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Verkhoyansk Secondary School — the Oldest School in the Far North: The Beginning of a Long Journey*

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Annotation. In this article, the author shares the results of his research on the history of the city of Verkhoyansk — one of the oldest cities in the Far North of Russia. The city was founded by the Russian Cossack Postnik Ivanov in 1638. The school, which was opened two and a half centuries later, has its own history, as interesting as the city itself: it reflects almost all the events that took place in such a distant time in the Arctic coast of the Arctic, in Yakutia, in Russia. Despite the fact that the city is one of the smallest for its population, however, the founders of the school, its teachers and alumni were involved in many historical events, facts that made the fame and pride of place, has contributed to the development of their region, their country. Today we will get acquainted with the earliest period — the time of the Foundation and creation of the school as one of the main points of enlightenment of the vast territory lying to the North of the Verkhoyansk ridges. As it turned out, despite the long-standing interest in this place on the part of domestic and foreign historians, sociologists, and ethnographers, this period still remains a blank spot in history: we still do not know many participants in these events, there is no reliable data about some facts. The author has to be content with fragmentary information, give his own interpretation and explanation.

Keywords: *Verkhoyansk, Verkhoyansk secondary school named after M.L. Novgorodov, education, political exile, education, school education, Yakutia.*

On January 1, 2021 one of the oldest educational institutions in the Far North — Verkhoyansk secondary school named after M.L. Novgorodov — celebrates its 150th anniversary. We hope that this date will be celebrated throughout Yakutia as one of the most significant dates in the history of the region. It reflects, as a mirror, the whole history of not only this once forgotten Russian suburb, very precisely named a “prison without bars”, but also the whole dramatic life of the Russian province. It has passed lots of trials: it was covered by the winds of reforms and hopes of the 19th century, it was carried away by the whirlwinds of revolutionary changes at the beginning of the last century, it shared the dramatic fate of the Russian schools development of the Soviet period with the whole country. The history of the country, the development of educational system of Russia: pre-revolutionary, Soviet and post-Soviet, can be studied through the biography of the school.

When we, together with the teachers and the headmaster of the school — Margarita Nikolaevna Yumshanova — began to study the chronicle of the school, it turned out that the period that takes place in pre-revolutionary time was the least studied. This is in spite of the fact that the scientific, historical and ethnographic study of the Verkhoyansk District is not lacking in attention of historians and travelers, geographers and ethnographers, folklorists and Slavists, scientists of

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other specialties. They actively visited these places, explored the territory through the length and breadth, vividly described the surrounding nature, life and worldview of the local inhabitants.

But we can find only a few lines in their travel notes regarding the presence of an educational institution here, and just some critical notes in the Russian press of the late 19th century about teachers and pupils.

There are several objective reasons for this. First of all, this is due to the fact that from the very beginning of the school establishment, and in the first decades of its existence, the educational process was directly related to the names of the country's most educated people who were in exile in Verkhoyansk — former university students, nobles, commoners, public figures and scientists. They played a major role in organizing an educational institution on the outskirts of the empire. This was not a secret for the local population and the authorities, but it could become compromising evidence both for the “inmates” themselves and for the officials who were strictly monitoring their life there, in a “prison without bars”. By the way, this term has nothing in common with either the projects of the Frenchman Pierre Botton, or with the current Western penitentiary system reform projects. The Yakut exile received this name due to the impossibility of escaping from these places: severe frosts in winter, the lack of roads in summer did not give any chance for the escapees to survive. In addition, many local residents — inhabitants of camps, reindeer sites — were very law-abiding, so that the escapees had to bypass all their paths.

Another reason for maintaining the silence about the pre-revolutionary period of the Russian education development may be the impossibility to discuss the educational achievements of the tsarist era in the Soviet period as only post-revolutionary successes had to be praised. The reticence was selective, but since almost all the first public schools were parochial, they were not widely discussed. Therefore, we have to be content with only fragmentary data and information when speaking about the first years of education spreading on this ground. The main sources of our research will be scientific, historical and ethnographic works of different years, memoirs, notes of contemporaries and archival documents.

Verkhoyansk is one of the most famous and therefore one of the most investigated cities in both Yakutia and the entire North of the Russian Federation. One of the most comprehensive studies of Verkhoyansk is the work of a political exile from Tobolsk province, Ivan Aleksandrovich Khudyakov, who came from a wealthy merchant family with a very difficult fate. After graduating from the Ishim district school, he entered the Faculty of History and Philosophy of Kazan University in 1858, where he first got acquainted with revolutionary ideas [1, Khudyakov I.A., p. 35]. It is believed that in order to study Slavistics better, he transferred to the Moscow University, where the subject was at a higher level of teaching. However, in 1861 he was expelled from the University because of his failure to appear for exams. However, he received a certificate with the right of teaching.

After that he went to St. Petersburg, where in 1863-1864 he was getting closer to N.A. Ishutin, a member of the secret organization “Land and Liberty”, which had been dispersed by that

time, and in August 1865 he went abroad and established contact with A.I. Herzen and N.A. Ogarev. Later Khudyakov recalled that the organization members "mostly abandoned all the joys of life and devoted themselves to the cause of national liberation" [1, Khudyakov I.A., p. 103]. On returning home, he continued his anti-state activities and became one of the active leaders of the Ishutin's organization "Hell".

On September 24, 1866, in the case of assassination attempt of D.V. Karakozov against Emperor Alexander III, Ivan Aleksandrovich was sentenced by the Supreme Criminal Court "as not incriminated in knowledge of the intentions of Karakozov, but incriminated in knowledge of the existence and goals of a secret society." It is not entirely clear whether his personal guilt has been proven, but the indictment specifically states that he is a man of "extreme socialist conviction, an enemy of the existing order, requiring the transformation of the state in its fundamentals" [2, Assassination attempt of Karakozov, p. 37]. Khudyakov was shorn of all rights and was sent to an eternal settlement in Siberia.

I.A. Khudyakov arrived in Verkhoyansk on April 7, 1867, and spent 7 years there. He was settled in the yurt of a large Yakut family, and he started studying the Yakut language, life and daily routine of the local population. He had the kindest relations with a very educated and inquisitive merchant S.V. Gorokhov, who helped Khudyakov financially in his ethnographic and folklore studies.

Semen Vasil'evich Gorokhov, the only second-guild merchant in Verkhoyansk, was one of the few people in the Yakutsk region who knew the north of Yakutia well, he was often approached by members of scientific and cartographic expeditions. Semen Vasil'evich was born in 1819 in a bourgeois family and received a good home education and, as contemporaries point out, "got his knowledge of grammar and mathematics quite well". He was one of the most intellectual and erudite Yakuts of that time, among the few he became a second-guild merchant, an active participant in public life. Besides, he financed a hospital in Verkhoyansk — the first medical institution in the Arctic, established in 1817.

Later I.A. Khudyakov became a mentor and teacher of S.V. Gorokhov's son — Nikita, assisting him in rationalizing the circle of reading and self-education, broadening his horizons, and later in learning the methods of local history, ethnography, and preconceptual studies. Most likely, N.S. Gorokhov received his first knowledge of the methodology of pedagogy and the arrangement of educational institutions with help of Khudyakov.

We can call these people, I.A. Khudyakov and N.S. Gorokhov, the pioneers of the education system in Verkhoyansk and the founders of the school in 1871. However, it is well known that the first requests to open an educational institution were submitted by residents of the Verkhoyansk district long before that date. We have a copy of the petition dated back to 1825. The document was found in the Yakutsk archive: a letter from the priest Aleksey Ivanovich Sleptsov to the

Verkhoyansk district police officer Petr Petrovich Mikhalev about the necessity of school opening¹.

But that year was one of the most dramatic periods in Russian history: the sudden death of Emperor Alexander I and, thus, the end of the “Alexander’s days...” also marked the end of enlightened absolutism and liberal reforms in Russia. The performance of the Decembrists on Senate Square predetermined the reactionary rule of Nicholas I with his rigorous government.

Verkhoyansk was far from these events in the capital of the Empire, but one can predict the result of the petition for school opening: surprisingly, but the events easily fell on the same plane and developed in the same direction. A report of the Verkhoyansk foreign council dated November 10, 1825, addressed to the Verkhoyansk district police officer, said: “... at the current congress, the patrimonial elders ... by agreement, or because of their own delusion ... completely refused to establish a school” [3, Verkhoyansk school, p. 6]. Thus, the petition of the Verkhoyansk priest was abandoned.

Having received this report, the district police officer sent an official letter dated December 27, 1825, addressed to the “Archpriest Aleksiy Ioannovich”, forwarding the report of the council and expressing the hope that “before long” the patrimonial elders would understand the benefits of this matter, noting that it was necessary to conduct explanatory work, “to teach them to be in other assumptions”. Internal censor, allegiance and conservative mentality of local elders became the reason for the refusal to organize the school at that time.

In this regard, the message in the newspaper “Socialist Yakutia” dated August 30, 1932 looks curious and somewhat paradoxical, because of the article “General education and school building in the Verkhoyansk region” by inspector D. Kychkin, which states: “The first school in the region was founded in 1859 (I-grade parish) ... “². Nobody knows whether it was a mistake of the author or whether he really knew that district churches classrooms operated in the city unofficially long before the official opening of the Verkhoyansk school. But we know from the history of the city and the stories of old residents that even before the school opened in 1871, children were taught to read and write at home, and the townspeople understood the importance and value of education, especially in wealthy families.

It should be noted that at that time there were quite a large number of educated people in Verkhoyansk, their number increased with the arrival of new exiles, starting from the first half of the 19th century. They did not consider it shameful to teach local children, and wealthy townspeople willingly send their children to study. This was a significant contribution to the financial

¹ Kurchatova T.T. Pervaya perepis' v Yakutskoy oblasti. Ekho stolitsy. 19 marta 2017. № 30 (2761) [The First Census in the Yakutsk Region. Echo of the Capital. 19 March 2017. No. 30 (2761)]. URL: <https://www.exoykt.ru/articles/02/608/17955/> (accessed 13 August 2020).

² Kychkin D. Vseobuch i shkol'noe stroitel'stvo v Verkhoyanskom rayone [General Education and School Construction in the Verkhoyansk Region]. Sotsialisticheskaya Yakutiya [Socialist Yakutia], 1932, 198(3108), p. 1. URL: <https://e.nlrs.ru/open/22292> (accessed 13 August 2020).

stability of the exiles. All this happened not without the local authorities' awareness, but at least with their silent agreement.

Only after the enthronement of the greatest reformer in Russian history, Emperor Alexander II, infamously known as "Liberator", it became possible to open an educational institution in a remote village, which was Verkhoyansk at that time. "On January 1, 1871, after the liturgy and prayer service, the Verkhoyansk school was opened in a convenient building of Semen Gorokhov. Four boys entered it. One of them is Yakut, and three others are Russian, the last ones have already received their initial home education"³.

The first teacher was a Cossack, Pentecostal of the Yakut Cossack regiment, Efim Popov. The curator and tireless devotee of enlightenment among the local population was S.V. Gorokhov, who donated an outbuilding of his house, consisting of four rooms, for the educational institution. This was the beginning of school education development in the vast polar territory.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Verkhoyansk district was the largest of all the districts of the Yakutsk region, as it occupied more than one third of its entire territory. The administrative center of the district was Verkhoyansk. There was a district administration, headed by a police officer, who was appointed by the governor-general of Eastern Siberia. The police department and the Cossack team were the executive body. Verkhoyansk, perhaps, did not resemble an administrative center: the pathetic view of the town always shocked visitors. According to the census of 1897, there were 59 households with 356 people in Verkhoyansk, 177 were males and 179 were females; in 1911 it had 450 inhabitants. According to the same census, the Yakutsk region occupied one of the last places in literacy among all provinces and regions of the empire: only 11090 educated persons were identified, that is only 4.11% of the whole population⁴.

Thus, it can be said that the school opening turned out to be the most significant event of the Verkhoyansk region of that time, which then included Abyy, Allaikha, Moma, Ust'-Yana, Sakkyryr, the foothills of the Verkhoyansk ridge.

The contribution of political exiles to the opening of the school is undoubted, but the desire of educated people from the local population to spread education in this vast territory is also important. The contribution of local officials is also well-known: at the urgent request of I.A. Khudyakov, the police officer of the Verkhoyansk district V.V. Ivaschenko wrote a report to the Yakut governor about the possibility of opening a parish school in Verkhoyansk. In particular, the police officer wrote that "the population of the district gladly expressed their consent... donated 1064 rubles 80 kopecks for the opening of the parish school"⁵.

Subsequently, in the period from 1871 to 1875, similar schools began to be widely opened in the Yakutsk region; they operated in 12 uluses, financed mainly by the local population. School in-

³ CSA YaASSR. F. 24, invt. 1, file 1625, sh. 1.

⁴ Kurchatova T.T. Pervaya perepis' v Yakutskoy oblasti. Ekho stolitsy. 19 marta 2017. № 30 (2761) [The First Census in the Yakutsk Region. Echo of the Capital. 19 March 2017. No. 30 (2761)]. URL: <https://www.exoykt.ru/articles/02/608/17955/> (accessed 13 August 2020).

⁵ CSA YaASSR. F. 24, invt. 1, file 1625, sh. 12.

spector of the Yakutsk region V. Popov wrote to the Imperial Minister of Public Education about Yakut's desire for education: "I consider it my duty to note the strong desire of the Yakuts to get not only primary education, but also secondary and higher education. It is only a thirst for knowledge and a desire to come to the light that can explain the fact that Yakut children run to rural schools for 5-6 miles even in trembling 40-degree frosts" ⁶.

The Gorokhovs also helped Khudyakov in his personal requests and affairs, including provisioning of paper and pens that were in short supply at that time. Apparently, at the request of Ivan Aleksandrovich, Semen Gorokhov made a trip to the naslegs of the Verkhoyansk ulus in 1868 and collected a huge amount of information about folk customs, myths, beliefs and folklore of the Verkhoyansk Yakuts, which were requested by the Russian Geographical Society. As P.S. Troev writes in his book "I. Khudyakov in Verkhoyansk exile", it was S. Gorokhov who provided invaluable assistance to the scientist in collecting materials that formed the basis for the fundamental work of I.A. Khudyakov "A Brief Description of the Verkhoyansk District".

In the whole story, the first attempt to organize a school looks very vivid, but doubtful, in which, as it becomes clear, Ivan Khudyakov saw the most reliable way to accelerate the enlightenment of people. As it is known, the scientist persuaded the police officer Ivashchenko to arrange a school upon his arrival into the city. However, in the worst traditions of the Russian bureaucracy of that time, Ivashchenko saw only a new source of financial income for himself. He easily "persuaded" the townspeople to donate money for this task (a considerable amount of 1000 rubles in silver was collected), which was made off by the police officer.

The political exile understood that the cause of public education can be undertaken honestly and unselfishly only by a representative of the people themselves. To this purpose he began to teach Nikita, S.V. Gorokhov's son, who, as he wrote, "has already been an educated and inquisitive young man". "His instructions on what books to buy were important to me, and I began to subscribe books on his advice, since my father did not refuse me money. I read under the guidance of Khudyakov, often discussed books with him, and this was Khudyakov's teaching of me," said Nikita Gorokhov afterwards [3, Verkhoyanskaya, p. 139].

On the advice of I.A. Khudyakov, the Gorokhovs subscribed the magazine "Children's reading" to Verkhoyansk in 1867 and a year later — the magazine "Family and School", then the magazines "Public School" and "Teacher". All this turned out to be the scientific, theoretical and practical basis for the beginning of educational and methodical work in the Verkhoyansk school.

It should be said that, despite the parish name of the Verkhoyansk one-grade school, it was originally a secular educational institution. The parish school at the Blagoveshchenskaya Church would not be open for another 21 years. At that time, the parish school taught, of course, both the Law of God and the foundations of the Christian doctrine, which was obligatory. More attention was paid to reading, writing and arithmetic; in addition to these subjects, geometry, geography, history, the beginnings of physics and natural history were taught. At the same time, meteorologi-

⁶ RSHA FE. F. 733, invt. 186, file 2115, sh. 24.

cal observations began in Verkhoyansk, which would glorify the city as the coldest place in the Northern Hemisphere. So both of these events — the school opening and the finding of the world's cold pole — are events of the same order.

It is also known that I. Khudyakov was the first who started meteorological observations, realizing the importance of this matter in the conditions of this harsh region. He constantly transmitted reports with meteorological observations through the Verkhoyansk District Police Department. The report of the Verkhoyansk District Police Department to the Yakut civil governor about the Khudyakov's presentation of meteorological observations table, which were sent to the Imperial Geographical Society in St. Petersburg, is known ⁷. He compiled them on behalf of the Chukotka expedition of Baron G.L. Maydel. This expedition was organized at the beginning of 1868 by the East Siberian Governor-General M.S. Korsakov, the Siberian Department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. Its goal was to strengthen the influence of Russia on the eastern borders and the final acceptance of Russian citizenship by the Chukchi ⁸.

Baron G.L. Maydel thanked Khudyakov and left him 2 thermometers, and subsequently donated a watch and money to continue the meteorological observations. However, the report of the executor and treasurer of the Yakutsk regional police department, centurion E. Zhirkov to the Verkhoyansk district police officer, said that only "English-made watches" and a note from the baron himself were delivered ⁹.

As the famous researcher of the history of this region, professor, doctor of historical sciences P. Kazaryan wrote, "After Khudyakov, Semen Gorokhov was engaged in meteorological observations. From November 13, 1871 to March 27, 1872, he conducted observations". [4, The city of Verkhoyansk, p. 17]. Schoolchildren were undoubtedly involved in these observations. As a member of A. Chekanovskiy's expedition Sigizmund Venglovskiy, who visited Verkhoyansk in 1875, noted in his diary, "Nikita set up a small observatory, diligently conducted his observations for several years." He described the merchant himself as follows: "Gorokhov ... is an enlightened, rather erudite person, a patriot of Yakutia, who passionately loves his native land. ... He helped us in organizing a new column of vehicles for further transportation of the collections. We also owe him a lot of practical instructions regarding travelling in winter time." [5, Mostakhov S.E., p. 408].

Nikita Semenovich had an extensive library, which mainly consisted of popular science books on earth sciences. He did a lot of meteorology, set up an observatory, kept results of his observations in a special diary, recorded legends, stories, fairy tales of his native people. "He sent his works to the Geographical Society in Irkutsk." [6, Kazaryan P.L., p. 87]. Unfortunately, these materials are not known to a wide scientific community, although there is information that N. Gorokhov

⁷ NA RS (Ya). F. И-12, invt. 1, file 1672, sh. 84-84-о6.

⁸ Kazaev A.V. Predislovie. Chukotskaya ekspeditsiya Gergarda Lyudvigovicha Maydelya (1868-1870) [Foreword. Chukotka Expedition of Gergard L. Maydel (1868-1870)]. NA RS (Ya), 2014. 29 p. URL: http://archivesakha.ru/?page_id=8500 (accessed 13 August 2020).

⁹ NA RS (Ya). F. И-25, invt. 1, file 156, sh. 4-4-о6.

was in active correspondence with the Academy of Sciences, in particular, with academician L.I. Shrenk.

Initially, the first teacher of the school, Efim Popov, was helped from July 1872 by the priest of the local church Orlov. However, it soon became clear that he could not cope with the duties assigned to him, and I. Khudyakov was ill and could not participate in the school affairs. But in the same year, Nikita Gorokhov returned from the Olekminsk gold mines, and invited Ivan Bratchikov, a Pentecostal who has a teaching practice, from Yakutsk. In 1874, in two years after his father's death, the governor approved N. Gorokhov as an honorary curator of the Verkhoyansk parish school, and after that things went much better. He immediately organized a boarding house at the school, realizing that an increase in the students' number at the expense of visitors will definitely require a search for place of their residence. His petition from January 7, 1874 to the Verkhoyansk police officer A.S. Antipin says: "Sincerely sympathizing to the cause of public education and wishing to help the government as much as possible in spreading literacy and the Russian language among the Yakuts, I humbly ask, your honor, to accept a school house opposite the house of the medicinal student Klimovskiy from me. I donate this house with all the barns and outbuildings to the eternal possession of the school. In order to spend as little of the school capital as possible, I undertake to deliver textbooks for students within 3 years"¹⁰. For a better arrangement of the educational process, Gorokhov ordered student desks and benches according to figures and drawings published in the journal "Public School" in 1870.

As a result of our research, we got the opportunity to learn new facts from the history of the opening and the first years of the existence of the Verkhoyansk secondary school. It had a significant impact on the further development of education in the Arctic zone of Yakutia and became an outpost of education in the Far North. The social structure and cultural enlightenment of the people is directly related to the history of increasing the desire of people to study and the dissemination of the science fundamentals among the local population. It gives us the opportunity to look back at the past of our republic from different point of view — without ideological or political implications. At the same time, spirituality is inextricably linked to the state policy, economic structure and economic development of society. An analysis of the pre-revolutionary period of the formation and functioning of the educational system makes it possible to represent the problems of modern reforming and modernization of this most important sphere of the state more clearly.

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