

## Russia: Locked in My Heart

by Susan Klingelhoef

(Editor's note: Between the 12th and 23rd of June, about 30 Georgists from around the world attended a shipboard conference/cruise from St. Petersburg to Moscow. There, they heard much heartening news about the groundswell for public collection of land rent in Russia — and made some good friends. This time, Susan writes of personal aspects of the voyage. In our next issue, she and others will report on the conference sessions.)

In the end, the greatest lesson is learned from the least expectation. With what recreational yardstick does one measure a sojourn in Russia? Is life there a matter of dreadful hardship and privation — or is it better than ever? Ultimately, it doesn't matter what country one is in, or what river the ship is cruising along, or who's inhabiting the adjacent cabin. What matters most is communication — the free, uninhibited sharing of ideas, achievements, goals and dreams.

The St. Petersburg cruise returns to me now in my dreams. And of course, I have my many photographs. But it is the recurring memories I cherish most of a place where everything went beyond my expectations. In Russia, as in a wonderful dream, everything is enchanting.

Fascination, awe, respect, fear, wonder — all these were packed inside me as I arrived at the Moscow airport. Noticing my eyes on the sign, ECOGRAD, Sasha (Alexander) Ivanov greeted me with his booming voice, "Susan!" I looked up to see a tall, abundantly dark-haired, moustached man with blue eyes — I would soon learn that blue eyes in Russia are as beautiful and omnipresent as the monastery cupolas.

I was escorted to my sixteenth floor room at the Hotel Russia, bordering Red Square. My room was opposite St. Basil's Cathedral, and a monastery of gold and green-tiled cupolas was right under my view. Much to my delight and amazement, Sasha surprised me and the other early guests with tickets — to the Bolshoi ballet! All this, and the conference on board the *St. Petersburg* had not yet begun!

Unlike Manhattan, where the buildings are high, hugging each other to the

right or left, the construction in Moscow is expansive — most structures are enormous, occupying space in a country where "hugging" is a desire, not an architectural necessity.

On Sunday, June 12, 1994, I boarded the immense *St. Petersburg* to join my Georgist friends from all over the world for the first day of the international conference, *Henry George's Ideas in Russia: For More Progress and Less Poverty*. With everyone accounted for and cabin keys in hand, we sat together in the "musical saloon" to be welcomed by



*This map and group photo represent most of the cities we visited and most of the conference attendees. Each of us - and I am 100% certain I can claim this - had a favorite town. — S.K.*



our hosts and guest speakers. It was a rousing first meeting, with many more to follow.

As we started up the Volga through the canals and locks, we saw exquisite coun-

### Setting Sail

*Exultation is the going  
Of an inland soul to sea,—  
Past the houses, past the headlands,  
Into deep eternity!*

*Bred as we, among the mountains,  
Can the sailor understand  
The divine intoxication  
Of the first league out from land?*

— Emily Dickinson

tryside with fir trees miles deep. We quickly learned that when the firs dispersed and gold shone through, it meant a stop was soon upon us. The monastery cupola is a navigator's friend, glistening the sunlight back into the sky, warmly drawing visitors closer to its doors. Each monastery's interior proved to be as rich as its exterior. The Russians are proud of their iconostases. In cities such as Uglich, our first stop, Yaroslavl, Goritsky, and Kizhi, each cathedral was enormous — unique in its presentation and a testimony to the city's history — it represented the people, often poor materially, but rich in a heritage dating back centuries.

As we worked our way up the Volga, we reached a series of locks through which we dropped a few hundred feet. Coincidentally, the cruise ship neared Petrozavodsk, on Lake Onega, during the summer solstice. Many of us frequented the uppermost deck in the wee hours of the morning to experience the famous "white nights." The sky was gorgeous — and so was the city of Petrozavodsk, clean and attractive because of its proximity to the lake, its spacious park, and the evidence of an ongoing attempt at town development. It was the first real city in which we were allowed to roam freely, which we did in search of the best linens, or the perfect gift.

St. Petersburg was breathtaking. I thought I had seen huge structures before arriving there, but I was wrong. The Hermitage is stunning and imposing — it invites and it intimidates — much like the city surrounding it. The Nevsky Prospect, the "Fifth

Avenue" of St. Petersburg, provided each of us with some of our best shopping opportunities, as well as the privilege of "getting lost in the crowd." (continued on page seven)

In the spirit of entrepreneurship, or a desperate need for cash, many Russians have adopted the street vendor's trade, selling whatever appeals to tourists—black painted boxes and pins, shawls, postcards, and assorted novelties. We benefited greatly from the ruble exchange: 2000 to the dollar! A pathetic economic situation for the Russians, but one that I greedily bought into.

Our dear, caring hosts arranged a night at the opera for our entire group to see "The Tale of Tsar Sultan." The production was lavish and big, representing enormous talents. For everything wonderful that was arranged for us during this conference cruise, I want to credit, in particular, four very special people: Tanya and Sasha Ivanov, Tatyana Roskoshnaya, and Tamara Chistyakova. Of course, there are many, many others who were involved and are deserving of special mention. Gloria Karn donated her artistic talents to the cruise by drawing passenger's portraits. (She captured Sasha incredibly well!) Irene Hickman gave a gift to each Russian participant—a colorful rosary, handmade by herself during the cruise! And diligent George Curtis from England wrote, and wrote, and wrote. He was never without his pen and paper in his tireless effort to document this extraordinary trip up the Volga. I miss the beautiful places I saw, and each old friend, but more, I miss the friends I made, the people who will eternally occupy a space in my heart as big as their country. ☒