, provided a meager food allowance, and given work norms. Many were carted back to the Soviet Union.

Finally, after ten years, a minority of them, as families, groups or single individuals, were able to escape or receive permission to depart to Hong Kong. From Hong Kong, they went to various immigrant-seeking countries, the vast majority going to South America, primarily Brazil. After several discouraging years of adaptation to a new environment, many were able to secure voluntary passage to the United States and Canada, some eventually settling in Oregon, where a community of Old Believers continues to grow. The first families arrived in 1964, and since then the population has increased up to 5000 over a two-county area (Morris, 1981). In the Oregon locale there are six *sobors* (churches, prayer houses), reflecting to some extent the community's internal division into three principal subgroups generally based on former residence — *Harbintsy* (Manchuria) and *Sintsyantsy* (Sikiang) of China, and *Turchany* of Turkey — and further divided on the strength of kin groups within these. Although no longer located in a cohesive village settlement pattern, the Old Believers continue to congregate in prayer halls for worship and gather at kin homesteads for marriages and other major events. To attend any of these events is to relive aspects of the historical accounts of pre-revolutionary peasant Russia (Morris, 1982).

The most orthodox of the orthodox, wincing under the threat of cultural erosion in the compromises necessary to co-exist with the host culture, preferred to exercise the ultimate strategy, that of exodus to a more remote, isolated region. These families in the early 1970s split off to form settlements in the northern regions of Canada and on the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska. The Alaskan community has prospered and grown over the past 16 years and it constantly attracts more families from Oregon. Initially, four extended families acquired a square mile of land and formed a village, called Nikolaevsk (Fig. 2). As of May 1986 the village had a population of over 400, or about 70

nuclear families. The village has its own public school managed by the state of Alaska (Fig. 3) and attended mostly by Russian children. Living in a cohesive village has considerably eased the strain of having deliberately to enforce what Old Believers consider to be an appropriate or proper cultural behavior.

In summer 1983, when Dolitsky visited Old Believers in the Kenai Peninsula, he noticed a growing controversy in Nikolaevsk between two factions of its residents. Two years later the *Anchorage Daily News* (27 January 1985) reported in greater detail about the dispute among Old Believers on the Kenai. The conflict centers on the differences in religious conduct: some Old Believers, led by Kondratiy Fefelov (who apparently studied in a monastery in Rumania uncorrupted, as he stated, by religious reforms), favor ordaining of priests. Many of the villagers, however, have not accepted Fefelov as a priest and refuse to share his idea as a whole. During 1983-84, as a result of this dilemma, five priestless nuclear families left Nikolaevsk, establishing a new home in a rural area near Willow, Alaska.



FIG. 2. Main road of the village Nikolaevsk, Kenai Peninsula, Alaska.



FIG. 3. Public school of Nikolaevsk.

### Religious Practices

From the religious point of view, the Old Believers are divided into those who recognize priests and those who do not; they are also divided into numerous sects. Lack of field research and available information precludes differentiating all these sects in any meaningful and complete way. In Alaska and Trans-Baykal there are no priests left in the *Bespopovtsy* (priestless) and *Temnovertsy* (dark-believer) lines of Old Believers. Instead, they are led by a layman, *Nastavnik* or *Nastoyatel'*, who is elected as the spiritual leader. *Semeyskiye-popovtsy* and Austrian groupings, however, do recognize the authority of priests. In their services, the Old Believers, especially in the non-priest grouping, strictly adhere to the ritual and church writings of the pre-reform time. In the mid-17th century, religious conduct was developed and taught to the Russians by ascetic Greek monks who emphasized austere deprivation, prolonged worship services resembling all-night vigils, and

long, strict fasting periods. Such is the case with the Old Believers today. They are left, essentially, with monastic rites. The Old Believers greatly cherish their religious ritual and are completely subordinate to their *ustavschiki* (elders), who can read Church Slavonic and know Holy Script. Their service begins at 2:00 A.M. on Sundays and on frequent holidays, and it lasts some five or six hours, the people standing through most of it. The Easter service can last up to fifteen hours. The week after Easter is celebrated by all the men and women going from house to house singing in praise of Christ, *Slavit' Kresta*, and enjoying the abundant delicacies of homemade food and *braga* (home-made wine), from which they have abstained during the Long Great Fast. The fasting requirements are quite severe. With Wednesdays and Fridays as fasting days, in addition to four prolonged periods during the year, the Old Believers abstain from all animal products, including milk and eggs, a total of over 200 days a year. Discipline within the family, and under the consensual influence of the *Sobor*, or church group, is strict. The *Sobor*, elected by adult men of the congregation, also elects other church officials, and it makes decisions on matters both spiritual and secular. Obedience is a virtue, and obedience is measured by the ancient standard. When relating with outsiders, the Old Believers are careful not to violate the rules of sacred cleanliness. They do not allow outsiders or those not in "union" to eat at the same table with them in their homes. Similarly, they do not accept food from outsiders. The non-believer guest is treated very hospitably but is fed separately and served in dishes kept separate and washed separately — often under an outside faucet. Most Old Believers eschew alcoholic beverages available in the market but are very generous with their own *braga*, made from berries. The Old Believers have no dealings with other branches of the Orthodox Church. However, there is no hostility on their part toward other Orthodox Christians.

#### *Marriage and Wedding Customs*

Marriage among Alaskan and Siberian Old Believers does not have a unified procedure and typical pattern. As a rule, Old Believers, even those in the Soviet Union, do not practice *venchaniye*, i.e., wedding ceremonies under the church traditions (Pokrovsky, 1974), confronting state requirements as well. For example, the *semeyskiye* of Trans-Baykal are divided into eleven different sects, and some of them refuse to recognize Orthodox Church ceremonies. However, the *semeyskiye*, or so-called Austrian grouping, and the *beglopopovtsy* confirm their marriages by following Russian Orthodox Church ceremonies established by Nikon, i.e., crowning the brides (Popova, 1928). The *semeyskiye-popovtsy*, who recognize the authority of the priests of the Orthodox Church, sometimes intermarried with Russian political exiles sent permanently to Siberia by the tsarist government or with the aboriginal population (Blomkvist and Grinkova, 1930; Bolonev, 1974). Bukhtarmin Old Believers of Altay (Kamenschiki) have had prayer houses, but they confirmed their marriages in the Orthodox Church of the Bukhtarmin Fortress (Mamsik, 1975). Only the *Bespopovtsy* and *Temnovertsy* sects ignore priests, and they confirm marriages not under the church but within a secret society.

Weddings are traditional peasant village affairs. Prior to the actual wedding, typical Russian peasant ceremonies such as the engagement negotiations are carried out by the parents of bride and groom. The final agreement is toasted with presents and a drink. Other ceremonies include *devichniki*, the time of increased sewing by the bride and her girlfriends, and the

evening parties during which the groom and his friends come to call. There is also the light-hearted "buying of the bride" in which the groom comes to take her to her new family, and the touching *proschaniye* of the bride's farewell to her parents. The wedding party, with a chain of handkerchiefs, proceeds to the prayer hall. The *venchaniye*, or crowning ceremony, takes place after the regular Sunday service, and the wedding, *svad'ba*, is celebrated for three consecutive days at the home of the groom's father. The bride's trunk, *sunduk*, is delivered by her kinsmen and "sold" to the wedding party. Later, after a meal *pir*, the young couple stands for the *poklony*, or bowing ceremony, which is the chance for kin and friends to give them advice and presents. On the last day of the wedding, the young couple must "buy" the presents from the best man and the matrons of honor with kisses, bows, and witticisms. At this point, the bride's mother-in-law is also auctioned off (Morris, 1981, 1982).

#### *Household and Subsistence Activities*

The household of Old Believers in many ways is similar to that of the 18th- and 19th-century Siberian peasants of Russian origin. The Trans-Baykalians build their houses with constructive and decorative elements characteristic of the northern areas of Russia and ornament the interior with red, blue, green, and orange colors, using patterns well-known in the Ukraine and Byelorussia. The Trans-Baykal area is the only place where architectural elements mentioned in folk epic descriptions of the homesteads of grand dukes and boyars (old-Russian noblemen) still survive.

The Old Believers of Nikolaevsk Village, Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, live in large, one-story houses consisting of several rooms, a kitchen, small closets, and a veranda. Several small constructions such as *banya* (steam baths), shed or *stoybische* (cattle house), *parnik* (green house), and toilet are within the area of a nuclear family's household. Each family household is surrounded by a fence. Furniture in the main house is quite simple but strong and comfortable.

The religious and social isolation of Old Believers in Alaska are major determinants of their economic (subsistence) isolation. Presently, in contrast to Amish, Old Believers are not in competition with new productive technology. However, the Old Believers are economically (mostly agriculturally) self-sufficient. Yet, they are efficient as well. Most of them do not purchase food (except sugar and salt) or traditional clothes outside of their community. Each family tries to guarantee its supply of food for the entire year. The source of their food is largely from vegetable gardening, fishing, cattle raising, and hunting (Fig. 4). Sometimes Old Believers buy or trade a particular essential item within their community. For example, Andron Martusheff's family, from the Alaskan village of Nikolaevsk, supplies milk to their relatives, Fedor Basargom's family. Similarly Fedor's family sells skillfully tailored traditional garments, made by his wife Irina, to Andron and other villagers. Some families specialize in certain subsistence activities, such as fishing, carpentry, and ship building. The subsistence specialization reflects the household and structure of the farms. Often several nuclear families from the same religious sect cooperate to confirm a big construction contract from outside. The main economic factor of such cooperation, as a rule, is a religious solidarity among relevant Old Believer sects. Old Believers do not carry out business and trade with hostile sects.



FIG. 4. Andron Martusheff household.

### Appearance

The physical type and outer appearance of the Old Believers is Slavic. The Old Believers of Trans-Baykal, as well most conservative North American Old Believers, wear clothing reminiscent of the 17th and 18th centuries, despite the stylistic differences of their clothes as a result of different cultural-geographical origins; at baptism, a person is dressed in a shirt bound with a belt and is given a cross to wear around the neck (See Figs. 5 and 9 for comparative examples). These three elements, the shirt, belt, and cross, traditionally have had to be worn at all times in public (Uspensky, 1905; Eliasov, 1963;

Morris, 1982). Hence, the men are seen with the long Russian *rubashka* shirt girded with a belt. Women lengthen the shirt to form a blouse/slip combination and wear a jumper *sarafan* over it, along with the ever-present peasant apron (Figs. 6, 7, and 8)



FIG. 6. Fedor Basargom, his daughter, and his wife, Irina.

(Grinkova, 1930; Eliasov, 1963; Morris, 1982). Children wear adult-style clothing simply reduced in size. Holiday clothing is more fanciful and colorful but of the same style (Martos, 1827; Rozen, 1870; Grinkova, 1930; Morris, 1982).



FIG. 5. Fedor Basargom (right) and Andron Martusheff (left).



FIG. 7. Siberian Old Believer (Trans-Baykal region). From Eliasov, 1963:224, with permission of the publisher.



FIG. 8. Luker'ya Anokhrievna Matveeva, of the village Novaya Bryan', Buryat Autonomous Republic (Trans-Baykal). From Eliasov, 1963:160, with permission of the publisher.

Men cut their hair, except for a fringe in front, and they leave their beards untrimmed. Unmarried women plait their hair in a single braid, and after marriage they keep it bound with two braids under a cap (*shashmura*) covered with a kerchief. Hence, in the town, on the streets, and in the residential areas one is treated to the frequent sight of Russians resembling peasants of yesteryear, nonchalantly going about their business.

In the Old Believer's life, appearance becomes highly symbolic of one's attachment to the group and of one's place within society. Traditional dress becomes identified and integrated with a total way of life, and the manner of dressing becomes one of the most important entities of their collective consciousness and representation.

### Language

Language and epics of Old Believers naturally do reflect their life in the north, the picturesque landscapes, and their economic contacts with the non-Russian nationalities. It should be pointed out, however, that some elements of the Siberian way of life and vocabulary are traced only in the descriptions of material culture. The poetry, reflecting the spiritual life of the epic heroes, remained unchanged and preserved as a precious relic,

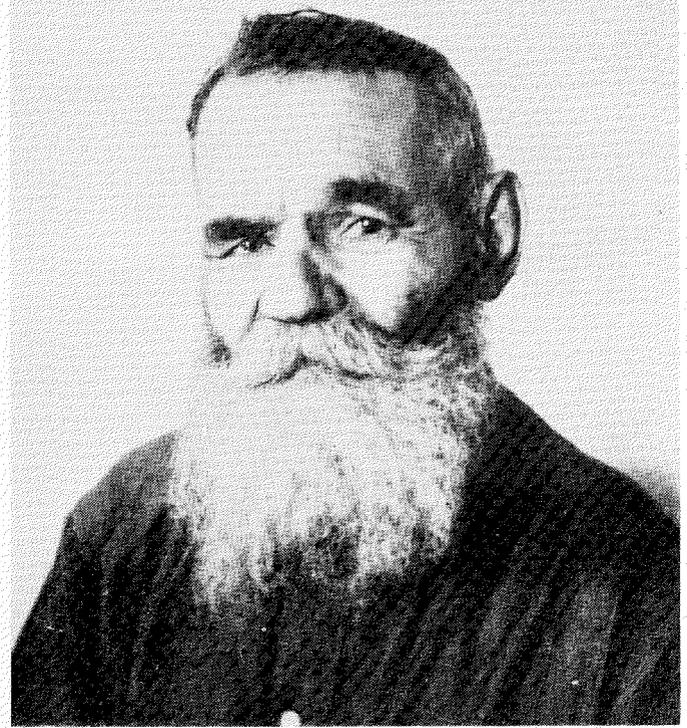


FIG. 9. Dorofey Osipovich Medvedev, of the village Yagodnoye, Buryat Autonomous Republic (Trans-Baykal). From Eliasov, 1963:161, with permission of the publisher.

even when words and expressions had lost their relation with the former life situations and became outdated.

Among North American Old Believers, Russian is spoken at home and in most work areas. Given the size of the Russian communities in Oregon and Alaska, there is ample opportunity for men speaking Russian to form groups for contract work outside of their villages, reducing the need to learn English as a second language. Living on farms in neighborhood clusters, there is little need for members, especially women who remain at home and have little interaction with outsiders, to speak English. Parents encourage their children to speak Russian at home, where they do not want them to practice English. Consequently, anyone over the age of 25 — those who have not had an opportunity to attend school and have had limited exposure to English-speaking people — speaks only Russian. To our knowledge, their conversational Russian is quite fluent, with a relatively extensive vocabulary, similar to the language of Siberian peasants with a South European Russian dialect. But since the language of the groups from Turkey and Rumania includes many Ukrainian, Turkish, and Polish words as well as East European dialectic variations, it is sometimes difficult for the researcher trained in contemporary Russian to understand their dialect or "jargon." Church Slavonic is used for religious services and the young learn to read and chant from their parents and elder siblings. Russian language, as a symbol representing an idea or a quality, is the channel by which Old Believers communicate beliefs and attitudes to the children, clarifying the place they are to take as adults in the community.

### Education

While the young have always been required by law to attend Soviet and American public schools, parents have been somewhat apathetic in the past about sending their children to school.

There are frequent religious holidays when children as well as parents attend church in the early morning hours, conflicting with the school schedule. Also, because of large families, commonly eight to twelve children, older children are often kept at home to look after younger siblings. To this day Old Believer parents are apprehensive about the exposure their children receive at school. There is outright objection to subjects they consider offensive, such as science, sex education, music, contemporary art, and literature. They also complain that the school environment tends to weaken the disciplined behavior required of their children. Parents will consistently urge teachers to be more strict with their children, often encouraging them to use physical punishment when necessary (Morris, 1982).

The Old Believers retain a characteristic Russian peasant attitude toward public education, namely, that the young should learn to read, write, and think so as not to be cheated by shop keepers. Anything more abstract is in God's realm and should be left alone. Consequently, parents have regularly withdrawn their children after the sixth grade, at a time when the offensive subjects are offered and, incidentally, when puberty often begins.

Their education brought to a halt, the young turn their attention to full-time adult work along with their parents. As a general rule, they are encouraged to marry early. For boys the marriage age is around 17 and for girls the age is usually 15, although marriages at 13 have sometimes occurred. Early marriage and full-time work have their advantages; they keep the young busy with real adult responsibilities. Within the first year, the newlyweds very frequently become parents. Hence, they have an obligation to abide by the religious rules to keep themselves in "union," if for no other reason than to be eligible to baptize the children. It is believed that the young will be protected by these measures from the temptations of the host cultures, occupying themselves instead with church and family and in remaining economically self-sufficient. All of this takes up time, and it both causes and necessitates interaction with one's own kind, preserving the hierarchy of authority within the community.

#### CONCLUSION

Life in close contact with atheistic Russians, aboriginal populations, and a foreign technology has led to disobedience of the traditional ways of Old Believers. Despite the eclectic nature of the Old Believers, by which they have adapted practical ideas and technology into their economic life style, the rate of change and its impact on their religious life has appalled the elders and middle-aged parents. Compared to the meager degree of change in cultural life between widely dispersed groups over 300 years, the persistent and unified governmental strategies in the U.S.S.R. and socio-technological changes taking place in the United States are much more rapid and unsettling. Although the oldest generation of Old Believers attempts to isolate the children from the temptations of developed societies by not having television, radio, and contemporary literature at home and by controlling their daily life within the community, elements of contemporary Soviet and American cultures penetrate into their families.

Relying on the ethnographic observations and oral testimonies of North American and partly Siberian (Trans-Baykal) communities and the examination of the limited written primary and secondary sources, we conclude that Old Believers have a strong sense of obligation to preserve the age-old religious

rituals of the pre-reform Orthodox Church in an attempt "to secure coherence in their universe of relations, both physical and social" (Firth, 1951:25). To Old Believers, religion is not an institution parallel to economics, politics, or kinship but is the soul of their society; it is more fundamental than the other features, and it permits them all (Durkheim, 1965). Their insistence on the preservation of the 17th-century pre-reform rituals has resulted in persecution and constant dislocation during the past 300 years. In the United States, they have so far found religious and traditional freedom, economic survival, and state protection of their cultural values. However, the temptations of the modern, secular world are a persistent threat to the discipline of their young. In response, some members have moved on to more remote locations. They feel as long as they can stay together as a community, they will continue to maintain control over the direction of their lives and social network.

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