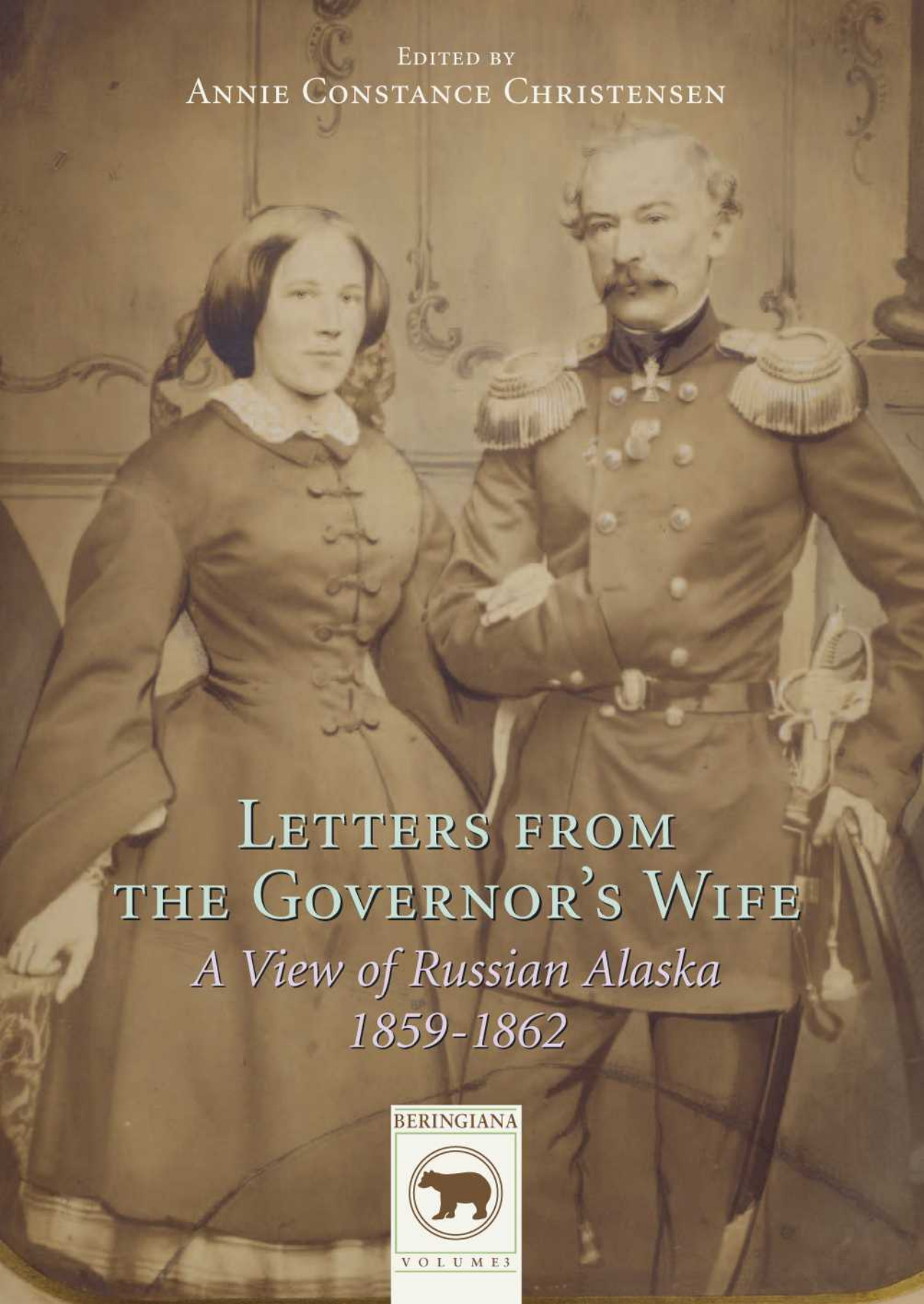

Edited by
Annie Constance Christensen

Letters from the Governor's Wife

A View of Russian Alaska 1859-1862

BERINGIANA

VOLUME 3

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A View of Russian Alaska 1859-1862

Edited by Annie Constance Christensen

With an Introduction and an Epilogue by
Annie Constance Christensen and Peter Ulf Møller

Aarhus University Press

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Editor's preface

Anna Furuhjelm's letters to her mother Ann von Schoultz form a kind of diary of her first years in Alaska as the Russian Governor's wife. A few hours after their wedding on February 2nd 1859, she departs for Alaska on a sledge with her husband Hampus Furuhjelm from Helsinki, and writes the first letter to her mother on the evening of the same day. Her last letter – No. 52 – was left unfinished on October 17th 1862, as the news reached Alaska that her mother had died.

The letters were numbered by Anna herself. Except for Nos. 32 and 51, they have all been preserved and are now kept in the archive of the University Library of Åbo, Finland (Åbo Akademis Bibliotek, Handskriftsavdelningen, Furuhjelm, Annie 14). Besides Anna's letters, there are two short letters from her maid, Ida Höerle.

All editorial additions are in square brackets. Abbreviated words, for instance 'yr', are given in their full form: 'y[ou]r'. A question mark immediately after a word – discerned[?], for example – means that I am not completely sure I have read the word correctly; two full stops followed by a question mark – many [..?] lips, for example – means that I have omitted an unreadable word. The letters have been slightly abbreviated. Some passages that discuss or inquire about friends back home, and also some of Anna's much repeated religious reflections have been omitted. All omissions are marked by three full stops in square brackets [...]. The short letters Nos. 7 and 44 have been omitted all together for that same reason. All underlined words have been rendered in italics.

Anna's orthography and punctuation has not been corrected. The peculiarities in spelling that catch the modern eye are due to archaic spelling or haste. The orthographical norm was not yet fully established. She writes: 'desert' (for a sweet course), 'trowsers', 'tare' for 'tear'. Parallel forms existed, for instance 'honour/honor', 'expense/expence', 'English/english'. – Anna had no formal education in English. For spelling problems, she consulted "Grandmother's spelling book" (Letter 33, cf. the present edition, p. 128). Misspelling occurs since she writes quickly and rarely seems to find time to read what she has written: 'govenor', 'woud', 'exellent', 'probaply', 'discription', 'for' for 'four', 'bands' for 'banns'. Another peculiarity is her indifference to writing double or single consonants: 'arrive/arive', (to) 'finish/finnish', 'innocent/inocent', 'British/Brittish', 'occasion/occassion', 'droll/drol', 'summer/sumer'. Some slight errors have been corrected, such as 'to' for 'do', 'that' for 'than', 'in' for 'it'.

Anna often uses Swedish, German or French words and expressions. They probably come to mind because she has spoken these languages frequently, or because

they seem to express her thoughts better. In the first case they are easy to translate, but in the second the translation might seem somewhat awkward.

The following abbreviations have been used in the editorial text: Swed./ish, Fr./ench, Ger./man, Rus./sian, RAC – Russian American Company.

The Russians still used the old Julian calendar at this time. Anna Furuhjelm often writes a date in both 'old' and 'new style'. In the 19th century, the difference between them was 12 days.

All information about persons mentioned in the letters, is given in the index of names.

I would like to thank The Danish Research Council for the Humanities and Aarhus University Research Foundation for making the publication of my great-grandmother's letters possible. Moreover I would like to express my gratitude to Leif Ludwig Albertsen, Doris Metzner, Hanna and Martin Ehrensvärd, Julian Lewis and my precious husband Jørgen Christensen for invaluable help in deciphering gothic German handwriting and illegible English words, and translating and editing all that had to be written in English.

Århus May 2005
Annie Constance Christensen

Introduction

An arranged marriage

After 1830, it seems to have been an unwritten rule that anyone appointed governor of Russian America had to bring a wife with him. The Board of Directors of the Russian American Company wanted no mistresses in the governor's house at Sitka. It was a matter of upholding the dignity and morals of the colonial administration – the representative of Russian empire and Christian civilisation in these remote parts of the world.

Governors of the colonies in Alaska were normally appointed for a period of five years, and the Board could very well imagine the privations and temptations connected with being a lonesome man at this northern outpost of civilisation, without a spouse of European upbringing and Christian belief to stand by his side. When the first Russian missionaries arrived in Alaska in 1794 to preach the gospel to the heathens, they were appalled to find their compatriots – fur hunters and merchants – living in unconjugal, or even polygamous relationships with native women.[1] One of the early governors left behind a native mistress and their three illegitimate children on returning home after his term in Alaska.[2]

Arriving at Sitka in 1830, Baron Ferdinand Wrangel was the first governor to bring his wife with him from Russia. "Her coming was an event of some import, for the young baroness transformed life in the rough frontier capital. The old 'castle' which was the Chief Manager's residence now featured formal dinners and balls. The casual relationships of company employees with the local women gave way to permanent wedlock, and the old roistering social life of the town acquired a higher tone".[3] All later Russian governors of Alaska were to follow the Wrangels' example. Married appointees brought their wives, and unmarried ones faced the task of finding a wife before their departure for Sitka.[4]

In early 1858 Johan Hampus Furuhjelm, an unmarried Russian naval officer of Finnish birth, received a proposal from the Russian American Company to become the next governor of Russian America for a term of five years, from 1859. He was then harbour master of the Port of Aian, a gloomy place on the eastern coast of Siberia. He had served there since October 1855 (from 1856 as Captain of first rank).

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1 Bolkhovitinov 1997-1999, 1, p. 268.
2 Pierce 1986, p. 11.
3 Pierce 1986, p. 13.
4 Pierce 1986, p. 40.

Describing social life in Aian in a letter to one of his friends, Furuhjelm wrote: "Apart from three married book keepers, one ditto priest and one ditto junior commissioned officer, Aian is inhabited only by workers with their wives. Nevertheless, I have from time to time arranged a dance for the local fops. They dance vigorously with their own and each others' wives – the only ladies in Aian."[5]

In the autumn of 1857 Furuhjelm's two unmarried sisters arrived unexpectedly at Aian by ship from Finland. They had been sent around the world to their unmarried brother, who – in the opinion of their elder brother Otto – was most able to provide for them. The sisters' unexpected arrival seems to have upset any budding marriage plans the 36 year-old bachelor may have had. In February 1858, Furuhjelm wrote to his benefactor and friend Arvid Adolf Etholén, another Finlander who had been Governor of Alaska (from 1840 to 1845), informing him of his decision to accept the post of Governor. Later in the letter, Furuhjelm confides: "I had very seriously considered going to Finland for a period of time to get married, but now, after the arrival of my sisters, I have given up the idea, since sisters and wives will never agree, as they say". Moreover, he concluded with irony and resignation: "I must consequently end my days as an old, sulky bachelor. But even in this matter I console myself that everything happens for the best and that I can live as a monk, if I have to, which I have already proved".[6]

The way of the monk, however, was not really an option for a future governor of Alaska. But time was running out for Furuhjelm. Since Aian had nothing to offer by way of a suitable partner, it was quite clear that his one and only opportunity to get married before going to Sitka would occur when he came to St. Petersburg to receive his instructions. He arrived in time for his official appointment by the Board of Directors, which took place on December 1 (old style), 1858. As for finding a wife before his imminent departure, he had to rely on the advice and services of good society in Helsinki (Swed. Helsingfors), in spite of the fact that he had not set foot there for eight years. And good society did not let him down. By the time Hampus arrived in the Russian capital, a suitable candidate for the role of governor's wife in Alaska had already been singled out. Her name was Anna Elisabeth von Schoultz. Although she belonged to one of Helsinki's noble families, she was nevertheless a newcomer in Finland and more cosmopolitan than most of her Finnish relatives.[7]

Anna was born on March 4, 1836 in Karlskrona, an important naval harbour in southern Sweden. Her father, Nils Gustaf von Schoultz (1807-1838), was of Finnish stock, but his branch of the family had moved to Sweden when Finland became a part of the Russian Empire in 1809. Nils appears to have been a very charming young

5 Copy of an undated letter from Furuhjelm, probably from 1856 or early 1857, in the editor's possession.

6 Copy of a letter from Furuhjelm to Etholén, February 26, 1858 (old style), in the editor's possession.

7 Annie Furuhjelm 1932, p. 107.

man, but he was definitely also an adventurer. By the time he met Anna's future mother, he had already taken part in the Polish Rising against Russia in 1830-1831, and served in the newly formed French Foreign Legion in Algeria. Too restless to settle down to married life in a provincial bourgeois setting, he left his family a couple of months after the birth of Anna, his second daughter, to try his fortune in the United States. He became involved in a haphazard rebellion to liberate Canada from British colonial rule, was taken prisoner, sentenced to death and executed at Fort Henry on the St. Lawrence River in December 1838.[8]

Anna's mother, Ann Cordelia von Schoultz, née Campbell, was born in India in 1813, but had been sent back to Britain at the age of five by her Scottish parents, to go to school. Ann and Nils met in Florence. After they got married, Nils brought Ann, his mother-in-law and his sister-in-law with him to Sweden. In 1842, six years after Nils fled home, Ann moved with her two daughters to Germany, a country she knew from her youth. Although she was eventually informed about her husband's violent death, she never revealed any of this to her daughters, and Anna sincerely believed herself to have been raised in "a happy, innocent Home, where nothing impure or unclean ever entered".[9] After three years in Heidelberg, the small family settled in Darmstadt in 1845. Anna and her elder sister Florence received a German education, but spoke English with their mother. Through a friend, they made the acquaintance of the young princes Ludwig ("Louis") and Heinrich, with whom they played and later danced at the balls of the court of Darmstadt. Prince Louis eventually became Grand Duke of Hesse. In 1894 his daughter Alix was to marry Tsar Nikolai II and become Russia's last empress, under the name of Alexandra Feodorovna.

Anna and Florence spent many happy years in Germany. In 1856, the family visited their relatives in Finland for the first time. They were received with much cordiality and warmth. That is probably the reason why Anna's mother, having been seriously ill in 1856, decided to move to Finland in 1857. She may well have assumed that her daughters would not be left without support there in the event of her untimely death. They settled in a five-room flat at 27 Mikael's Street in central Helsinki.[10]

Because of her multinational background and upbringing, Anna spoke English, German, French and Swedish. Though only 22 years old in 1858 – and 15 years younger than Furuhjelm – she was thought of as a suitable first lady of the Russian American colonies. Her newly retrieved Finnish relatives played an active role in positioning her for what seemed a most advantageous marriage. In the summer of 1858 Anna spent some time at Tavastby, the estate of Adolf and Margaretha Etholén. Mrs. Etholén was a cousin of Anna's vanished father. "Uncle Adolf" and "Aunt Margeret" told her about Russian America and life in the colonies. We know already that the future governor Furuhjelm was Etholén's protégé. By early December Anna

8 Pipping 1967.
9 Letter No. 41, cf. the present edition, p. 191.
10 Annie Furuhjelm 1932, p. 115.

was, in her own words, "thinking of Hampus now already", and he too had heard of her.[11] It seems likely that Etholén played an active role in arranging the match.

The new governor of Russian America had to be installed in his office in Alaska before the end of June 1859, together with the wife he still lacked. So when Furuhjelm finally arrived in Helsinki shortly before Christmas, there was no time to lose. A ball was arranged in the house of Marie and Fabian Langenskiöld on December 24, 1858, the latter being another cousin of Anna's father. Here Anna and Hampus met for the first time. Hampus is reported to have been standing in the doorway of the salon, unceasingly watching Anna, while she danced with the other young people. As for Anna, she had ample opportunity to inspect the dignified slender figure of the governor who actually looked quite youthful. She may possibly have agreed with the opinion that his dark eyebrows and dark moustache, in combination with his grey hair, made him resemble "a French marquis from *l'ancien régime*".[12] She may even have found an opportunity to look into his dark eyes. In any case, they both seem to have liked what they saw. On January 10, 1859 they became engaged, and on February 2 they were married. Due to the tight time schedule, they had to have their banns read twice on one Sunday.

After the wedding lunch, for 60 invited guests, also at the Langenskiölds' home, the newly married couple set out from Helsinki on their long journey to Sitka in Alaska. The first leg was a sleigh ride to St. Petersburg. Anna's elder sister Florence had been invited to accompany them as far as to London. Anna's mother stayed behind in the Helsinki flat, together with her German servant Babette Fischer and her nephew Ormelie. Anna was never to see her again.

On the very first day of the journey, Anna wrote a letter to her beloved mother. It was the first in a long series, in which she was to share her thoughts and impressions from the New World or, more precisely, from *her* new world, which had two unknown continents to be explored: married life and Russian America. These letters make up the present book.

Russians in the New World

At the time Anna set out to discover Alaska for herself, little more than a century had elapsed since Europeans first learned of its existence. Its coast was sighted on July 17th, 1741, at 58°14′ northern latitude, by a Russian navy expedition under the command of Vitus Bering, a Dane by birth. A small party of seamen went ashore on the island now called Kayak Island to get fresh water. The German naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller went with them and nearly made the first contact with the local Americans, when he came across the remnants of a fire, which seemed to have been left in the middle of a meal.

11 Letter No. 30, cf. the present edition, p. 111.
12 Annie Furuhjelm 1932, p. 108.

Ann von Schoultz, the mother of Anna Furuhjelm.

Bering himself never made it back from the expedition, but died on an uninhabited island now known as Bering Island, where his ship the *St. Peter* was stranded on the return voyage along the Aleutian string of islands. Surviving crew members, however, brought home tales of the incredible wealth of furs in this part of the world, and soon Russian entrepreneurs set out to exploit it. Fur hunters, usually part owners or employees of small trading companies based in Northern Russia and Siberia, started coming to the Aleutian Islands in search of valuable pelts, especially those of sea otters. A merciless slaughter of these animals began. The native Aleuts, being highly skilled hunters, provided cheap labour, and a great many of them perished in the process.

Typically, company-owned ships would take parties of "promyshlenniki" (hunters, traders) to promising locations in the newly discovered territories, leave them there with a stock of supplies, and call again after a number of years to fetch the men and their harvest of pelts. The ships might also bring replacements for a following term. As hunting activities gradually reached further eastwards, larger trading companies emerged and became increasingly dominant.

A new era began with the arrival in the 1780s of the rich and energetic merchant Grigorii Ivanovich Shelikhov, who was destined to play an important role in the Russian colonisation of North Western America. Shelikhov saw very clearly that further growth of the fur trade required permanent Russian settlements in America. His company, founded in 1781 in partnership with another well-to-do merchant, Ivan Golikov, gambled by building three galiots in Okhotsk, on the east coast of Siberia. In August 1783 the small flotilla set out under Shelikhov's command, with

192 labourers and some livestock on board.[13] One year later Shelikhov arrived on the island Kodiak near the base of the Alaska Peninsula. Having ruthlessly subdued the native inhabitants, who were unfamiliar with the effects of gunfire, he founded the first Russian colony on American soil. Kodiak became the stepping-stone to further Russian expansion into the New World.

Shelikhov remained on the island together with his wife Natal'ia for two extremely active years (1784-1786). He organised fur hunting, built houses, fortresses and boats, taught the native Eskimos, whom Russians called "Koniagi", to keep goats and grow vegetables, converted some of them to the Orthodox faith and even founded a school, where 25 native boys, given in hostage to the colonists, started learning Russian.[14] In the summer of 1860, Anna, together with Governor Furuhjelm, paid a visit to the former centre of Russian America and left her vivid impressions of the island in two letters to her mother.[15]

After Shelikhov's return to Russia, he and his partner Golikov petitioned for government support, including a monopoly on trade in the North Pacific. They argued that one strong, united company was necessary in order to sustain Russian commercial interests and territorial claims in the region. In spite of protests from competing merchants, their proposal gained support from high-ranking officials in Irkutsk and St. Petersburg. In 1788, Shelikhov and Golikov presented their ideas – and their application for 200,000 roubles – directly to Catherine the Great. The Empress awarded them with silver medals for their achievements, but, rather unexpectedly, refused all their requests. Philosophically, she was in favour of free trade and against monopolies. Politically, she was too cautious to provoke England and Spain by openly laying claim to unexplored American territory.

Initially, the Russian expansion into the North Pacific had taken place without attracting too much attention from other European powers. But in the last three decades of the 18th century other nations had become increasingly interested in exploring and mapping this unknown region, and in establishing to what extent the Russians were already present there. In 1769 Spain began to push north from Mexico into Alta California, and by 1784 nine Catholic missions had been established, stretching from San Diego to San Francisco.[16] Several Spanish naval expeditions explored the coast further north, and in 1789 the Spanish ambassador in St. Petersburg warned Russian ships not to encroach on Spanish-American territory, which allegedly extended as far north as Prince William Sound, at 61° northern latitude.[17]

For a while it looked as if the Northwest Coast might become a colonial realm divided between Russia and Spain. However, the international rivalry for exploration

13 Bolkhovitinov 1997-1999, 1, p. 118.
14 Al'perovich 1993, pp. 89; Bolkhovitinov 1997-1999, 1, pp. 126-127.
15 Letters Nos. 36 & 37, cf. the present edition, pp. 144, 146, 157.
16 Haycox 1997, pp. 6-7.
17 Al'perovich 1993, p. 145.