

BULLETIN FROM THE KOTLAS CONNECTION CHAIRS

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CATCHING UP ON A BUSY YEAR

RUSSIAN SAMPLER 2015

The 21st annual Russian Sampler Day, co-sponsored by the Connection and the Colby College Russian Program, was a treat for adult and student participants. As always, our volunteer teachers offered lively classes, featuring Russian icons, Russian language, a slide show of our Sister City, Kotlas, cooking lessons, beautifully decorated Easter eggs, and Russian fairy tales.



Figure 1 Kirill Shulgin, Katya Smotrina, Teacher Natalia Shakhmatova, Polina Shelygina, and Sofia Bugreeva on the Two-cent Bridge between Waterville and Winslow

Our five guests from Kotlas added to this array of classes with exciting new topics for the American middle and high school students. Kotlas high school students Sofia Bugreeva and Polina Shelygina donned bright red folk costumes to lead the students in a traditional Russian folk dance. Katya Smotrina, gave her students ceramic folk figures and instructed them about painting the little figures in traditional colors. Kirill Shulgin gave the American students a lesson on Russian student volunteer activities, both in his school and outside of school. As part of his class, Kirill had the students fill out a questionnaire about bullying in school, a project which he and other Kotlas students are carrying out in their home schools. Kotlas teacher of English, Natalia Shakhmatova, wowed the students with her collection of bones and relics from recent

archaeological digs in the Kotlas area.

Our Russian guests had more busy days of learning and fun in a series of visits to local schools. Mary Dunn's fifth grade students at the Hall School in Waterville and the Russians had a grand time together. The fifth graders had carefully prepared lovely art projects for the Russian guests, including a large exhibit of their paintings of Russian window decorations. They took the guests on a tour of the Hall School and performed a short instrumental concert which the Russians answered with a vocal concert of their own. It was a marvelous example of people-to-people diplomacy and a memorable day for everyone.

During a visit to the Mid-Maine Technical Center (adjacent to Waterville Senior High School) the Russians saw classes on automotive repair, LPN (licensed practical nurse) training, and videography. The videography class was preparing a video on the Waterville area which Connection members took to Kotlas during their April visit.

When the Russian students visited the high schools in Waterville and Winslow they were each assigned an American big sister/brother to guide them through the day. They attended classes in science, math, history, and English.

While the students were attending classes at the high schools, teacher Natalia Shakhmatova went into classrooms at Winslow Elementary and Winslow Junior High. She met with the principals, Kyle Price and Kevin Michaud. Natalia teaches all levels of English education in Kotlas at Lyceum #3, so it was a very interesting day for her.

The Two-cent Bridge served as the starting point for a tour by the visiting teacher and four students of downtown Waterville. The snow on the ground prevented a good view of the memorial stone at the base of the birch trees planted to commemorate the sister city relationship. The group moved down the street for the traditional pictures at the "Welcome to Waterville" sign which notes that Waterville and Kotlas are sister cities. Then it was on to Main Street and a stop at City Hall for photos on the front steps and a tour of the Waterville Opera House. The teacher and students were happy to have a chance to shop in the Maine Made Shop followed by lunch at nearby Jorgensen's Café.

One afternoon when the weather was beautiful, Peter Garrett and Herb Foster took the Russian visitors snowshoeing. Time was limited, so they stayed in Waterville and hiked on the flats along the Kennebec River south of the Hathaway Center. Surprisingly, none of the Russians had ever been on snowshoes. Everyone thought, however, that they'd be a big hit in Russia. A bonus came in the middle of the hike when a number of waterfowl were spotted on the river, one of which was native to Kotlas.

What is a trip to the coast without a view of a lighthouse? A visit to Portland Head Light has become a standard for our student and teacher visitors from Kotlas. Coupled with time in Portland's Old Port the day becomes a highlight of their tour of parts of Maine. While it was cold and crisp it was a clear day, good for photos and a brief walkabout. The lighthouse visit was followed by a lobster roll lunch at DeMillo's. Of course, souvenir shopping was part of the tour. During the return to Waterville stops were made at DeLorme to see Eartha and at Freeport's giant Indian. The drive back from Freeport was quiet. The sea air had done its work.

No Russian Sampler visit is ever complete without a day in Augusta. This year was no exception. The four students and teacher toured the State Museum and the Maine State House. They were also able to get a brief meeting with Governor Paul LePage.

Over the course of their 15 day visit the students and teacher got a chance to sample a wide variety of yummy, home cooked meals, as well as lobster rolls in Portland, sushi in Boston (during a trip arranged by Co-chair Martha Patterson and Mark Fisher), pizza, an Italian dinner, and a traditional Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings at the home of Martha and Neal Patterson.

The Connection is very grateful for the hospitality of all the students, teachers, and principals, who spent time and effort to welcome our guests so warmly.

GRATEFUL PARENTS REFLECT ON TWO GIFTS FROM KOTLAS

Members of the Kotlas Connection who adopted two children from the Kotlas Baby Orphanage wrote the following update:

We adopted Tatiana in 1996 at the age of 22 months, and returned two years later to adopt Alex, 19 months of age.

We are approaching a milestone event later this week (this was written in May) when Tatiana graduates with highest honors from State Fair Community College (SFCC) with an AAS Degree in Criminal Justice. I home schooled both kids through high school. Frankly, Tatiana hated school. After high school graduation we discovered she had vision problems. Following therapy, and with renewed confidence that she was indeed intelligent, she has excelled in school. Her desire is to serve people by being a police woman. Several years ago she realized that had she not been adopted she might be working the streets, and this brought about a desire to eventually work in anti-human trafficking. We are waiting to see if she will be able to pursue her police career as

she was recently diagnosed with a congenital hip defect which will most likely result in needing a hip replacement at a young age. She enjoyed playing soccer for several years with the local parks and recreation department and has helped coach younger kids' teams. She learned to play the guitar several years ago and spent a couple of years playing in our church's praise band on Sunday mornings. She has spent several summers working as a counselor at various Bible and church camps, including one ministering primarily to children who have parents in prison.

Alex graduated from high school last December and has been taking some general education classes, also at SFCC. He plans to continue taking classes at SFCC next year and then transfer to a university to study Athletic Training. His passion in his spare time has been playing soccer. In addition to the parks and recreation leagues he was blessed to be able to play on a small Christian school team (home school students were allowed to play) and was honored by being selected the Athletic Scholar twice and Most Christ-like one year. He still plays in pick-up soccer games when he can and helps referee the local parks and recreation games. He has been playing drums in the praise band at church for the past two years and seems to have a natural talent for it. In the summer he also volunteers at a local Bible camp. This summer he will be old enough to serve as a counselor. He also puts some time into working at a local fireworks stand in the summer.

While we have had some challenges along the way, our children have been a tremendous gift to us, and we will be forever grateful for being part of our lives. We are thankful for Dr. Sergei and Dr. Maria and the staff at the Baby Home for the care our children received during their first months of life.

THE CONNECTION'S RUSSIAN FILM SERIES

From March 31st until May 12th, 2015, the Sister City Connection sponsored its fourth series of Russian films, under the auspices of the Mid-Maine Regional Adult Education program at Waterville High School. Former series featured topics of current interest in Russian films (social problems, religion, crime) or important moments in Russian history, as film directors interpreted them. This year's series featured Russian comedy classics, in some cases films, which elicit "laughter through tears," the work of the most famous film writers, actors, and directors. The social commentary in these films is muted and presented in a humorous way, as the films depict real-life dilemmas for Russian citizens, such as endless bureaucracy, alcoholism, marriage and divorce, and the underground illegal economy.

The Connection was very pleased to have 31 lively participants in this year's film series, and all the participant-chefs shared in preparing a festive and delicious Russian dinner at the conclusion of the film series.

AMERICAN SAMPLER/25th ANNIVERSARY TRIP TO KOTLAS

In April Co-chairs Martha Patterson and Mary Coombs along with Peter Garrett, Mark Fisher, and Tessa Couture traveled to Kotlas to participate in their American Sampler (a day for Russian high school students to learn about the United States from people who live there) and to help celebrate the 25th anniversary of the sister city relationship. This was Mary's 7th trip to Kotlas. What follows are the recollections of Martha, Mary, and Peter about that trip.

With great anticipation our plane to Moscow landed and there to greet us was Arina Pavlova and her longtime friend, Viktor. Our group quickly realized we had no worries. Arina had arranged every detail of our visit in Moscow and our journey to Kotlas. Viktor was a tremendous help with the luggage!

The train ride to Kotlas was filled with anticipation, visits from folks in the group, the yummy meals from the "restaurant" and relaxation.

Upon arrival in Kotlas, we were greeted with flowers and chocolates by members of the Waterville Committee, host families, and our friends. We were quickly reminded that "mud season" is the same in Kotlas as it is in Maine. The weather was also very similar as what we left behind in Maine – sunshine and high temperatures one day followed by clouds and snow flurries the next.

A busy agenda was launched with an impressive American Sampler, various school visits, a hospital tour and a tour of a very lovely rehabilitation center. The American Sampler was held at Lyceum #3 (where the teacher connection was originally born when Mary became friends with English teacher Zinaeda [Zina] Egorova). Mary likes to say that she and Zina are like sisters who meet after years of separation and pick up the conversation where they left off, as if they had never been apart from each other.

The 2015 Sampler was organized with an impressive opening and closing ceremony. Leaders guided the school children to their classes. Martha's cooking class was well received with more students than anticipated. The cookies were described as being finger licking good!

As we visited one school after another we admired the behavior of the students, their creativity, and their eagerness to perform their tasks and their ability to perform on demand. The questions that they asked in English amazed us! School #18 was one of the schools we visited. It is also the school attended by two of our most recent student visitors, Katya Smotrina and Polina Shelygina. We were led on a tour of the building and saw some of the science classrooms. Students put on talented performances including plays, singing, and poetry reading. The following day we attended a special concert at Gamma, Kotlas' performing arts school. The concert was outstanding. The school was also preparing events to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II (or as the Russians call it, the Great Patriotic War.)

Kotlas is home to a boarding school which allows students whose parents work for the railroad to receive vocational training as engineers and workers on the railroad. Because their parents may be gone for significant stretches of time they know their children are receiving good care. Students wear uniforms. We also saw many working with industrial equipment.

We visited the village schools in Providina where Larisa Trubina is the principal. She was here with students in 2008. We sat in on a logics class of 3rd and 4th graders who were solving problems. Providina is an area where Gazprom workers live and schools are quite well equipped as a result. They even have their own bus for field trips. There are so many students that Larisa talked about double sessions for instruction. We also walked to their music and art schools which are housed close by. These classes are scheduled around the school day and are not part of the Russian educational program as in American schools.

We were also involved with higher education in Kotlas. At the Pedegogical School where Tanya Shelygina works and trains primary teachers, we spoke with their teachers-in-training about our lives, the American educational system and answered their questions. Each of us was in a different room so more could take part in these events.

Waterville Committee member Natalia Koptelovna gave us a tour of the Medical College where doctors are trained to go into the nearby villages to minister to the people. They give advice, and take care of common ailments. It would be similar to our PA (physician's assistant) training in the US. Nurses, lab workers and ambulance staff are also educated here.

On a tour of the Electromechanical College we were first taken to the museum where we were shown some of the achievements of past graduates. We then toured classes in residential wiring,

phone technology, lathes, and welding. All of these educational visits were truly interesting and we were impressed with the dedication of their staffs towards their students. Dedication to student success seems to be a universal trait of teachers everywhere.

The hospital visit was particularly dear to Martha as she spent all of her working career dedicated to saving lives and making a healthier community. No translation was necessary for Martha as she understood perfectly the instrumentation and all other aspects of hospital life.

Kotlas is very fortunate to have a beautiful rehabilitation center dedicated to making life easier for those with disabilities. The center was beyond comparison to any center in the Waterville area. It has grown and developed to become a regional place where parents from the region can bring their disabled/handicapped children to receive training. Parents themselves can learn how to best meet their children's needs. Since some staff members from the rehab center were in Waterville through the Open World Program in 2013 to visit social service organizations we were glad to view some of the outcomes of that visit.

The evening meals hosted by our former and newest Russian students were plentiful, tasty, and



Figure 2 Farewell Dinner in Kotlas with Members of the Waterville Committee

cooked with love. It was so nice to see all of our "students" again! Our committee cooked a fish soup and chocolate chip cookies for the Waterville Committee. It was hosted by the parents of Anton Eltsov. Anton first visited the Waterville area in January of 2012. He later returned to spend a year at Messalonskee High School as a guest of Mark Fisher. A special meal was enjoyed with folk dance and song at the Cultural Center. We had a chance to make a fire in a Russian fireplace, weave, and learn to dance as the Russian folks do. Dinner with Mayor Bralnin promised bonding between the mayor's office and the Waterville committee. The members of the Kotlas Connection invited the mayor to send a delegation

to Waterville to continue the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the sister city relationship. A bittersweet ending was celebrated with the Waterville Committee amid a scrumptious homemade buffet, pictures, gifts, and singing. Peter Garrett played "Russian Nights" on his fiddle and we raised the roof.

It was hard to say goodbye to our Russian families and friends some of whom we may never see again. There is a saying, "It is only farewell until we meet again." On the train we reminisced, relaxed, and planned our time in the beautiful city of St. Petersburg. Arina had everything under control as she graciously accompanied us and saw that we got on our flight to the USA. We thank her for her many kind gestures to keep us comfortable as none of our team spoke Russian fluently. We learned some words, but then realized that true friends understand each other no matter the language or distance. We became reacquainted with old friends and met many new ones.

KOTLAS DELEGATION OF SIX CELEBRATES 25 YEAR SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIP IN WATERVILLE

Early in the evening of June 26th six representatives from Kotlas arrived in Waterville at the home of Martha and Neal Patterson. They were met with colorful American leis, bouquets of flowers and a variety of yummy treats. That marked the beginning of the Kotlas delegation's seven day stay in the Waterville area to celebrate the 25 year sister city relationship on this side of the

Atlantic. Included in the delegation was Kotlas Mayor Andrei Bralnin, Natalia Makarovskaya, Nikolay Makarovskiy, Maxim Dmitriev, Andrey Strekalovskiy, and Natalia Verkhovtseva.

During their visit the Russian delegation was treated to a variety of Maine and American food specialties. They enjoyed Maine lobsters after being shown how to eat them in the proper style, had corn on the cob, strawberry shortcake, a traditional American BBQ, and a fish soup made at the Patterson's camp from the 15 fish caught by Andrei Bralnin and Maxim Dmitriev.

Because seeing the ocean is always on the wish list of guests from Kotlas, a trip to Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park was put on the agenda. The day was just right weather-wise. A walk along the shore, lobster rolls at Galyn's, and a bit of shopping got the group started. After lunch a stop atop Cadillac Mountain provided a clear view of the surroundings. Later some of our guests even took a dip into the ocean at Sand Beach. While Thunder Hole wasn't thundering, it was still a great photo stop. The drive back to Waterville ended a great day on the coast.



Figure 3 Natalia Makarovskaya, Maxim Dmitriev, Nikolay Makarovskiy, Natalia Verkhovtseva, Andrey Strekalovskiy, and Mayor Andrei Bralnin atop Cadillac Mountain in Acadia National Park

Another favorite activity of friends from Kotlas when they come to Maine is shopping in Freeport. This delegation was no exception. It rained for a good part of their time in Freeport, but that did not dampen their enthusiasm. That night we all gathered for a lobster bake at the lakeside home of Marilyn Hall.

Bright and early Monday morning the Kotlas delegation got a close-up look at Maine's state government during a visit to the State House in Augusta. State Representative Tom Longstaff greeted the Russian guests and led them on a very informative tour of the State House committee and sub-committee chambers and offices. He also brought the group into the House and Senate chambers where they had the opportunity to mount the podiums and have their pictures taken swinging the gavel. During the tour the Russians learned about the procedures for moving new legislation through the chambers. They were especially interested in the process of public hearings held before committees of the legislature.

After a quick lunch in the State House cafeteria the delegation crossed the street to Blaine House for the Governor's Tea. The delegates were warmly greeted by Governor Paul and First Lady Ann LePage. The Governor led the Russians and their Maine hosts on a brief tour of the first floor of Blaine House pointing out many of the historical pictures and mementos along the way. Governor LePage then invited the group to join him in his office in the State House. There the governor pointed out all the pictures and paintings on the walls and the special significance they hold for him. The group moved next door to the cabinet room where photos were taken. The delegates were very impressed with everything they saw. Kotlas Mayor Andrei Bralnin presented the Governor with a number of gifts from not only the City of Kotlas, but also from the governor of the Archangel Oblast. (An oblast is equivalent to one of our states.) Mayor Bralnin made a personal invitation to the Governor to visit Kotlas in 2017 to help celebrate that city's 100th anniversary.

When our Kotlas guests met Kimberly Lindlof, President of the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce, at the Two Cent Bridge on a bright, sunny morning in late June, they began a day full of getting to know Waterville. *Morning Sentinel* reporter and columnist Amy Calder walked along on the tour and later used the Russians' impressions of Waterville in her informative and appealing articles in the newspaper. The story of the Two Cent Bridge and the role of the mills and their workers in the development of Kennebec River cities was fascinating history for the Russians, who crossed

the swaying bridge with laughs. They passed by the Sister City sign, where many photos were taken, on the way to the Hathaway Center and more information about the restoration of the old mill buildings. They toured one of the apartments and had all kinds of questions about the office and living space in the building. The beautifully restored Opera House and City Hall were next on the tour agenda, and then it was on to visit stores along Main Street and a luncheon at Cancun Restaurant, where the guests had an array of tacos, enchiladas, tostados, and fajitas for the first time in their lives. This merry lunch was followed by a public reception to honor the Russian delegation at the Waterville Public Library. The guests were delighted to see the exhibit of paintings by Kotlas artists, photographs of past Kotlas delegations in the Waterville area, and beautiful displays of Russian arts and crafts. Area residents dropped by to talk with the Russians and share cookies and cold drinks. After the reception, Peter Garrett, took the Russians on a brief walking tour of a new section of the Kennebec-Messalonskee Trails, so they had a chance to stroll in the woods along the river, a restful conclusion to a very busy day.

The evening following the Waterville tour found our Russian guests and members of the Kotlas Connection gathered at Joseph's Fireside Steakhouse for dinner. Included in the group was Waterville Mayor Nick Isgro and his wife, along with Oakland Town Manager Gary Bowman and his wife. Many toasts and gifts were exchanged that evening. Mayor Bralnin invited everyone to come to Kotlas in 2017 to help them celebrate their 100th anniversary as a city.

The exhibit at the Waterville Public Library was only one of four exhibits set up in the Waterville area to commemorate the 25th anniversary celebration. There were also exhibits in the Winslow Public Library, the Oakland Public Library, and the front window of The Center on Main Street in Waterville. Each of the displays included photos of our historic trips to and from Kotlas and an outline detailing all the visits. The Kotlas Connection is thankful for the cooperation received from all of the library staffs and the REM organization and to the members of the Connection who helped to put the exhibits together.

On the morning of their last full day in the Waterville area our Russian guests toured the State Museum in Augusta. By lunchtime the delegation had found its way to Colby College. Russians love poetry, so it was fitting that on their last day in Maine, they gathered at Colby for an afternoon of poetry. The history of the particular selection of poetry is closely tied to the 25 years of the Kotlas-Waterville Area Sister City Connection. When Maine poet and artist, Jean Ann Pollard, visited Kotlas in 1991, she exchanged poems with Kotlas poet, Vyacheslav Chernykh, who was a member of the first delegation from Kotlas to visit Maine. Jean Ann treasured these poems for many years and recently devised a plan to have Colby students of Russian work on some translations of her poems into Russian and Chernykh's poems into English. Current Colby students presented their translations in a booklet to the Russian guests, and Jean Ann (in English) and the students (in Russian) did a brief reading of their favorite Kotlas poems. The Russians were a lively and very appreciative audience for the readings and applauded the students for their hard work and great success in translation.



Figure 4 Nikolay Makarovskiy, Julie de Sherbinin, Mayor Andrei Bralnin, Jean Ann Pollard, Michael Loginoff, Natalia Verkhovtseva, Emily Tolman, Maxim Dmitriev, Natalia Makarovskaya, and Andrey Strekalovskiy at the Colby Poetry Reading

The delegation's visit concluded with a farewell pizza party at the home of Sheila McCarthy and Cliff Reid. Memories of the days spent in the Waterville area were expressed. As always there were a few tears flowing as good-byes were made and promises to keep in touch were voiced. Very early the next morning the delegation went by limousine to the Portland Jetport to begin their trip back to Russia.

THEN AND NOW

(Co-chair Mary Coombs reflects on the past 25 years.)

I'd like to remark about some of the differences I have found from visits to Kotlas over the years. On my first trip in 1989 during Communist times, we were only allowed to see Moscow and Leningrad. It was unusual to see Americans outside the major cities, and we were viewed with suspicion. In 1991 I was able to travel to Kotlas and learn much more about Russian lives. Then and now people in Kotlas welcome us with open arms as members of their families. We discuss many things happening in world affairs but still maintain that while we may have different opinions, we know that friendships remain treasured above all.

In Kotlas schools there are many more classes of English in 2015. Each school employs 1-2 teachers of English. President Putin has emphasized that English is the language of international relations/commerce and, therefore, it is an important necessity of education. Uniforms are not required in most schools, but there seems to be a dress code of white shirts/blouses and black pants/skirts. Schools are much better equipped with smart boards and computers in some rooms. Computer classes are taught, but personal computers remain in homes. They are not brought to class. We found a Skype connection at the Boarding School and perhaps in the future they will be connected with classes at Waterville Tech.

Discipline still seems rather tight by American standards with students raising their hands and waiting to be called upon by their teachers. They stood when we came into the classrooms. They sit two at each desk for instruction. I think the curriculum is not as regimented as it was before. Hallway behavior seems to be as crazy as ever. At the senior high level they still have Saturday classes and serious students take them. There is lots of homework as there are no study halls during the day. Kotlas students were under the impression that American students have little homework which is far from the truth.

Teacher pay in Kotlas is still low, but much better than it was. Teachers buy supplies for their classrooms as often happens here. Teachers on both sides of the Atlantic are involved in the lives of their students, but I would say that because many teachers in Russia have the same students from grade 2 to graduation in grade 11, they have deeper connections with their charges. There is certainly a dedication to the arts.

The changes in infrastructure over these years are phenomenal! There is now a modern bridge that spans the Northern Divina River. We used to only travel across by ferry (or ice bridge in the winter). Railroads remain the preferred means of travel. Roads have improved, and there are many more cars on the streets. Traffic lights have become necessary to help traffic flow. There is now a car dealership selling two brands of foreign cars. Personal garages used to be built on the outskirts of town. Now cars are parked next to the multi-unit apartment buildings.

With land ownership comes the construction of many new single family homes built of brick and stone, but still most residents of Kotlas live in apartments. Would-be homeowners can put money down during construction, secure a mortgage, and six months later move into their apartment. The purchaser is responsible for fixing up the inside of the apartment. Friends help each other. The edges of Kotlas have expanded. There are now three malls where kids gather with their friends just like here.

When we were in Kotlas during the 90's, life was very difficult with not much on the shelves. Today there are European shops and Russian stores with everything that we have here. Supermarkets have a variety of foods but prices remain high.

SAVE THE DATE

The annual meeting of the Kotlas-Waterville Area Sister City Connection will be held at 7 PM on Tuesday, November 10th at the REM Forum in The Center in downtown Waterville.