

ROCKWELL KENT’S LETTERS TO THE SOVIET JOURNALIST NIKITA BOLOTNIKOV (1961-1970) – translated and annotated by Mitya Kiselev

Among Kent’s Soviet friends and collaborators there were people of distinctive character and outstanding talents. Nikita Bolotnikov (1905-1977) was definitely one of them – a polar explorer, historian, journalist and writer.



The mouth of Khatanga River in the southeast coast of Taimyr Peninsula in the Russian Arctic was known as a potential mining bonanza since the 18th century. In the 1920s, geologist Nikolai Urvantsev brought from Taimyr a few mineral samples, showing signs of oil presence in the area. In 1932, professor Nikolai Shatskiy outlined good prospects of oil mining in the lower course of Khatanga River and suggested a reconnaissance expedition – an idea, immediately accepted by Stalin’s government. Already in 1933, the steamer “Pravda” came to the Gulf of Khatanga with a well-equipped expedition onboard. The first summer season has nearly been spoiled by unusually heavy ice, which stopped the ship miles away from its planned destination in Nordvik Bay. The winter was spent on the small island of Samuila, which allowed the team to explore the area in Soviet-built Kégresse half-trucks. In the summer of 1934, three more ships, including icebreaker “Rusanov”, arrived in Khatanga with additional workforce. Among hundreds of newcomers there was 28-y.o. drill rig operator Nikita Bolotnikov. He was born to a middle-class family in Yalta (Crimea) on 1 April 1905. In 1921, the Bolotnikovs left the war-ravaged Crimea for Moscow, where Nikita found himself working in a distillery. At the same time, he completed a related course in the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy. However, in 1929, Bolotnikov decided to start a new life and joined mining courses in the Moscow Geological and Prospecting Institute.

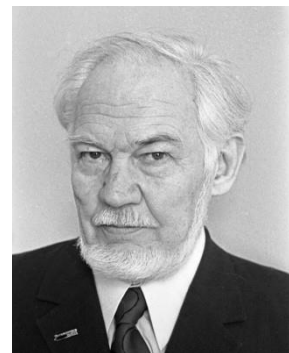
The first wintering experience forever changed his life: for the rest of his days, Nikita remained a tireless explorer and chronicler of the polar regions. At the same time, his energy and organizational talent made Bolotnikov demanded in practical sphere. In 1936, he returned to Nordvik at the head of relief expedition on board the steamer “Smolensk” traveling all the way up from Vladivostok. Upon arrival, he had to take leadership over the expedition base, which became shelter for hundreds of people, stranded during the infamous winter of 1937-1938. At that time 25 Soviet ships were trapped all along the Siberian coast due to the uncommonly harsh ice conditions and bad planning. In Nordvik, the wintering population went far beyond the planned numbers, exceeding 500 people. Bolotnikov had to feed and employ this unexpected workforce, acting both as the base commander and accountant. At the turn of 1940s, he retired from polar duties and settled in Moscow, where the Chief Directorate of the Northern Sea Route – the primary administrative organ of the Soviet Arctic – appointed Bolotnikov one of the historiographers of national polar explorations. With the start of German invasion in June 1941, he voluntarily joined the workers militia and continued first as a private in a construction battalion, then as a decorated frontline journalist. His wartime service came to its end only

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

in May 1945, in Prague.

After the war and till his final retirement in 1965, Bolotnikov worked as a special correspondent of the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (“the weekly Literary Gazette”), edited by famous Soviet poet Konstantin Simonov. This gave him a chance to visit the USA and many other countries in the Americas, Africa and Asia. In his late years, Bolotnikov devoted himself to writing and editing. He took part in publishing literary miscellanies *Na sushe yi na more* (“On Land and At Sea”), *Letopis Severa* (“Chronicles of the North”) and *Polyarny Almanach* (“Polar Miscellany”). Bolotnikov is also remembered as the chief editor and commentator of Russian editions of the works by legendary Antarctic explorers Robert Scott, Ernest Shackleton and Carsten Borchgrevink, as well as of the five books by Rockwell Kent. In addition to that, Bolotnikov wrote two articles about Kent as a writer: “The Russian “Rockwellkentiana” and “Rockwell Kent – a Poet of Universe, a Knight of Peace”.

The two met each other in Moscow several times and pursued an active correspondence from the early 1960s and until the Kent’s last years. Bolotnikov himself passed away on 26 October 1977. A sand bar at the mouth of Khatanga River in the Russian Arctic now bears his name.



The collection of Bolotnikov’s personal documents is owned now by the Russian State Archive of Economy in Moscow (RSAE, collection # 444). It contains 41 letters, addressed by Rockwell Kent to his Soviet correspondent between 10 October 1961 and 12 December 1972. Apart from them, there are some letters sent to Bolotnikov by Sally Kent already after the artist’s passing. As Bolotnikov did not speak or read English, all the letters were accurately translated for him, likely by Boris Senkin – the one who worked as Kent’s personal translator on his visits to the USSR. Although most of the artist’s letters are dealing with the publication of the Kent’s books in Soviet Russia, many of them also contain his comments about the contemporary US political situation and social problems. Letters are written in a very specific Kent’s way; they are full of delicate humor and self-irony. In 2012, in order to celebrate Kent’s 130th birthday, notable historians Yuri Nekhoroshev and Anatoly Chernobayev selected 10 of his letters to Nikita Bolotnikov and published them in the “Historical Archive” magazine (Moscow, 2013, vol.5, p.56-77). The online version of this article can be found at the RSAE official website.

The texts below are reverse translations of Kent’s letters, interpreted by Boris Senkin for Nikita Bolotnikov more than 50 years ago.

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

#1.

Au Sable Forks, NY, 25 March 1961.

Dear Mr. Bolotnikov!

You are a precious friend of mine and I cannot help forgiving you for belated response to my letters – even though it is a deadly sin from a Christian point of view. Your telegram, and now your letter, made me feeling absolutely happy.

First of all, I remember how much disappointed we were to hear about your sudden departure from Moscow immediately upon your return from Sochi!ⁱ So now I am particularly glad to know when my books are planned to come out from the printing house, and that my “Wilderness” is in translation already, and that publication of other works is in progress.ⁱⁱ We have not yet received those issues of “Around the World” and “Knowledge is Power” with extracts from the “N by E” and “Salamina”, but maybe they will be delivered soon.ⁱⁱⁱ

Recently I have shipped a heavy box of my manuscripts to your Ministry of Culture. I have no idea at whose disposal they will be given, but I hope you will have time to look through the final version of “Salamina”. I finished this work during the winter of 1934-1935 and sent it proudly to my publisher with the very first postal dog sled, instructed to hand the parcel over to the very first steamer from Denmark. I put manuscript and my illustrations for the Icelandic “Gisli Saga” in a thoroughly crafted wooden box, wrapped in a perfect sealskin, sewed with the seal sinews to make the parcel waterproof. Everything arrived safely and the publisher exhibited all items at the window of the largest book shop in New York City: they remained on display until that terrible smell of sealskin forced shopkeepers to hide all the treasures. You will find the manuscript, I hope, a quite remarkable thing.^{iv}

I also shipped three parts of my big Greenlandic diary together with the printed hand which I have just made for a publication in NY.^v I embrace a little dream that it will be accepted. I sent this printed copy to our mutual friend Mademoiselle Tamara Mamedova of the Council for the Friendship with Foreign Countries, in hope she will be able to read it and decide would it be interesting for the Moscow publishers.^{vi} Fairly said, the diary is too “parallel” to “Salamina” for being published at the moment.^{vii} But anyway, I wrote Ms. Mamedova that if its publication will be considered one day, the manuscript should be first given to you and that any publication of it can be done only by permission of the State Geographic Publishing House.^{viii} I offered it already to a very decent publisher in the US, but the manuscript returned for a very strange reason: because the text “is on topic of a culture that already vanished due to the strong influence of aerial communications”. They could add – and this would be fair enough! – “under strong influence of Pentagon”.^{ix}

I feel bad because I have to write in a language unfamiliar to you. On other side, you translate all your letters to English and this kindness amazes me. In NY City, I have a Russian-American friend [*who?* – M.K.] who generously translates my correspondence, but it always

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

takes a long time.

I am sure all of your creative journeys are valued by the Geographic Publishing House and this allows me to suggest that geography of Western Hemisphere might be interesting for you – especially of that region known as Adirondack Mountains, 300 miles to the north from the NY City.^x How glad would we be to see you as our guest!

We cannot wait for the photos. I also made a habit of developing my own black-and-white images by myself. Such a big mistake it was for me not to have made some of your photos with my Leica!

Now we spend much of our time on geography and studies of Congolese and Lao people. But even more time we spend trying to understand the geography of our governmental minds. We are terrified by our country’s policy and our only hope is that it will not make an old-fashioned attempt to solve the growing unemployment problem by starting another war. We should finally learn bitter lessons of Korean events.

We do hope that despite your intense traveling – or owing to it – you are well and happy. Please keep writing to us!

Yours truly, *Rockwell Kent*.

Source: *RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, p.34-34reverse.*

#2

Au Sable Forks, NY, 18 April 1961.

Dear Mr. Bolotnikov!

We have just received those volumes of the “Around the World” magazine with extracts from “Salamina” and my article, addressed to the readers of the future century. I am very grateful to you for sending these periodicals.

While packing my manuscripts, I found a story written over 47 years ago. It is about a striking tragedy of a fishing fleet, that affected many families and entire community which that ill-fated crew belonged to.^{xi} The story is worth to be published and, even though I hope to see it in an American press, I would like to send it to you. It will definitely be of your special interest, for it reflects the real life of brutally exploited Newfoundland fishermen of those old days. If you will promise to try to publish it [in Russia], I will quickly send you the text together with the copies of two illustrations that I made at the time of its creation.

I would like to know in which part of the Soviet world you are now. In our eyes you are a devoted traveler who resemble the ancient mariners, taken away from their homes for months. Please, send us a message as soon as you can.

The manuscripts that I have sent to Leningrad almost three weeks ago, should already be delivered. So, my “Greenlandic diary” that I mentioned previously has probably reached our friend Tamara Mamedova. I am absolutely sure it cannot be published before the work on “Salamina” is done completely. As I already explained to M-me Mamedova, first reviews must be sent to Geographic Publishing House.

In the recently delivered “Soviet Literature”, I had a pleasure to see woodcuts and linocuts by Vladimir Melnichenko and Ada Rybachuk – I enjoyed her article as well.^{xii}

With warm greetings from both of us,

Your Rockwell Kent

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.36-37

#3

Au Sable Forks, NY, 13 July 1961.

Dear Mr. Bolotnikov!

I was waiting for your letter to have an occasion to thank you in return for your telegram with warm birthday greetings. I appreciate your kind attention and your excellent memory that keeps the date of your friend's birthday.

It is a real pleasure to read your letter, not only for its gentle charm, but also for this your wonderful depiction of Moldavia.^{xiii} Before we read it, the country was just a geographic name for us; a province of Romania, taken at the end of WW2. In 1959, we had an idea to sail in a boat down along the Danube River, then taking a ship from Constanza to Odessa. A trip like this could bring us close to the Moldavian border, but the plan failed. We had to fly to Moscow via Kyiv. What we have learned from you about Moldavia and its people makes us dreaming about a visit. Maybe we will succeed on our next journey to your country next year.

Long after I wrote you about that short story found among other papers, a happy idea came to my mind to send it to a good Canadian magazine, only to ask its publisher whether it was already included to my “N by E” or not. This is a story of Newfoundland disaster, the one that you know as the editor of its Russian edition. I found an early version of the story in my archive, but forgot that this text has already been used.

I am sad to see the delay in publication of my books in Moscow. Looking into the future, I see these books clearly, for I know already their format.

In America, the National Council for the Soviet-American Friendship wants to publish a book, talking about our donation to the Soviet people, made last year. Our best designer plans this book as a volume of quarterly format, having 64 pages. The question is would not it be too costly to publish it with our very limited funds.

The times are hard now for all peace-loving Americans, who dare to look forward. I can say the times are hard also for those peace-loving Americans who look back – back to those freedoms that made us proud of our nation for two centuries. Conservative circles, supported by the majority of our Supreme Court judges, overwhelm those who dare to defend freedoms or, which even more important, to make a use of them. But our brave liberals, badly insulted during the infamous McCarthy Era, are recovering now, although their strength still has to be tested.

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

Since our return in December, me and Sally are staying at home. Our garden, on which we rely most of the year, keeps us here. Sally is gardening every day, while I paint outside. The summer is quite a busy time of our life, as Adirondack Mountains are beloved by many of our urban friends. If one day we will see you among our guests, this will definitely be something to celebrate!

I hope you will find some time to read the “Greenlandic Diary”. I asked Tamara Mamedova to look through it, but her recent appointment as the head of the Council’s American division made her busy life overloaded. And her recent illness interrupted her activities completely. When you will be back in Moscow, try, please, to find and read the diary’s manuscript. Once I wrote this, I realized that your English skills will make the reading of original text complicated, if not impossible.

The diary covers a long period of time and contains many parts that have already been included in “Salamina”. Of course, they cannot be published now. We appreciate your care of us, for you translated your letter for our comfort. We know how difficult it is to find a translator. We are lacking Russian interpreters here in New York, that’s why our kind translator is so busy. Each of your letters reminds us how linguistically challenged are we and our compatriots. In your country, on each non-English speaker there are hundreds, even thousands of people, able to communicate in our language. I apologize for writing in English. We are sad to know that you felt bad and had to visit doctor. So nice that treatment brought you to such an amazing land! We wish you will flourish in good health and good mood.

With warm regards from both of us,

Your friend Rockwell Kent

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.50-51

#4

Au Sable Forks, NY, 7 November 1963.

Dear Mr. Bolotnikov!

It is truly wonderful that improving health allows you to return to Moscow, however, given how much you are in love with Moldavia, this tough urban lifestyle does not probably make you that happy.

I will be happy to write you about abstractionist art in America, however, my own sickness during the last few months turned me away from the events of the world’s artistic life. But owing to the blessed freedom in choosing of our friends and supporters, I managed to keep up some contacts with the adepts of this silly abstractionist cult. I will try to write you more about this in a few days.

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

We have just received the book of Eskimo tales by Ekaterina Sergeeva.^{xiv} It is beautifully illustrated and, beyond all doubts, very well written. Unhappily we will not be able to read it until an English edition appears. Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen was half-Eskimo raised in Greenland. He collected some Greenlandic tales which he published in a book entitled “Festensgave”.^{xv} Despite my own involvement in the creation of this work, I lost my English copy of it. If I will find another one in our antique book shops – I will send it to Ms. Sergeeva.

I will send you also my recently printed “Greenlandic diary” – all the notes from 1931-1932. Most of them ended up in “Salamina”, which you know well. I was not sure the Soviet audience will be interest in such read straight after publication of “Salamina”, that’s why I have not sent it earlier. But as long as it is a personal diary, written without an intention to make it public, it may look fresh and genuine comparing to an edited text. The edition of 2000 copies are selling very well, it has already become as rare as the Sergeeva’s “Kiwagme The Storyteller”. The original manuscript of my diary was donated to the Russian people together with other items – to my understanding, it is now in the Pushkin State Art Museum.

I hope, your health is good enough and you are quite happy in all of your beginnings.

With warmest of our greetings,

Your affectionate friend Rockwell Kent

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.80-81

#5

Au Sable Forks, NY, 29 March 1965

To Mr. N.Bolotnikov,
“Literaturnaya Gazeta”,
Tsvetnoy Boulevard, 30, Moscow, I-51, USSR

Dear Mr.Bolotnikov!

It is been a long time since we wrote to each other, but you are a friend who is always with us. A few days ago, we were visited by two Soviet couples working in the UN Secretariat. One of our guests, gentleman named Vladimir Orlov, is a librarian in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Talking about my books, published in Moscow, I told them that autobiography “It’s me, O Lord!” was translated, but its publication was delayed for several years, and I understand that my “Wilderness” and “Voyaging...” were published by the Geographic Publishing House but I have not heard anything about these books for long. I said, that this happened probably because the Geographic Publishing House has recently merged with another one. That’s why I am writing to you now in hope you can advised me regarding the fate of these three of my works. If you know anything about the publisher’s plans regarding these books, please kindly share this information with me.

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

Long ago I was asked to write special introductions for the Russian editions of “Wilderness” and “Voyaging...”. As I informed you subsequently, I was ready to write these prefaces and send them to you. Unhappily, I fell ill and could not do much. For several months I suffered from a heart malfunction so serious that sometimes my pulse could barely be taken. Finally, I agreed to implant an electronic cardio stimulator. After the operation, that was carried out last December, I had to go through the long period of recovery, but now I feel good or, better say, much better than in the last few years.

I have a feeling that publication of “Wilderness” and “Voyaging...” could be postponed because I have not provided publishers with the prefaces required. If it is true and if they still plan to publish my books in the USSR, I can promptly finalize this job once the requirement is reconfirmed.^{xvi}

I know nothing about the publisher responsible for [the Russian edition of] my autobiography. As I thought, in July last year, when we left Moscow, its translation was finally completed despite many difficulties, and I could expect the release in December. Maybe you, as a member of Moscow’s publishing community, can clarify what has exactly happened to those plans. Needless to say, how much are we disappointed by the delay of publication.

We would be very happy to learn that you are doing as well as at the time of our last meeting. To make things different, this year we gave up all the plans for outbound journeys and decided to follow the great advice of Pangloss – to “work the land”, i.e. our own garden.^{xvii}

With best wishes from both of us,

Your Rockwell Kent

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.95-96

#6

Au Sable Forks, NY, 22 April 1965.

Dear Mr. Bolotnikov!

We received a copy of the new edition of “Salamina” and I am writing to you now to express my gratitude and admiration. The cover catches eyes and looks much better than that of American edition. I checked the title page and, to my greatest pleasure, found that terrible little illustration removed. Before I received this copy, I have not realized that you also contributed its publication. We suggest that now you cooperate with the publishers permanently, and we send you our congratulations.

A few days before the delivery of “Salamina”, we also received a copy of my autobiography from Andrey Chegodayev, who took active part in this edition. It is an amazing book and I

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

particularly impressed by the quality of colored reproductions of my arts. And, of course, the overall quality of the book itself is beyond my dreams.

Talking about “Salamina” again, I kindly ask you to tell your colleagues from the Mysl Publishers how much I pleased by the job they have done. I hope, the immediate success of this edition will be a proper reward for them. Apart from this, I thank you, my dear friend, for your kind attention to me. You sent me this copy so quickly, I hope publishers will add some more. I would love to have a few more, in addition to those normally sent by publishers to the author. These “spare” copies can be paid, in case of need, from the honorarium – of course, if the second edition will bring me any.

With warm greetings from both of us,

Rockwell Kent

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.102. Translation, typed copy

#7

Au Sable Forks, NY, 3 April 1967.

Dear Nikita!

I am writing you back immediately upon receiving your letter, which came only a few minutes ago.

I am more than pleased to know that “Of Men and Mountains” are about to be published in the “Volga Magazine” – tomorrow or day after tomorrow I will send you my preface.^{xviii}

Now let me touch those shortenings or changes, that you have asked me to do in the “Greenlandic Diary”. This diary was not written for the public and I never could even imagine someone else reading it. Now it is published in America, where we, as I can see, are falling into opposite extreme by rejecting any moral restrictions of the past. The things I wrote about openly were considered as unacceptable decades ago. Nowadays the audience is waiting for them. Until now, certain words and phrases have only been good for the toilet walls, but in modern literature they are no longer able to shock anyone. Neither me, nor Sally, will ever agree with this. Of course, the Diary should not contain anything that might be taken by readers as insulting or provocative, and you, by your own choice, can either erase or change anything you want.

You ask me not to send back those copies of “The Voyaging...”, but you have probably received them now. I sent them to you weeks ago, but I greatly appreciate your gentle generosity.

On this, let me finish the letter: I want it to be sent with the first departing mail. The only thing I want to add – me and Sally await the start of our trip to the USSR with growing excitement. We plan to sail from Montreal on 28 April.

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

Please pass to your friends my gratitude for their sweet memories of us and tell them about our warm feelings.

With all my greatest respect,

Your Rockwell

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, p.204

#8

Au Sable Forks, NY, 17 January 1968

Dear Nikita!

We were thinking of our Soviet friends so often that if we will say that our vacation was celebrated in their company – it will not be an exaggeration. This relates to you particularly. Your telegram brought you to us like a flying carpet.

We wanted so many times to write how much we are grateful for your preface to my little book “Of Men and Mountains”. At the same time, we have to argue an injustice.

On our visits to your country, we traveled in many places and saw much more than ordinary tourists. We always feel ourselves the special guests of your people. But on that trip, described in my book “Of Men and Mountains”, we spent most of our time among the artists in their sanatorium in Gurzuf.^{xix} We lived there not like tourists, but like members of a big family. Throughout my life I was and still is a devoted socialist, a loyal supporter of your goals and plans since the time of October Revolution. For this, and also because I am not a sociologist, I never make a comment like the one you have made in your preface to the book. I can draw us as Epicureans, having fruits from the Soviet Tree of Life – the fruits we have learned, tasted and found extremely good.

Nikita, you rush to remind the readers that all those minor (and even silly) issues I have criticized are now sorted. I think, you have been moved by your wounded pride. Our friends from Gurzuf, who were totally agree with my views [of Soviet reality], would be surprised by such reaction.

But I adore your admission: the ability to admit is the quality of a man that touches and captivates me mostly. We learned this amazing quality of Soviet people from our friends and, first and foremost, from you – our most respected friend. This quality is the best fruit of the 50-years growing of socialism.

Can this fruit give birth to a new life in this broken world? I wish this lovely fruit to become as beautiful as the distant future of mankind.

Your loving Rockwell

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.210-211

#9

Au Sable Forks, NY, 9 September 1969

Dear Nikita!

It is been probably two months or so since I have written to you to thank for the copies of my “Greenlandic Diary”. Now I have to ask you for some more of them from the publisher. This is because our new house is almost ready and we can move in two or three weeks. Thus, for the third time in my life, we start to collect books for our home library. My friends already sent me some volumes and I am going to reward them partially with my own books published in your country.

As I have likely written earlier, I am perfectly impressed by the excellence of your edition of my old diary. I cannot read it, but interested to know how have you managed to get rid of that small part, not matching the Soviet standards. I cannot recall what arguments I have used that time, so I risk to repeat that the Diary appeared completely unedited and uncensored when it has originally been published in English. This was my moral task to leave it as it was and, moreover, to describe these primitive people as they were, not as they were imagined [by the civilized world] – simple, childishly naïve, but indecently (shamelessly?) unlimited in their sexual life. I feel that inclusion of this part into the Diary might be important from anthropological angle of view.

This way or another, I like this little Soviet edition of my book and I want desperately to have a few more copies of it to send them to some devoted collectors of my written works.

We are keeping well and Sally’s health, which is the main cause of my anxiety, improves steadily. Improves despite our current unhappy circumstances and hard 12-hours work every day.

In a few weeks I hope to complete the last 15-years additions to my previously published book “It’s Me, O Lord!”. Finding a publisher will be the next challenge. These 15 years contain primarily my journeys to your country and I know that Soviet readers would be interested in a potential new edition of my autobiography.

Affectionately,

Rockwell

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, p.221

#10

Au Sable Forks, NY, 12 February 1970

Dear Nikita!

I am rereading now your heart-warming letter from 30 September. While enjoying it, I feel ashamed by my own inaccuracy in correspondence. I try to “legalize” my inattentiveness by appealing to the serious bronchitis, which drained me physically and mentally during the last month. Moreover, it forced me to spend sadly long time on recovery right at the time when I could not afford it. This coincided with our eventual moving into the new house, which we still had to turn into a comfortable living space. In this situation I simply could not continue to describe the old years of my life. I hope to restart soon and to finish the job in a next few month.

Due to this delay I, have to calculate all the forced changes in a potential order of my Soviet publications. My heart is really moved by your great interest in “adopting” the child that has not yet come to this world. I cannot help thanking you from the deepest of my heart. I promise to complete this most important task of my life.

Nevertheless, I cannot, of course, forget the loving “step father” of my autobiography, already published in Moscow. This is my old good friend Andrey Chegodaev. I understand clearly that, beyond all doubts, he should at least consult both the translation of the new version and its publication. We have not heard anything from Andrey for several months and we worry. Perhaps, you know something about his life and health, so you can send us some information. If he is not able to work on translation and publication of this still unfinished part of my book by himself, I would be glad to see the things in your hands. I hope you can gain the suggested assistance from our dear young friend Boris Senkin, whose interpreting talents earned our greatest respect and endless love.

I have not sent you promptly a word of my appreciation for those additional copies of “Greenlandic Diary” – another burden up on my weak shoulders. I have got these copies and now, when I learned how difficult it was for you to obtain them, I feel much more grateful and cannot stop blaming myself for negligence of your self-sacrifice.

You are talking about some changes and shortenings in the text of “Greenlandic Diary” that you have found essential. I can only assure you again, that I have never doubted the necessity of these changes and the wisdom of your decision.

We moved into the new home in November and still worked on making it comfortable, when at about Christmas time we found ourselves besieged by the coldest weather ever seen in our northern corner. For weeks, the mercury in our thermometer has not even raised higher than 0 Fahrenheit. Very often it was going down to 30 or 40 degrees below zero. We had the first snowfall in November, followed quickly by a harder one that covered all around with a meter-thick snow. Despite some mild temperature of the last 10 days, the

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

whole area is still under deep snow.

However, dear Nikita, I have to be merciful to Sally, who types this letter despite the weakness of her poor hands. Thus, for the good of her, I have to finish with this letter by expressing again my hearty gratitude for your loyal friendship and restless protection of my interests, which, in your own words, makes you happy and proud. Let me give a tight virtual hug to you and our young friend Boris.

Your always loving friend Rockwell Kent

Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.231-233

Editor's note: for those interested, Bolotnikov's letters to Kent and all of Kent's to him can be found in the Archives of American Art - [Reel 5162, Frame 1483-1537](#) | [A Finding Aid to the Rockwell Kent papers, circa 1840-1993, bulk 1935-1961](#) | [Digitized Collection](#) | [Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution](#) | [Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution \(si.edu\)](#)



Ada Rybachuk (1931-2010) – Soviet and Ukrainian artist, sculptor, muralist and book illustrator. Was born in Kyiv, where she lived for the first 10 years of her life. Being on Red Army service, her father was not purged by Stalinist regime (as you may find in some online sources) and the family's relocation to Kazakhstan in 1941 happened because of the war and German occupation of Ukraine. With the end

of hostilities, Ada and other family members reunited in Kyiv, where she lived for the rest of life. The girl dedicated herself to the art and studied in the Kyiv State Art Institute, where she met her life partner **Vladimir Melnichenko** (1932-2019), an artist of the same age.



Already in her student days, Ada became interested in the North and indigenous cultures of

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

the Arctic. In 1954, Ada and Vladimir made their first trip to the White Sea and further north – to the small Samoyed (Nenets) village on Kolguyev Island. In total, Ada and Vladimir spent several years in the Arctic, studying indigenous lifestyle and art, which contributed Ada’s own unique colorful painting style. In 1957, shortly after their final return from the North, Ada and Vladimir participated in the World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow, where they were frequent visitors since then. In Moscow, they met Rockwell Kent, who reflected this in his preface to the Russian edition of “Salamina”:

“Recently... I have met talented young artists from Kyiv, Ada Rybachuk and Vladimir Melnichenko. They lived and worked in the Arctic like me, they love the North and its people.

I heard that some blamed these two of “separation from real life by escaping to the North”. Such an injustice! The Humanity is hiding now under glossy shroud of modern life, cultural manners, clothes and conveniences. The Man with all his thoughts and feelings. Does not it mean we have to go through these outer layers for understanding of the Man’s essence? And is not it the aim of the art to open it for us? The works of two young artists reveal this essence... We who strive to create a better world for Humanity must know the clay from which we form Man”. (Salamina, Moscow: Mysl Publishers, 1965)



In the 1980s, Ada Rybachuk and her husband cooperated with Ukrainian-Jewish architect Avraam Miletsky in creation of what became the one and only public cremation center and columbarium in Baikovo Cemetery in Kyiv. A “Wall of Memory” with a series of expressive concrete reliefs was planned by the artists, however, this part of modernist project was denied and all preliminary installations demolished already at the time of construction. What caused the issue remained unclear: artists themselves and many others blamed architect of encouraging authorities to make unfavorable decision due to the interpersonal conflict with Ada and Vladimir. However, the unusual design of the Crematorium and scandalous destruction of ill-fated reliefs earned them a “dissidents” fame.



Andrey Chegodaev (1905-1994) – Soviet and Russian art historian, critic, museum curator and collector. Doctor of Arts, expert on modern Russian and Western art.

Belonged to the noblemen of ancient Mongolian origin - lineal descendants of Chinggis-khan, who settled in the Grand Duchy of Moscow in 16th cent. His father, Prince Dmitrii Chegodaev (1875-1967), was a prominent Russian chemist, revolutionary and an activist of Lenin’s Bolshevik Party. Andrey Chegodaev was born in Saratov (Volga Region) and educated in the Department of Art Theory and Art History of the Moscow State University. Worked in the Moscow Leo Tolstoy Museum, Pushkin State Art Museum, chief editor of the Publishing House of Children Literature, Professor of the Moscow Surikov Art Institute. In 1957-1994, headed the Western Art Sector in the Art Theory Institute of Soviet Academy of Sciences. Published over 30 books and 300 articles on the classic and modern

art history. Supervised the creation of illustrated book “The Art and Graphics by Rockwell Kent” (Moscow, Academy of Arts Press, 1962, 1963), wrote its preface. Met Rockwell and Sally Kent in Moscow many times. Described their meetings and talks in his book of memoirs “My Life and People I Have Known” (M, Zakharov Publishers, 2011).



Ekaterina Sergeeva (1898-1975) – Soviet writer, folklorist and pedagogue. Was born in 1898 (in some sources – 1899) in Ukraine, where she had a troubled unhappy childhood. Started her education in Kyiv. In the mid-1920s, she moved to Odessa, where joined the Department of Literature of the Odessa State University. Upon graduation, Sergeeva was sent to Khabarovsk for two years practical training in teaching. In 1932, she was appointed the director and only teacher at the local Eskimo school in the village of Ureliki (in the historic Providence Bay, in

Chukotka). While living among the Arctic natives, Ekaterina became fluent in Yupik – the Siberian dialect of Inuit language, one of the most difficult for Europeans. In Ureliki, she formed and led a group of schoolchildren, interested in oral literature and folklore of Yupiks and Chukchas. In 1935, Sergeeva had to move to Leningrad, where she worked in the Leningrad Pedagogic Institute and published several schoolbooks for Yupik children. In 1938, she returned to Ureliki, but in 1941 fell seriously ill and had to be sent to Leningrad for treatment. In 1945-48, Sergeeva worked in the village school in Nikolskoye – capital of Commander Islands, east of Kamchatka. In 1948-1956, she again worked in Chukotka, where she retired in 1957. Sergeeva passed away in 1975, in Leningrad, where her son Dorian (1928-1984, prominent ethnographer, anthropologist and archaeologist) headed the State Museum of Ethnography. Her personal archive is owned now by the Regional Museum of Magadan.

On 17 September 1963, Sergeeva wrote to Nikita Bolotnikov, sharing some details of her life in Chukotka: *“Dear Nikita Yakovlevich!... Thank you for your big heart and deep interest in my Kiwagme... Me and my son Dorian lived in Ureliki, which in the 1930s was a tiny native community with a few Russian inhabitants. I was running the local school and had to do everything – to give lessons to Eskimo kids, to cook hot meals for them, to wash dishes and towels. In the evening hours, some adults were also attending special classes. Kiwagme the Storyteller was among them – a strong man, club-footed; with horribly disfigured face which you had to get used to. We lived in a small room in the baking house, where Kiwagme started to work one day. We saw each other every day and befriended. He was very willing to share his countless tales with me. In order to encourage and support him, I paid Kiwagme (and other local storytellers) 50 copecks for each hour of our studies [0,5 roubles, good money in my child years – M.K.] In 1941, me and my son had to return to Leningrad because of my illness. When the city was besieged by Germans, I was still recovering, however, had to start working as a nurse in a hospital. My bad health and lack of food made me a terrible dystrophic, but in the spring 1942 was evacuated for treatment. In 1945, I came to the Far East with strong intention to go back to Chukotka. Unhappily, I had to spent three years teaching in Commander Islands by the order of Kamchatkan authorities. Only in 1948 I managed to escape, but reached Ureliki shortly before the death of Kiwagme. In 1953-1956, both in Ureliki and neighboring Bukhta Provideniya, I was able to collect some details of his life. In 1957, I retired and started working on my collection of native tales, partially included in the book.”* (Source: RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.64-69)



Dmitry Kiselev. Born in remote Kamchatka Peninsula, Northeast Siberia, Mitya Kiselev is a polar historian, avid traveler and expedition guide, working for Silversea Cruises. When not travelling to the Arctic, Antarctic or other remote places in the world, Mitya lives with his family on Cyprus

ⁱ Bolotnikov indeed had to set on a prolonged working trip to the Ural Region, from which he went straight to Moldavia. Its climate was considered helpful for the improvement of his health. In Moldavia, he acted as a special correspondent of the “Literary Gazette”. Bolotnikov returned to Moscow in the mid-1963 – *Original note.*

ⁱⁱ Kent’s “Wilderness” was published by the Mysl Publishers only in 1965.

ⁱⁱⁱ Soviet pop-science magazines – M.K.

^{iv} The Kent’s books “N by E” and “Salamina” were planned to be published in the USSR in 1961, but eventually they were released in 1962. An extract from the “N by E” appeared in the 12th volume of the “Knowledge is Power”, the last of 1960 – *Original note.*

^v Probably a printed drawing of a human hand – *Original note.*

^{vi} **Tamara Mamedova** took a responsible position in the Soviet Council for the Friendship with Foreign Countries in 1958. In the Bolotnikov’s personal archive there is a curious letter, sent to Mamedova from Kishineu (Moldavian capital) on 29 August 1961: *“Dear Comrade Mamedova! I have to apologize as I forgot your second name. We met each other last autumn in Moscow, when I applied for permission to publish my interview with Rockwell Kent in the “Literary Gazette”... I am also the chief editor of his books “N by E” and “Salamina”, planned for publication in Russian by the Geographical Publishing House... As I see, Comrade Mamedova, during the last year we have had an active media campaign around his donation to the Soviet people, but now Kent is almost completely forgotten – there are no news about him, nobody writes about Kent himself and his collection, given to us... Although I am not in charge, I feel bad about this. For this reason, in order to break up this unpleasant silence, I secured the approval from my superiors and asked Kent to write an article about contemporary American art and literature.... I remember your recommendation to avoid any political issues in my talks and correspondence with Rockwell Kent. I limited the content of my letters to the practical problems of publishing and my own impressions of beautiful Moldavia. However, in his last letter from 13 July, Rockwell Kent complained about the current state of things in the USA... Last but not least. In each of his letters, Kent invites me to visit him in Adirondacks. I do not know if it is a formal politeness or a real invitation to visit him? We are friends indeed – this can be proved by your translator Boris Senkin, who patiently translated our long talks about the Arctic, where I spent 5 years working. Nonetheless, if it is a sincere invitation, I think I would be able to make such a trip approved by my newspaper’s management... I have already been to the States in September 1959, as a member of our Academic expedition on board research ship “Mikhail Lomonosov”, which participated in the 1st International Oceanographic Congress in New York City. I think, this time I will not have any obstacles either. But advise me please, does it make sense to start any*

“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CARE OF US”

preparations for such trip this winter or in the future spring? Of course, if the situation in the world will not escalate...” (RSAE, collection 444, inventory 1, folder 64, pp.56-58) – *Original note*.

^{vii} Interesting, because a recent online publication of his Greenlandic Diary in Russia was commented by its editor in a similar way, as “parallel to Salamina and not very valuable” – *M.K.*

^{viii} The Geographic Publishing House, or Geografiz, was established in 1945. In 1962, it released Russian editions of two books by Kent – “N by E” and “Salamina”. In 1963, the Geografiz merged with the bigger Mysl (“Thought”) Publishers.

^{ix} In 1951, the US Thule Air Force Base was constructed near Cape York in Northwest Greenland, which badly affected the historic Inuit village of Qanaaq and led to its relocation – *Original note*.

^x In the late 1940s, Kent purchased the Asgaard Farm in Adirondack Mountains, in the northern part of New York State. The farm became his home for the rest of the artist’s life – *Original note*.

^{xi} The story was included by Kent to his book “N by E”, which he mentioned in a later letter from 13 July 1961 – *Original note*.

^{xii} Soviet Literature – a monthly literary magazine, printed in the USSR in English, German and some other European languages.

^{xiii} Moldova’s name in the Soviet times – *M.K.*

^{xiv} “Kiwagme The Storyteller”, by Ekaterina Semenova, Magadan, 1962. In 1985, the book was republished with the addition of the Kiwagme’s biographic essay by Sergeeva.

^{xv} Incorrect transcription of Danish title of the book *Festens gaver. Eskimoiske Alaska eventyr* (“Party gifts. Eskimo Alaska adventure”), published in 1929, after Rasmussen’s 5th Thule expedition – *M.K.*

^{xvi} The Kent’s “Wilderness” and “Voyaging...” were published in the USSR in 1965 and 1966 respectively – *Original note*.

^{xvii} Pangloss – one of the main characters of the Voltair’s “Candide”, the optimistic tutor of Candide himself – *Original note*.

^{xviii} Volga Magazine is a monthly magazine of arts and literature, published in Saratov (Volga Region) since 1966 – *Original note*.

^{xix} Gurzuf is a village near Yalta, in the most popular touristic part of the Southern Crimean coast. The place is famous for its cultural and creative atmosphere, related to Alexander Pushkin, who lived there for three weeks during his Crimean journey in 1820, and Anton Chekhov, who owned a house in the village in 1900-1904 (now Chekhov’s Museum). The Sanatorium for Artists was opened in Gurzuf in 1947, in the Villa Salambo – the property, built by Russian impressionist artist Konstantin Korovin in 1912 and owned by him until his immigration from the USSR in 1928. Rockwell and Sally Kents spent some time in the Sanatorium in 1957 – *Original note with some additions by M.K.*