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Life at the St Petersburg Dacha. P. Piskarev, L. Urlab, Dacha Life in Petersburg at the Start of the Twentieth Century

The past few years have seen the appearance of numerous studies devoted to the St Petersburg, and more broadly, to the Russian, dacha [Deotto 1997; Deotto 2004; Lovell 2003; Utekhin 2004].

As an introduction to the two previously unpublished early twentieth-century memoirs of the Russian dacha by P. Piskarev and L. Urlab below, let me give a short outline of the history and specific character of this type of temporary summer residence in St Petersburg.

In his sketch, 'Dachas', of 1837, the author Faddei Bulgarin wrote:

In Germany and in France, persons from the highest circles and rich members of the nobility borrowed from the Italians a taste for villas outside the city. This taste was then taken over by the English. But up to the end of the eighteenth century {in Russia},¹ all this only applied to tsars, princes moving in the highest circles,² court gran-

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¹ The passages in curly brackets have been inserted in the translation for the purposes of comprehensibility. [Editor].

² This qualification was necessary because a 'prince' could be, by the early nineteenth century, someone of quite lowly status within the nobility and gentry (as Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* indicates very clearly). [Editor].

dees, and wealthy persons of the first rank. Ordinary members of the gentry would leave town for the summer, but travel to their own estates; members of the civil service {who were not estate-owners} would spend time in the public parks and pleasure gardens, or take their families on trips to the countryside so they could get a breath of fresh air; merchants and traders did not risk quitting their shops, offices, or workshops. In other words, city folk lived both summer and winter within the city limits, and would only take pleasure trips to the countryside on high days and holidays, when the weather was fine. [...]

The habit of building dachas began to spread in Russia in the reign of Catherine the Great along with the advance of enlightenment. The Peterhof Road was the fashionable place. The {Neva} islands were deserted. Each of them belonged to a single person and had no more than one dacha. An area that now has thousands of dachas then had only four: one on Elagin, one on Krestovskii, one on Kamennyi, and the Stroganov dacha on the Petersburg Side. The Peterhof Road also had very few dachas, and they belonged to grandees at Catherine's court or to leading bankers. At Strelna, and between the Strelna estate and Peterhof, there was not a single dacha even in my day. To say of someone 'He lives at a dacha' meant the same as 'He is rich, powerful and distinguished.' [...] And today? [...] Almost all the stall-keepers from Gostinyi dvor¹ get an airing on holidays at their masters' dachas. [...] In the summer, don't bother looking for a merchant in his shop, an apothecary in his, a German craftsman in his workshop, or a clerk in his office! They are all at the dacha! [...]

A love of nature, of trees and flowers, can be taken to indicate a certain degree of education, and the possession of **two** houses or **two** apartments is proof of affluence. All this is true, with a few exceptions. Not only that, the taste for dachas has brought into being a new city: **summertime Petersburg** (that is to say, the Petersburg and Vyborg Sides, and Krestovskii and Kamennyi Islands). Wastelands and marshes have been made habitable and then embellished by delightful little houses and gardens. [...] Dachas have raised Petersburg prices for goods, apartments and tradesmen's labour by at least a quarter, and have eliminated at least two months from our **working calendar**. At the dacha people do more eating, more sleeping, more enjoying themselves — and less working.

Ladies talk to one another {there}, because acquaintances are easily made at the dacha and neighbours readily come together. In the winter such acquaintances do not need to be maintained, since the two cities, **summer and winter**, have their own distinct mores and customs' [Bulgarin 1837].

¹ The main covered market in central St Petersburg. [Editor].

The word ‘dacha’, as the newspaper *The Northern Bee* tells us, ‘gained its current meaning initially because forested areas around Petersburg were handed out free for people to build houses out of town’ [Voskresnyi letnii den v Peterburge 1841].

As A. Grech observed in 1851, ‘Petersburg dachas have lost their original meaning of “a place out of town given into ownership by the Government or bought by a particular person”. The term “dacha” can now often mean a peasant hut rented by a city-dweller for the summer months’ [Grech 1851: 176–177].

‘The word “dacha”, in the sense of a summer dwelling out of town, can be said to be almost exclusively a Petersburg term. Moscow adopted it from the northern capital, and did so only recently. Our provincial towns as yet have no notion of dachas. In Moscow incomparably fewer people live at dachas than in Petersburg. [...] Moscow has a multiplicity of parks and boulevards that fill the air with fine scents and offer residents a cool and shady spot. [...] Consequently, dacha life has not put down roots in Moscow, has not become a necessity for everyone. [...] Petersburg occupies a smaller territory than Moscow but has a much greater number of inhabitants, and is forced to cram buildings in to save space. [...] Petersburg has just one place for promenades in summer: the Summer Gardens; it likewise cannot boast any abundance of private gardens. And these are the factors that drive every city-dweller to look for a sanctuary outside Petersburg each summer’ [M<ezhevi>ch 1842].

According to Vigel, city folk started to depart for dachas in 1800. Recalling his arrival in Petersburg in 1802, he wrote that: ‘There was no sign of any great activity. It was only a decade later that the city started to fill up with people so fast; at that time its population was not so large. But the habit of spending the summer at the dacha had spread to all classes in just two years [i.e., since 1800 — AK]: people had not yet come back from them, and Petersburg seemed deserted’ [Vigel 1892: 3].

The dacha was not only a place of recreation for large families living in city apartments but also offered the opportunity to free oneself from the burdens of strictly regulated employment and to adopt a more relaxed sense of decorum.

In the 1830s a Petersburg woman wrote as follows to a friend in the provinces:

‘The Petersburg custom compels every respectable family to move to the dacha. Everyone — from distinguished lords and rich merchants to humble clerks and civil servants — departs for the dacha from mid-May onwards. Father went all moralistic about this luxurious habit, which obliges almost every resident of the capital to have two houses of his own, or two apartments, but ended up renting a dacha on

*Aptekarskii Island*¹ — a very decent little house with a garden, i.e. with several dozen birch, rowan and lime trees and a special place for flowers. Around here the out-of-town houses, or dachas, are rented out unfurnished, so we had to have our furniture from the city moved over here, which made father extremely angry, because some of our best pieces were damaged and two mirrors were smashed as they were being moved from the carts to the barge. In the end we had to call in a decorator to clean the windows and fix the sun-blinds and the canvas awning over the porch to protect us from the sun; we had to buy a load of flowers to decorate the porch, the balcony and the staircase, as well as doing some repairs in the house and the kitchen, and the result was that the dacha cost us almost as much as a city apartment. But all the same, how much fun it is to be at the dacha! [...] You feel somehow bolder in the open air, and I still can't get used to the etiquette here [...] Being at the dacha gives you an excuse to stop making routine visits to people when they are "at home" and to put off loads of social obligations' [Bulgarin 1836: 247–248, 255–256].

In 1832 coach routes opened to Krestovskii Island and to Novaya Derevnya, and in 1837 to Poliustrovo, where a pleasure garden offered concerts and dance evenings. Steamship lines along the Neva to the Islands opened in the 1840s, as did permanent omnibus routes to dacha places beyond the river and to Ekaterinhof. The arrival of the railway brought a further boost to the environs of Petersburg: first to Pavlovsk (1838), then to the district along the Nikolaevskaya line towards Moscow (1851), and later along the Gulf of Finland. In the mid-nineteenth century publishers started to produce guidebooks for 'persons visiting dachas' with full timetables for all modes of transport, which reflected the requirements of their primary clientele of city-dwelling employees.

In 1841 I.I. Pushkarev tells us that:

The lack of public gardens in Petersburg itself is compensated by the delightful dachas that are spread out through its environs. Dacha life during the summer has now become almost a habit for all ranks and levels of residents in the capital. As soon as spring arrives, close to half the Petersburg population move out of the city, to dachas, and stay there until September or beyond, trying to take some advantage of the pleasures of rural existence. Nowhere, it seems, do people so value the summer period as in Petersburg, and no one is as eager to enjoy the healthful weather as the inhabitants of Petersburg, even those of the middle estates. So, for example, the family of a civil servant subsisting on a modest salary already think it a necessity to live at the dacha, even if only in a cramped hut, and abandon Petersburg every summer,

¹ Literally 'Apothecary Island', located north of the city centre, and the site of an important botanical garden. A place of temporary residence for those of modest means. [Editor].

whatever the considerable inconvenience of transporting furniture and the high cost of living. Soldiers spend the summer months in camp, while civil servants with families, merchants and respectable tradesmen travel out on holidays and Sundays to have lunch or tea or go out with their relatives and acquaintances at the dacha. A boat trip is a great pleasure, especially on a quiet and clear evening. These excursions are always available at a moderate price, and they are much more tranquil than bumpy cab rides. At any time of day the embankments of the Neva and the canals are full of fine-looking row-boats, which transport promenaders to distant islands endowed with attractive and secluded retreats for walking. Even the lower classes of the Petersburg population have acquired a taste for out-of-town amusements. It is nice to see noisy crowds of walkers converging on the outskirts of the city from four o'clock onwards on Sundays: salesmen, workmen and shopkeepers of all ages and nations [Pushkarev 2000: 666–667].

As for merchants, those of the first guild who were active on the stock-market remained in the city on workdays; only on Saturdays were they free to visit their families at the dacha [*Voskresnyi letnii den v Peterburge* 1841].

Leikin informs us that *'in the forties, dachas were reserved for people of means, but in merchant life even well-off people did not use them much'* [Leikin 1907: 21].

In his autobiographical sketches 'Petersburg in the Forties', V.R. Zotov recalls Petersburg dachas from the 1840s through to the 1880s:

People have been complaining about Petersburg dachas for much more than half a century. It's just that in recent times they have done so in significantly greater numbers. Residents of the capital have secured a few new places for their summer migrations, but they have built their dachas, then as now, like true conservatives, as mere houses of cards, without making any allowances for the climate, with Mauritanian and other embellishments on the facade, but without the most basic facilities indoors; they have built verandas and belvederes but have omitted to install stoves; various means of protection against the sun, which so rarely makes an appearance in Petersburg, have come at the expense of any defence against the strong cold wind that blows right through all our dachas for the whole of the so-called summer. Equally, the range of fashionable and preferred dacha locations has changed with the times. At the beginning of the forties, the best circles could be found above all on Kamennyi Island, in Tsarskoe [Selo] and Pavlovsk, middling sorts took up residence on the Peterhof Road, in the Finnish village on Krestovskii Island and in the Koltovskoi area that could be reached from Krestovskii only by row-boat and was separated from the city by a wooden road (which took the form not of wooden blocks, which were introduced in the fifties, but of planks laid across the street that made carriages jump as if they were on a piano keyboard). Novaya and

Staraya Derevnnya came into fashion only at the end of the forties, when the bridge to Krestovskii was built and Izler opened his mineral waters and concerts at Novaya Derevnnya. At Polyustrovo the old Kushelev-Bezborodko had a splendid dacha whose garden he opened to the public. This became the venue for occasional concert evenings given by visiting musicians. Until the opening of the railway to Russia's second capital, the Moscow highway was a wasteland taken up with factories, not dachas, but the Peterhof Road, which had not yet been taken over by the Putilov works and other factories, was overflowing with dacha folk of modest means, especially in the villages of Tentelevo and Avtovo, near the Krasnyi Kabachok and the Sergius monastery. These people went out strolling on a wide road covered in thick dust when the weather was dry and in no less thick mud when rain came down. In the evenings these dacha dwellers, most of them from the class of civil servants, played whist with the same intensity as their descendants do today [Zotov 1890: 329–330].

In his series of sketches 'How We Vegetate at the Dachas', Leikin gives a topography of the dacha locations where the merchant class spent its holidays and depicts a trader who finds himself out of place in the bosom of nature.

The Karpovka¹ is the bottom rung of dacha life. A drab merchant who has just discovered the delights of civilization in the form of dacha life and for the first time resolves to leave for the summer from Yamskaya or Kalashnikovskaya wharf, reaches the Karpovka in the first instance and then, gradually moving on to Chernaya Rechka, Novaya Derevnnya and Lesnoi, will eventually get as far as Pargolovo and Pavlovsk.² At the Karpovka he puts on fine shoes to replace his workaday footwear; his cotton shirt with its crooked collar and gussets, held together by a calico shirt-front, makes way for a stripy blouse; he starts to let his collar out from behind his tie, stops eating Lenten fare on Wednesdays and Fridays, and realizes that it is possible to do without home-made kvas and bread; he starts to make fun of sepulchral old men, the upholders of ancient decorum; realizes that 'shop-assistants are people too', shortens the hems of his jacket, loses the habit of wearing boots that squeak, and smokes his first roll-up in the open air — in other words, he acquires polish, and strides rapidly along the road of progress [Leikin 1912: 226–227].

Merchants trading on the stock exchange preferred Staraya Derevnnya, which contained 'many English merchants who rented dachas from one year to the next, many German merchants, many Russian merchants active on the stock exchange who had shed their original

¹ The little river dividing the Petersburg (now Petrograd) Side from Aptekarskii Island. [Editor].

² i.e. development will creep further and further north of the city, till it reaches the summer palace settlement of Pavlovsk, about 50 kilometres away. [Editor].

character and dedicated themselves to imitating Englishmen and Germans. Half the inhabitants of Staraya Derevnnya are anglers and lovers of boating trips. They show off to each other their gigs, the fishing tackle they've bought in the English shop, and their eccentric suits. Many of them keep out here both horses for riding and carriage-horses, and in the evenings take trips out to the tip of Elagin Island' [Leikin 1912: 282].

Pavlovsk was an 'aristocratic dacha location', just like Kamennyi Island, where *'everything is carefully trimmed and licked into shape, life is in a corset, everything vegetates to attention'* [Leikin 1912: 239, 267]. Only extremely rich traders could afford to buy a house on Kamennyi Island, and only merchants near the top of their profession could live in Pavlovsk next door to a general and *'provoke the general's wife every day by displaying their thoroughbred steeds'* [Leikin 1912: 240].

Finally, the dacha's 'lower depths' were represented by the village of Volynkino, on the Gulf of Finland close to Ekaterinhof. This was the preferred summer location for 'merchants who carry on with actors and are on the path to ruin' [Leikin 1912: 216].

In 1843 a newspaper provided a topography of the dacha locations preferred by various strata of the urban population:

Pargolovo, for the most part, is inhabited by German merchants, managers of merchants' offices, and amongst them craftsmen and shopkeepers. [...] In the so-called Finnish village on Krestovskii Island you mostly find actors from the French company, who need to be close to Kamennyi Island, i.e. to its theatre.¹ [...] Chernaya Rechka, behind the Stroganov gardens, contains Russian and German families. [...] Emelyanovka is full of German merchants and craftsmen of modest means, and of civil servants with no great pretensions. [...] The character of Ekaterinhof is Russian. [...] Tentelevo is a nest for civil servants and a refuge for the less well-off Germans. The German colony on the Peterhof Road has the same character as Pargolovo, only in miniature. [...] Dachas in Pavlovsk and Tsarskoe Selo, i.e. apartments rented for the summer in the palace settlement or in the town, belong to a special category. This is a place for families who love the sounds, life and apparel of the town, and are looking for large public entertainments, whist, preference, in a word — distraction [Smes 1843; see also [Smes 1845]].

At the end of the nineteenth century, most urbanites preferred to spend the summer at cheap dachas in Novaya and Staraya Derevnnya while repairs were done in their rented city apartments under the supervision of the owners. Moreover, as one guidebook informed its readers

¹ A theatre on Kamennyi Island was built in 1827. [AK].

in 1892, 'for some time now people have started to take up residence here [in Novaya and Staraya Derevnya] for the winter as well, which must without doubt in general be put down to the impossibly high prices for apartments in Petersburg itself' [Zarubin 1892: 214–215].

The city in summer is recalled by Dobuzhinsky: '*Petersburg in the summer period was empty, the "masters" had headed off to their dachas and abroad, and cooks, caretakers and maids became the masters of the city. At stalls by the gates people shelled seeds, others played the harmonica, and the cheery decorators, so abundant in Petersburg in summer, bawled out their songs. This was "Piter"*' [Dobuzhinsky 1987: 11].

The custom of making a sharp distinction between 'winter' Petersburg and 'summer' Petersburg continued into the twentieth century.

Not long ago, when I was sorting through old folders at home, I rediscovered some reminiscences by two long-time Petersburgers, P. Piskarev and L. Urlab, entitled 'Dacha Life in Petersburg at the Start of the Twentieth Century' (22 typed pages, with handwritten authorial corrections; the manuscript is dated 12 May 1964). These memoirs were presented to me in 1972 by a native of Petersburg, Irina Konstantinovna Borman, who after the Revolution lived in Estonia. Regrettably, Irina Konstantinovna died in 1985 and took with her all existing information on the history and the authors of this text.

The memoirs published below give an extremely detailed account of everyday life at the Petersburg dacha.

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P. Piskarev, L. Urlab

Dacha Life in Petersburg at the Start of the Twentieth Century

Petersburg dacha locations were to be found along all the railway lines leading out of the capital. But Petersburgers especially favoured dacha settlements on the Finland, Baltic, Warsaw and Primorskaya lines, those upstream on the Neva, and finally those closest to the city — on the islands and at Novaya Derevnnya.

Of the suburban routes, the Primorskaya and Irinovskaya lines were especially important.

The Primorskaya line had two branches: one went from Novaya Derevnnya to the Sestroretsk resort, the other to Ozerki. The rolling stock was distinguished by its small carriages and the special appearance of the locomotive, which was like a iron cube. It looked identical to the steam-engine on the city railway that ran from Znamenskaya ploshchad [The Square of the Sign] (today Ploshchad Vosstaniya [Uprising Square]) through the Nevsky gates and out of town.

The Irinovskaya line, which went from the Okhta to the station Borisova Griva on Lake Ladoga, had a narrow gauge. It had the usual type of locomotive, but one that could only be described as a mini-locomotive — it was a real miniature, with carriages that looked like toys (they were reminiscent of the tiny carriages in children’s model railways that can now {i.e. the

1960s) be found in many Soviet cities). Trains went very slowly on the Irinovskaya railway. Passengers were issued with tickets by conductors travelling on the train.

The dacha clientele varied according to the location.

Places with so-called summer residences for the tsars (Tsarskoe Selo, Peterhof, and others) filled up for the summer season with people who had a direct connection to the court, with high-ranking civil servants and the families of officers in the Guards' regiments. Permission to reside in these places could be difficult to obtain, as the crucial factor was the trustworthiness of a dacha tenant. In addition to the security staff in the palaces and the police standing outside them, these places were swamped with secret police agents — plain clothes detectives.

But it should be borne in mind that the number of such dacha folk was not great, because many people in these categories preferred to go abroad, to resorts in the South, or, indeed, to their own estates — many of them were wealthy landowners.

Sestroretsk was a place of recreation for the wealthy bourgeoisie — and, so far as its resort district went, for members of the intelligentsia too — both in the immediate area of Sestroretsk and along the Primorskaya railway line.

Dachas beyond Beloostrov on the Finland railway line were the favourite holiday place for lawyers, doctors, professors, writers, artists (who included the following names: {Maxim} Gorky, Leonid Andreev, {Ilya} Repin, {Kornei} Chukovsky, and {Mikhail} Gertsenshtein,¹ who was killed in Terioki by members of the Black Hundreds).

The most affluent groups in the population rented dachas without taking any account of distances. The head of the family would send his family off to the dacha but go there himself only on Sundays. These wealthy dachas, fully equipped and with many rooms, were to be found in the healthiest and most scenic spots, for example along the Primorskaya, Finland, and Warsaw lines. Some people even rented whole dacha estates, taking no heed of their distance from the railway station; dacha dwellers of this kind had their own equipages. Such places were found primarily on the Finland railway beyond the station at Beloostrov. Before the Revolution, this marked the border

¹ Mikhail Yakovlevich Gertsenshtein, a noted specialist in economic legislation and Professor at St Petersburg University, was, from 1905, one of the leaders of the Kadet (Constitutional Democratic) Party; as a liberal and a Jew, he became a target for the anti-Semitic 'Union of the Russian People'. He was shot dead on 18 July 1906 while walking on the beach at Terioki with his wife and daughters. His funeral was attended by thousands. The trial of his alleged murderers, held in Finland in 1907–1909, became a cause célèbre, and eventually Tsar Nicholas II stepped in to have the case dismissed. [Editor].

with Finland (which, while forming part of the Russian Empire, enjoyed a measure of autonomy). Many other people had dacha estates of their own.

Less well-off people rented dachas in various locations, trying to pick up houses that were attractive to look at, that had amenities, and that were situated in scenic spots close to woods, parks, or the shores of the sea or a lake, or the banks of a river.

Civil servants, clerks in private institutions and enterprises, and others were, of course, less discriminating and demanding in their choice of dacha — as long as it was on the cheap side and not far from the city, since the head of the family came back to the dacha every day after work.

In train carriages on the Finland line you could often see people whiling the time away playing cards. These were mostly dacha folk travelling long distances on Saturdays to see their families. The groups of card players met regularly, always riding not just on the same train, but in the same carriage, and often travelling to one and the same station.

Workers, even skilled ones who earned more than a low-ranking or even a middling civil servant, tended not to go to the dacha. This was due to the fact that workers — natives of the village — never lost touch with their roots and sent their families out to the country.

The children of workers who had lost that connection to the village were condemned to spend the summer on the streets or in the yard. Children in worker settlements on the outskirts of town could at least run around on the stunted grass that grew beyond their houses, but those who lived in the city were huddled in tightly enclosed courtyards where there was no air, where a stench came from the refuse pit, and where the sun never made an appearance. In those days no one cared for children of this sort. Workers of this kind would only take their families out of town on Sundays.¹

Renting a dacha started to preoccupy people in the early spring. In March people could be seen wandering round in search of dachas. A little white ticket in the window meant that a dacha was available for rent. Many dacha folk maintained their relationship with the same landlords, renting dachas from them year after year.

Prices for dachas varied — everything depended on the location, the size of the dacha, and its amenities. Many dachas were rented furnished; some even had crockery.

¹ By the 1910s, a movement had in fact started to provide working-class children with 'rational leisure' over the summer: see Catriona Kelly. *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991*. New Haven, 2007. Ch. 11. [Editor].

To give some indication, we can cite the following prices: in Pavlovsk a furnished five-room dacha cost 300 rubles for the summer; a two-storey dacha in Finland, at Perkijärvi Station, with six rooms, furnished and with crockery, on the shore of a lake, equipped with a boat and a bathing hut, was 150 rubles; in the same location, but further away from the lake, a three-room dacha with a glass veranda but no furniture cost 80 rubles.

In the areas closest to the city — Shuvalovo, Ligovka, Dachnoe, Vsevolozhskaya and others — prices for small dachas with one or two rooms and a front garden were in the range 25–50 rubles for the summer.

People renting dachas with several rooms could themselves rent out rooms, which made the dacha cheaper for them. Rooms of this kind were mainly rented by people on their own and tended to cost 10–15 roubles for the summer. Tenants in this category included young shop-assistants, office workers, and other employees of modest means.

But what happened to the owners of the dachas? That depended not so much on the size of the property or the material situation of the owners as on their character. A mean owner, even if well-off, would be ready to squeeze himself into a kennel in order to rent out as much as possible and get as much money as he could. But not everyone was so greedy. Some owners were reasonable, cultivated people, who not only derived income from renting out dacha space but also spent the summer in a civilised fashion, occupying one or other floor of a two-storey dacha or living in a separate heated dwelling where they spent the winter too.

As time went on, more and more dachas were converted for winter use. People had various reasons to move from the city to the suburbs. Those who rented a place in the suburbs all the year round began to be called ‘winterers’ [*zimogory*].

Some enterprising house owners not only rented out dachas but sold lunches too. They pinned on fences or telegraph poles laconic advertisements of the following type: ‘*Home-made lunches. Address such-and-such*’. This suited bachelors very well. Such good-quality lunches with three or four courses were designed for the well-off. They had their regular customers who always came at the same time for their hot lunch. In good weather the meal was served on the veranda or even in the garden. This sort of pleasant environment drew in the customers, spelling the ideal of domestic comfort, or something like it, so far as they were concerned.

At this time, apartments in Petersburg were very expensive, and dachas were cheap by comparison. With this in mind, many Petersburgers gave up their apartments, sold their furniture or put it into

storage, and departed for the dacha. It was a simple matter of calculation. A large city apartment cost 150 roubles per month, while the same money could buy a dacha for the whole summer, that is, for about four months, which amounted to 35–40 roubles per month. This course was taken not only by the well-off, but also by people of modest means: it all depended on how enterprising they were, on the make-up of their family and various other circumstances.

{The dacha once found}, the preparations began, a process that involved all members of the family. Each one made sure that his or her own interests did not suffer. The mistress of the household took care of domestic matters and her own wardrobe, the master was concerned with whatever was connected with his principal dacha activities, while the children thought of their favourite toys.

Preparations brought with them all the bother of packing. The scale and character of the preparations depended on who was going where, and to what kind of dacha. It was one thing to provide all the essentials for a dacha with one or two rooms, quite another to do so for a dacha with many rooms. It should be remembered that even furnished dachas still required a lot of work for life in them to be reasonably comfortable and convenient.

If effects had to be moved to dacha locations close by, no more than 30 kilometres away, then draught-horses were used. Dacha folk would make a prior arrangement, either directly with the driver or with the boss of the stables, regarding the time the transport would arrive to load up, and leave their address.

The cost of this kind of transport was approximately five roubles, for dachas close to the city (up to a radius of 20–25 kilometres). The weight-bearing capacity of a cart was one tonne.

The driver was always reasonably punctual. If members of the family helped to take some of the things from the apartment out on to the street, excepting heavy items, then the driver himself loaded them on to the cart, because this required experience and an expert eye to make sure that the load did not topple and nothing was lost on the way.

After loading was complete, the effects were tied up with a long strong rope, which was stretched to go around the whole load. The rope was threaded through hooks located specially for this purpose on the underside of the cart. To make absolutely sure, the rope was wound around a stick. When loading the cart, the driver took into account his own interests as well as the comfort of the servants who accompanied the load. For this reason, a sprung mattress or a settee would go in the front of the cart, and the servants would triumphantly plump down on it, clutching a cat in a basket, or a canary in a cage, or a goldfish tank, or a rubber plant in a pot, or the enormous

horn of a gramophone. The driver usually walked alongside the load; from time to time he would sit down on the mattress or the settee next to the servants, with whom he sometimes struck up a lively conversation. If it rained he pulled out a big tarpaulin to cover the things and the people sitting in the cart. You can only marvel at the stamina of the horse, which pulled this heavy load along the paved surface on iron wheels.

The journey lasted for hours. Rest stops were required for the driver to gather his strength and the horse to be fed and watered. Resting points included coaching inns, taverns and tea-rooms.

Everything went smoothly and well while the load was still being pulled along the road. But both horses and people faced torment as soon as the time came to leave the highway and follow country roads. The roads were pitted, with deep ruts full of water and liquid mud. The horses' legs and the wheels sank into the mud and clay. The cart was thrown from side to side, which scared driver and servants alike. There was no way of extracting the cart from the ruts to a more even surface. The tormented horse came to a halt, sweating and frothing. If the driver was not able to lash it into action, he had to seek the help of passers-by.

While this ordeal was going on, the masters were already sitting in their empty dacha and anxiously looking at the clock and at the road to see whether the long-awaited cart was about to arrive. They sighed with relief when it finally appeared. There were cases where such ordeals ended in an emergency. To avoid this outcome it was sometimes necessary to unload the cart, to give the horse a chance of moving to a more even and safer place. Then everything was reloaded and the journey could continue.

When the cart arrived at the dacha, unloading could begin. Heavy items were unloaded by the driver, the rest by all the members of the family. Once the cart was unloaded, the driver's mission could be considered complete. He could get ready for the return journey. The driver would doff his cap, bow low to his customer and wish him and his family happy and enjoyable holidays at the dacha. The customer responded in kind: as he settled up, he thanked the driver for the safe arrival of his effects and gave him a tip. The driver thanked him and set off on the return journey content that, whatever difficulties he had experienced on the way, everything had turned out well.

The railway was used to move effects over long distances. When dacha folk could find others moving to the same location, they would club together to book out an entire carriage. The more travellers there were, the cheaper the overall cost of transport.

So, all the domestic effects would be taken to the station. The deliverer was given a receipt, and at this point all his worries were

at an end. Smaller items were placed in the baggage compartment of a passenger train. Freight transport was not quick. But one train per day along the Finland railway was an express. The rate for sending loads on this train was higher. At the destination, the effects were unloaded and handed in at a warehouse. If the load was going to Finland, it was inspected by a customs official before being dispatched onwards. In order to ensure trouble-free transport back from Finland, some items were stamped. These included: bicycles, sewing machines, and cameras. Items were transferred from the station to the dacha by local peasants. In all fairness it must be noted that roads in Finland at that time were in a much better condition than those in the Russian Empire itself.

Then began the process of sorting out the interior and setting up a comfortable dacha. When everything in the dacha was properly organized, the family turned its attention to the wider environment. They tidied up the flower beds. They planted climbers in front of the terrace or the balcony: hops, beans, nasturtiums, and others. Linen portières adorned the open terraces and balconies. Pedlars brought seedlings. Wealthy dacha residents gave gardeners instructions where and how to plant flower beds. The poorer ones, who had no more than one bed in their front garden, bought their own seedlings and did the work themselves. Large dacha gardens were decorated with glass spheres of various colours and brightly painted plaster gnomes. The bed was bordered by stone slabs or brick, or was fenced off by bent rods. Yellow or red sand, or crushed bricks, were scattered over the paths.

The garden would have benches (especially if it was large), but there had to be another bench by the gate at the entrance into the garden from the street. Sometimes benches were placed in pairs, one opposite the other, on the bridge across a canal, if the street had such a canal for drainage. These were the places where dacha folk relaxed and chatted in the evenings. Their neighbours often joined them. When it started to get dark, the youngsters would go off to amuse themselves, while the old people dispersed to their dachas for their night's rest.

After putting the garden in order, parents turned their attention to providing entertainment for the children according to their ages. They had sand brought in for the youngest, they bought moulds in various shapes, shovels, spades, buckets, and so on.

Younger children were provided with swings and hammocks suspended between trees and play houses. They occupied and entertained themselves by playing ball, hoopla, and badminton, by rolling a large wheel, and by going on butterfly hunts. The most popular children's games in those days were catch, I spy, tag, hide-and-seek, and cowboys and Indians. The favourite activity for older boys was

flying kites. Sometimes the kite flew high into the sky, which showed that it had been well built and was skilfully directed by the boy who had put it together. Sometimes the kite had a rattle attached, in which case it crackled in flight. Playing at soldiers was, of course, an absolute fixture with boys. A group of them between ten and fourteen years of age would form a brigade. Adults helped the children to organise this activity. Parents bought their children toy guns, swords, revolvers, sword-belts, military headgear, and epaulettes. The brigade carried a flag with the double-headed eagle, complete with a gold fringe and gold tassels; it included a bugler and a drummer. The boys greatly enjoyed marching along the dacha streets to this musical accompaniment. They set up camp in a clearing and put up a canvas tent. They went on expeditions, made spying missions, launched attacks, crossed rivers — in other words, did everything required for an education in military matters. During the Russo-Japanese War these games took on special meaning. The Boer War also had an influence.

The older children were able to use a sports area equipped with rings and bars. If there was room, a maypole swing¹ was set up, and a place was chosen to play skittles. Adults and young people, both students and employees, also liked taking part in recreations like the maypole swing, skittles, and rounders. Croquet was an especially popular game on warm and light evenings. If there was no suitable place next to the dacha, the players picked a spot on waste ground, where they joined forces with neighbours to make a suitable lawn. Dacha folk also came together to play football. At that time football was not as widely played as now and was just done for fun.

Life was just as interesting away from the dacha. Wherever there were large areas of water — lakes and rivers — people went boating.

People bathed on open beaches and in closed bathing huts. It has to be said that these huts upset the look of a place and ruined the scenery. Some of them were in good or at least acceptable condition, but others looked menacing and half derelict, with big cracks, and spoiled the bank of the lake or the river. Not only that, the cracks were a temptation for peeping toms.

In Terioki, Sestroretsk and other places where the sea only came up to your knee, platforms were built that extended far into the sea. Bathers could walk a fair distance along them, leave their clothes in a cabin, and go down a ladder into the sea in a place where the water was above their knees and they could start swimming straight away.

Fishing enthusiasts had a delightful time in these places, sometimes

¹ In Russian, *gigantskie shagi*. Another near-equivalent in English is 'witch's hat'. Thanks to Mavis Curtis for help on this point. [Editor].

disappearing on the bank or in a boat from morning to evening, though the results of their activities might amount to zero.

In some dacha locations, horses were available for hire. This occurred mainly in areas with large parks, and special roads in the parks for riding. Wealthy people had special clothing — men's or women's — for this activity.

People organized long bicycle rides, trips to pick mushrooms and berries and, finally, picnics in a convivial group with food, drink, and sometimes even a samovar and a gramophone, which in those days played a large part in dacha life. The songs of Vyaltseva, Raisova, Dulkevich, Panina¹ and others sounded out over the glass-like surface of the lake and the neighbouring areas. So did the fashionable dances of the time such as the cake-walk, the kickapoo, the tango, the oira, and others. The gramophone came into its own especially at the end of the summer, on dark evenings, when dacha folk gathered by the samovar on their balconies and verandas, under the light of kerosene lamps that drew hordes of moths to them.

Men, both young and old, whether in the city or at the dacha, never went anywhere in the summer without a hat on. Summer headgear included panamas and straw hats with straight rims. Panamas were very finely woven and expensive. Summer dress for men consisted of a white shirt with light trousers and a wide belt made of thick material, with a pocket added for a watch (in those days there were no wristwatches). People in pyjamas or house wear did not go outside the territory of their dacha. That, if you like, was dacha etiquette.

Society life at the dacha took place mostly at clubs like the yacht club, the rowing club, the tennis club and others. Shuvalovo, for example, had clubs of this kind. It should be noted that members of these clubs were well-off people. As well as paying the membership dues, you had to have the right apparel for visiting the club, especially on Sundays and holidays, and especially on competition days. Members did not have special emblems on their clothing, but they were all dressed in exactly the same way: at the yacht club and the rowing club they wore a blue double-breasted jacket with white trousers, while at the tennis club they were all in white, both men and women. That was pretty smart. In addition, these clothes always looked neat, immaculate, you could say. And if in the tennis club all you needed was your own racket, in the yacht club you had to have a yacht of your own. All this was beyond the reach of a dacha dweller of modest means.

The following figures give an indication of how high membership dues were in some clubs: in the Krestovskii lawn-tennis club they

¹ Famous performers of drawing-room and gypsy romances: see Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era*. Ithaca, NY, 2003. [Editor].

stood at 30 roubles, and the patrons of the tennis courts in the Tauride Gardens paid 50 roubles for the season.

Racing on the lake, whether in yachts or in racing boats, was a big occasion for a dacha settlement. It was usually scheduled for Sundays. Dacha dwellers of all ages and various social stations dressed up in their finest and spilled out on to the shore of the lake. That was the start of the festivities, which continued late into the evening.

The least exclusive section of the dacha population, especially the young people, formed drama groups and put on amateur performances and improvised concerts. They had no special premises for these activities, which took place in someone's barn or simply under a canopy. So as to kit out an 'auditorium', everyone dragged out from their dacha whatever they could — from an upholstered armchair to a simple bench or stool. The stage decorations, costumes, props and makeup were provided on the same voluntary basis. The odd item was hired from a theatre studio. Although these performances were extremely rough-and-ready, people put a lot of heart and soul into them. The director and the actors, amateurs all of them, took a serious approach to their beloved activity, turned up punctually for rehearsals, learned their parts conscientiously — though a prompter remained a necessity in this kind of operation. The amateur theatre repertoire consisted almost exclusively of light entertainment: vaudevilles and scenes from everyday life. But some groups were willing to tackle more complex and serious genres. On the day of a performance everyone was excited, everyone had a lot to think about: some people sorted out the 'auditorium' by sweeping up and providing the seats, some cut the wicks and poured kerosene into the lamps to light up the stage, some looked after the staging, some checked that the curtain was not about to jam — while the actors wandered around their gardens, still cramming their roles so as not to disgrace themselves in the performance.

Performances were free, but tickets of invitation were distributed to ensure order. An inspector stood at the entrance to the 'auditorium', but of course a few people managed to slip in without a ticket. Sometimes the tickets were simply written by hand, sometimes they were typed, and sometimes they were given an artistic flourish by pencil or watercolour designs. Families kept their tickets as a souvenir of dacha life and of the people with whom they had had such an interesting and enjoyable time.

On rare occasions, charity events were held. People were charged for attending these: the beneficiaries might include the victims of a fire in a village or a village school or hospital, or — in times of war — the wounded. The initiators and organisers of these performances went round the dachas in advance to sell tickets, explaining to people the charitable purpose of the enterprise.

Although these performances were nothing special, they were popular with dacha people. Audiences were encouraging and sympathetic, and also tried to help in whatever way they could, from stools and kerosene lamps to costumes for the actors. Who knows, maybe some of these amateur actors later turned into professionals either in the provinces or even in the theatres of the capital.

From around 1908–1910 dacha locations began to be introduced to film. Cinema brought a certain variety to the life of dacha folk. It gave them an interesting and enjoyable way of spending the odd evening or two. People were very keen on going to films, in spite of the cramped and stuffy conditions. The venues were so small that they struggled to accommodate an audience of 100–150.

Some dacha locations had pleasure gardens with a brass band, theatre venues and a large restaurant. There was for example a garden of this kind in Ozerki, on the Finland railway. These gardens were frequented not only by local dacha folk but also by people from Petersburg. Finally, there were a few dacha places where people could hear symphonic music. These included Peterhof, Sestroretsk, and, of course, Pavlovsk. In Pavlovsk, in the part of the park next to the station, a fully equipped open stage was set up, along with a covered hall where symphonic concerts were conducted both by Russians and by foreigners. In the intervals the audience took a stroll in the park. A large restaurant was also on hand. These concerts were attended not only by local dacha folk but also by devotees of symphonic music from Petersburg. They were free, though places in the covered hall in front of the stage did cost money. Programmes were decided one week in advance and reflected a wide range of tastes. Symphonic music was played on certain days, light music could be heard on others, while the military brass band played on Mondays. Sundays were reserved for touring musicians.

The concert hall was owned by the directors of the Moscow-Vindavo-Rybinsk railway company. The cost of a journey from Petersburg to Pavlovsk was higher than on other suburban routes, which significantly offset the fact that the concerts were free. The train timetable was coordinated with the start and finish of the concerts.

As for dacha folk's independent socializing, much of it came at the railway station, where people gathered every evening. The custom was that everyone, especially young people, was drawn to the station in the evenings. Here women met their husbands who had been held up in town. This was also where couples had their rendezvous, where people made new acquaintances and flirted.

Many young people turned up to these gatherings with a riding crop, which was then fashionable. Dacha trains arrived and departed,

long-distance trains rushed on without stopping, and all the while the youngsters kept strolling up and down. The first of them to leave were those who had to work the next morning, while the last were school pupils, students and other young dacha people with not a care in the world.

Some dacha locations had voluntary fire-fighting societies made up of young people living there. They included the idle sons of rich merchants and other young people not burdened with work. There was a society of this kind in Ozerki, for example. Special entertainments were organized to raise funds. These took place on the shore of the lake. A brass band was in attendance. Young people strolled and flirted on the bank. Smartly dressed young ladies invited from the dacha community sold confetti and streamers. The dashing firemen hung around these saleswomen and offered them assistance. The firemen were spick and span in their uniform, with shiny buttons and gleaming helmets polished to perfection. The uniforms and helmets were, of course, the property of members of the society. The fine-looking firemen took charge of the event, maintained order, and wasted no opportunity to court the young ladies from local dacha society. Confetti, stored in bags made of thin paper, sold exceptionally well. Groups of young men bought these bags, filled their pockets with confetti, and threw it over the girls they encountered, who hit back with their own confetti. This crossfire brought much amusement and was accompanied by witty exchanges, compliments, and, of course, laughter. It can easily be imagined what condition the confetti battle left the participants in, not to speak of the paths to the lake, the grass nearby, the bushes and even the lower branches of the trees: everything was covered in multi-coloured confetti. There was so much of this confetti on the paths that people walked over it as if it were a carpet — that is what it felt like. {These walks} were how acquaintances were made, and young men would arrange to meet girls at the dances that were held in the evenings in the pleasure gardens at Ozerki. This was also the venue for performances by professional actors from Petersburg.

After an event like this, the girls were left with plenty to take care of. Confetti had the habit not only of catching on the top of the hair, but also of getting deep inside it. It took a huge effort to comb your hair so thoroughly that not a trace of confetti was left. But, as they say, desire is stronger than compulsion. The next morning, the girls who had been 'victims' the day before happily went back to this amusement without reflecting on the consequences for their hair.

Since we have been talking about firemen, we ought also to say something about fires. At that time fires in dacha locations were quite frequent, especially, of course, in a hot dry summer. The local fire brigade was joined by members of the voluntary fire-fighting society

in putting them out. It should be said that the volunteers gave quite skilful assistance. You need to remember that a fire would quickly draw a crowd of curious people from the dacha settlement, and these included the volunteers' female admirers. This factor made the part-time fire-fighters full of vigour in their striving to become the hero of the moment.

Another source of entertainments for dacha folk was charity events. These included 'white flower' events to raise money for the struggle against consumption (in those days the word tuberculosis was not much used). Dacha folk, mainly female, offered their services in selling the 'white flower'. They received a sealed cup for collecting money, and a board covered with camomile flowers, and proceeded to walk the streets of the dacha settlement in the company of their admirers, all the while asking passers-by to make a modest contribution to the struggle against consumption. Anyone who dropped a coin into the cup had a camomile pinned to them. Since the contributions consisted mainly of coppers, the cup soon got heavy if the collection went well, and it was carried by a member of the collector's male entourage while she attached the camomile to the lapel or the dress of the donor. The collection campaign was a broad phenomenon: it took place in all towns and settlements.

Local church holidays were another excuse for socialising. The sound of the bell alerted local residents and dacha folk to the start of the holiday service in the church. Those who wanted to attend the service set off earlier. But the young people gathered around the church only when the service was coming to an end. Thus came about another gathering, which ended only at dinner time when all the dacha folk returned home to eat.

St John's Day deserves a special mention. On this date the tradition was to burn tar barrels, a custom that was observed especially faithfully in Finland and in the Baltic region. This was an extremely impressive spectacle. A pyre with several tiers was set up in a clearing or by a river or a lake. A tar barrel was placed on top of it. When it began to get dark and a big crowd of locals had assembled, the stack was set on fire and lit up the surrounding area with the sinister tongues of its flames. Dances were held right there for local residents and kept going until the last fire had gone out. The style of dance reflected the national culture that predominated in a given area.

Besides public entertainment there were special occasions in the family: name-days and birthdays. These were celebrated with great pomp. The festive atmosphere was mainly established in the dacha garden. Balconies and verandas were garlanded with greenery. Multi-coloured flags interspersed with various flowers and Chinese lanterns were hung from a cord in the garden. When it got dark, candles were lit in the lanterns, and Bengal lights were also lit. All

this made the garden magically decorative. The culmination of the evening was a firework display. Fireworks were bought in a specialist shop in the city, on Kazanskaya Street. They varied in their quantity and effect according to dacha dwellers' means. Fireworks were mostly set up near water: by a river or a lake. A wide selection offered a great deal of variety: coloured rockets, Roman candles, fireworks that hopped like frogs over water, Catherine wheels, and much else. Adults were always in charge of all this: children were not allowed to take part. Neighbours came streaming out to watch displays put on by wealthy dacha households. This entertainment brought pleasure and delight to everyone. This kind of festive mood took hold of people especially on St Olga's Day, St John's Day, St Peter's Day, St Vladimir's Day, and a few other dates that were many people's name-days. After the firework display people were invited for a festive supper. If the weather was favourable, the meal was served in the garden under paper lanterns and with candles on the table. The candles were protected from the wind by special glass caps. This kind of supper made for an appealing picture of the festive family idyll. Late in the evening the guests took the last train home. The hosts escorted them to the station. There was plenty of noise, laughter and joking on the way. The mood at this point was a good indication of how much fun the name-day had been. The guests who had supped most heavily were left to stay for the night.

Dacha settlements also contained people who offered entertainment to earn themselves a crust. These included organ-grinders, Petrushka shows,¹ wandering musicians, and even small itinerant orchestras.

The barrel-organ wasn't popular in dacha locations because there weren't such receptive audiences there as in the courtyards of the city. When an organ-grinder went up to a dacha and began his 'concert', the mistress or, if it was a wealthy dacha, her maid, came running out, gave him a few coppers and waved her hand. That meant: 'Take your money and move on.' That was the view taken by adult dacha folk. Children saw things differently. They wanted to listen to the organ-grinder, to look at his monkey, they wanted the white mouse to pull them out the lucky ticket as it did for grown-ups. But no one took any notice of the little ones. Despite all the tears, the organ-grinder was escorted off the premises. This was hardly a great blow to the man's pride. He doffed his hat, thanked people for the money and continued on his way, pleased that if he received treatment of this kind he would be able to go round more dachas and collect more money. As for pride, it doesn't buy you bread to eat or sew you a coat to wear. Not everyone, of course, took this attitude to organ-grinders. Even in dacha areas there were

¹ i.e. the Russian equivalent of Punch and Judy, a knockabout glove-puppet farce. [Editor].

people who found some kind of charm in barrel-organs, or who listened to them when they were in the mood, or who were simply embarrassed to drive the organ-grinder away and hurt his feelings. Such people included the poorer kind of dacha folk, who were not blessed with the sophisticated musical understanding claimed by their wealthier counterparts.

Petrushka shows were another matter. Unlike the mournful barrel-organ, puppetry was a life-enhancing art. Petrushka was very popular among all dacha residents, both rich and poor: he was never chased away and always welcome. As soon as the booth went up for a performance, children from the vicinity came running. The tricks and escapades of the mischievous, resourceful, high-spirited Petrushka brought forth resounding laughter from the children. He got warm applause. After the performance, a collection went round. Sometimes people invited a Petrushka show to their homes for family festivities such as the children's name-days. The repertoire, the price and the time were set by prior arrangement. It was mainly wealthy people who made such invitations.

Wandering musicians also brought entertainment to dacha communities. These were mainly elderly, or even downright ancient, violinists, who because of their age and infirmity had no chance of holding down a job in a theatre. Lack of money drove these people to wander from one dacha to the next. Both their age and their appearance (which was sometimes sickly) made people sympathetically disposed towards them, and they usually received some money after playing one or two items.

Sometimes even trios and quartets, both brass and string, did the rounds of dacha areas. These included both young and old musicians. Their repertoire was light music, primarily from comic operettas. These performers gave their concerts at the wealthier dachas in the hope of greater reward.

Some dacha settlements had the benefit of a merry-go-round, which was usually set up on some patch of empty land. Children — whether local or from dacha families — loved merry-go-rounds. They were pulled along by a horse to the accompaniment of an accordion, or sometimes just a harmonica. There was always a big crowd of children standing around the merry-go-round, shouting out in high spirits to those on the ride, who might be sitting on a wooden horse, or a lion, or a swan, or simply in a boat. Next to the roundabout stood a pole with a metal ring hung from it. The children taking a ride on a horse, lion or swan tried to grab the ring. But that was not easy. Whoever managed to do so was given one free ride. Many people wanted a go on the roundabout, the demand was huge, the money flowed in the ticket booth, and the enterprising owner made a tidy sum. Everyone was happy in their own way: the

children took pleasure in an interesting entertainment, the owner in his profits.

The dacha settlements close to the city were constantly full of noise. Pedlars shouted out to advertise their wares. This began early in the morning. Then came the organ-grinders, and the evening was the time for the gramophone. Many dachas had gramophones in those days. Often defective, they would make hissing, wheezing and grunting noises. There was always a gramophone playing somewhere. It was the fashion. Arias from *The Merry Widow* ('The Swing', 'Off to Old Maxim's') boomed out from every terrace, people sang 'Poppet, My Darling Poppet', and a hoarse voice emanating from the gramophone begged that chrysanthemums be laid on her grave (this was the song 'Chrysanthemums'). People who needed peace and rest because of age or ill health, or students preparing for autumn exams and re-sits, simply did not know where to hide from this musical din. Especially on the Finland railway and along other railway lines, dachas stood so close to one another.

There were a lot of gypsy women wandering through dacha settlements. They came into dacha gardens or straight into the houses and foisted upon families, especially the women, their services as fortune-tellers. They were so insolent, stubborn and persistent that it was impossible to get them out. The only way out was to accept. The women would hold out their hands with an open palm and listen with a smile to the gypsy's patter without setting too much store by the predictions. Once the séance was over, relieved that the ordeal had come to an end, they would give the gypsy a few pennies. But relief was premature — the ordeal was not yet over. After stuffing the money into the large pocket on her wide skirt, the gypsy would ask for old items of clothing and footwear both for herself and for her little one. Most gypsies went around with children: one babe in arms plus one or two who clutched at her skirt. The kids were swarthy, dirty, barefoot, ragged and emaciated. The gypsy would not leave until she had been given some old rags. But sometimes people ran out of patience and together forced the gypsy out of the garden, locking the gate behind her to be safe. Gypsies were in the streets and at the station — absolutely everywhere. There was no escape from them anywhere.

Dacha folk took a great interest in visiting gypsy camps. But gypsies were not to be found everywhere. There were none at all on the Finland and Primorskaya lines, though there were some on other lines. The largest numbers were on the Nikolaevskaya line, working their way along the Moscow high road. Dacha dwellers along this railway line — in places like Sablino, Tosno, Lyuban — would visit their camps. What is a gypsy camp? It is a group of nomadic wagons belonging to a group of families travelling together. Gypsies set up

their camps near a population centre of some kind: a village, a settlement, a dacha location. The purpose of this was to use opportunities to replenish their supplies both of manufactured goods and of food. Gypsies produced nothing, they only consumed. The gypsy men used the local peasants for various scams involving horses, and their women used them for fortune-telling. The camp was set up in a clearing somewhere close to water and with a bit of elevation. Here is how it looked: several rows of tents, and beyond them covered wagons with raised shafts, with horses grazing nearby. The women and children were grouped next to the tents, while the men spent their time near the wagons doing repairs, greasing the wheels, shoeing the horses and doing other bits of maintenance. When dacha folk went into the camp, they came with ample supplies of coppers and sweets. The first commodity they used to pay the gypsy women for fortune-telling, the second they used as gifts for the children. They also brought various trinkets, cheap glass and brass ornaments, and other artefacts to which gypsy children were so partial. The gypsies' way of life was extremely primitive. If you looked into a tent, you saw nothing besides feather-beds, blankets, pillows, teapots, cups and planks for bread and skins. The children always had a piece of bread in their hands. They chewed away at it all day. And this was 80 per cent of their daily nourishment. In warm and dry weather the gypsies slept in tents, but when it was cold and wet they spent the night in their wagons. The hygiene and sanitary conditions of their lives were appalling.

The gypsies' mattresses were luxurious. They were very large and stuffed with swan feathers. When you lay down on a bed like that, you literally started to drown. That kind of mattress could protect you from even the worst cold.

Dacha folk visited the camps in large groups and were welcome. The gypsies doffed their caps or their wide-brimmed hats and bowed. They all knew that the dacha people had come with the most peaceful of intentions — to have fun, to see what their life was like. The dacha folk gave the gypsies cigarettes and got talking to them. The gypsies entertained their guests by dancing to tambourines and singing romances to guitar accompaniment. The visitors gave money to the performers and sweets and trinkets to the children, who also sang and danced. In the evening fires were lit in the camp. They were the centre of activity for the rest of the day. The light of the fires made the camp an impressive spectacle and gave it a large dose of the romantic appeal evoked by Pushkin's narrative poem *The Gypsies*. The dacha folk returned home with their heads full of what they had seen.

Dacha folk enjoyed themselves from morning to evening. But how did their servants, cooks and nannies pass their time? Their days

were spent in toil unregulated by the clock. It was only towards the evening, having finished their work in the kitchen or put the children to bed, that they found rest. They gathered in the dacha yards, sitting on a bench or on the steps of the back entrance, and chatted about the secrets of their masters' lives. The elderly servants, worn out after a day of work, soon found it hard to keep their eyes open and quickly went to bed. The younger ones played games, or amused themselves on the maypole swing if it was not being used by the masters, and wandered out in groups through the dacha streets. The girls got to know boys — mainly shop-assistants or delivery boys, in other words the kind of people they met when making purchases. The poor servants had an especially hard time when the berries and mushrooms ripened. The masters went into the woods for the sake of the walk, picked the berries and mushrooms, but when they got home, they dumped them in the hands of the servants for further processing: cleaning, boiling, salting, pickling. In the winter these same masters would serve up the results to their guests, boasting emphatically that these were the products of their labour, their culinary art, and so on. In other words, they too had 'put their backs in'.

Vagrancy was very common in tsarist Russia. Beggars formed throngs at church porches on holidays, but were to be found everywhere else too — including dacha locations. Down-and-outs varied in their appearance, their age, their manner of begging, and even in what they were asking for. Perhaps some of them were people down on their luck, who had hard lives; others had taken to the bottle and sunk to the bottom of the heap; others were idlers and freeloaders; others were just tramps; there were also some professional beggars. There was one other category of vagrant: religious wanderers. These people, mainly elderly, wandered from one sacred place to another, covering the whole of Russia from the Solovki monastery in the north to Mount Athos on the Black Sea. They went from one settlement to another, from one town to another, requesting alms and shelter for the night. There were a lot of down-and-outs everywhere, but the greatest concentration of pilgrim wanderers was on the same Moscow highway. They made their way along this road from Petersburg to Moscow to the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery, from there to the Kiev Caves Monastery, and then further south to Mount Athos. This stream of beggars and wanderers continued all day, from morning to night. Dacha folk barely had time to see one out by giving him a kopeck or a crust of bread before a second and third turned up, and so on endlessly.

For dacha folk along the Nikolaevskaya railway line the combination of fortune-telling gypsies, down-and-outs and wanderers asking for money was a real curse. It was impossible to give to everyone. Therefore, if people saw under their window yet another beggar or wanderer, they waved their hands and said 'Don't be angry'. This meant that

the man was being turned down. The beggar or the wanderer moved on. But there were occasions when drunken beggars who urgently needed a hair of the dog started to demand money and resorted to threats. Since the men were absent from dachas during the day, the women would take fright and meet the extortionist's demands, only calming down when he had left the territory of the dacha.

In some dacha locations, however, beggars, tramps and wanderers were very few. These notably included the summer dacha residences of the tsar: Peterhof and Tsarskoe Selo. On the territory of these residences, there were a lot of policemen and security guards. They were the people who got hold of the tramps and beggars and immediately took them to the police department, where they established their identities and sent them on for future isolation — to be precise, sent them marching into exile. There were almost no tramps in Pavlovsk or along the Primorskaya railway, especially in Sestroretsk. But on the Moscow highway, as has already been said, they were there in abundance.

Retail provision for dacha communities varied: everything depended on the location and the clientele. Trade was best developed in the summer residences of the tsars, along the Primorskaya railway line, in the resort zone, and along the Finland line. It was rather worse along the Nikolaevskaya line, where dacha dwellers living on the highway had to buy their groceries at the railway station, which was the focal point for all trade. Not only here, in fact, but in all dacha locations, shops were found at the station, with the exception of urban settlements like Peterhof, Tsarskoe Selo, Sestroretsk and others, where retail points were spread over the whole settlement. The shops were no different from those found in the city. But the delivery trade was different, and it was the salvation of dacha dwellers, especially those who lived a long way from the station, because it provided all the essentials from bread upwards. Bread was supplied by the baker. He carried around on his back a big basket secured with a wide belt over his shoulder. The basket was rectangular, wider at the top and narrower at the bottom. It had a covering of white material and, in case of rain, an oil-cloth as well. Over the top was a flat, low, broad basket with cakes in. It was removed to reveal a deeper basket containing buns. This too was removed to reveal the rest of the basket, which was stuffed full of bread and rolls. The goods were priced by the piece, not by weight (there were not even any scales). Each baker had his own patch, which he always worked at the same time. The dacha dwellers were expecting their supplier. If no one was to be seen in the garden or on the veranda, the baker knocked at the window and waited for the mistress to come out.

Dacha folk had a particular fondness for Vyborg pretzels, Swedish bread, English bread, and traditional Russian bread rings (*bubliki*).

These products were brought round by special tradesmen, who carried them on a tray on their head. They were available in the city too, but they were in particular demand in dacha locations, and especially in those along the Finland railway. The sellers offered their wares with long drawn-out cries such as ‘Vyyyyyboooooorg preeeeetzeeeeels’. The intonation was enough on its own to tell people that a salesman with Vyborg pretzels was on his way, and they made their way to the gate to meet him. In fact, other vendors made the same cries to advertise their goods, though each one had his own intonation.

Meat was brought round on a cart and was weighed out using a large steelyard. Fish was presented in ice in a big green vat which the vendor carried on his head, putting a soft round leather pad underneath. The fish trade was well developed in locations with large areas of water.

The berry trade started with the approach of the berry season. The fruit came both from the city and from local gardens. It was delivered on a tray, stacked in punnets covered in cloth. The salesman carried the tray on his head. Water melons were taken around on a cart.

Dacha areas also had vegetable stalls, but people preferred to have vegetables from local gardens, fresh from the soil. They also made much use of flowers grown by local gardeners.

A permanent figure among the various suppliers was the ice cream man. Ice cream was delivered in various ways: on the head, on a hand-pulled cart and even on a two-wheel cart pulled by a horse.

The well-developed retail trade made dacha life convenient and was highly successful.

At that time the business done by kiosks and stalls was very limited and took place next to the station. There were no public dining-rooms either. The supply of eating places was poor. Home-cooked lunches were expensive and available only to regular customers. In restaurants, where such things existed, the prices were even higher. People on their own thus found that they were poorly served for the basic amenities they needed on their summer holidays.

We should add a few words about the supply of newspapers and magazines. In places like Sestroretsk, Pavlovsk and Peterhof, papers were sold by newspaper-boys who stood at the junction of the busiest streets. But in smaller dacha settlements newspapers were not sold on the street, nor were they delivered. They were sold at station kiosks. These places also offered the most popular magazines, in the first instance *Ogonyok*.¹ It should be noted that before the Revolution

¹ A popular illustrated magazine, not to be confused with the post-1917 illustrated Soviet magazine of that title. [Editor].

newspapers weren't such a necessity for people as now. Dacha folk went to the station to buy a paper or a magazine for the sake of the walk. They were in no particular hurry to find out the news of the moment if there were no exceptionally important events occurring at that time.

There was one other curious practice in dacha life: postal deliveries. Small stations, especially those on the Nikolaevskaya and Northern lines, had no post office. If there was post, it was handed over to the person on duty, who put it on the table in the waiting room. People who lived next to the station or in nearby villages would come to the station after the mail train had been and look through the post. This system offered no guarantees against accidents and dishonesty. Later on this primitive state of affairs was eliminated. More and more post offices were created, and letters and packages were delivered direct to people's homes.

The infrastructure in dacha areas was just as variable. All the amenities then available were concentrated around the stations: paved roads, lighting, and so on. People made much use of local cab drivers, who waited at the station and took up position at the stop when the dacha trains came in. The further you got from the station, the worse services became: roads were not paved, and streetlights were either partly or completely absent. To some extent the light coming from dacha verandas improved the situation for people coming home late. Late in the evening, there was almost nothing to provide orientation — except perhaps an electric torch when such things started to appear on sale. With the arrival of electricity, the state of street lighting improved greatly.

At night, especially during the autumn, a watchman did the rounds of the settlement with a wooden rattle consisting of a box with a ball attached by a strap. The watchman waved the box, causing the ball to move, which made a monotonous sound as it hit the sides of the box. But this means of protecting dacha visitors and the local population did not achieve its aim; indeed, it even assisted thieves in carrying out their activities, since, by listening to the rattle, they knew where the watchman was and could happily burgle a dacha at the other end of the settlement.

Some dacha areas had means of transport to take people to more remote settlements. For example, from the station of Popovka on the Nikolaevskaya line, there was a horse-drawn tram route to the settlement of Podobedovka. And Shuvalovo was serviced by a steamer that took people across the lake to the first settlement at Pargolovo. The steamer ran every time a dacha train came in.

At the end of the dacha season, with school about to start again, people would start making preparations for the return journey.

Besides all the stuff that had been brought to the dacha, they now had to take the fruits of the labours of careful dacha wives: jams, salted and pickled vegetables. The servants sat on the cart with big bunches of flowers. The dacha folk took the same large bouquets with them to the station to catch the train back to the city.

Dacha life served up abundant material for humorous magazines of the time. This theme was readily taken up by Chekhov in his early stories. The figure of the 'dacha husband', weighed down with all kind of purchases, became a classic character. Stories and caricatures in these magazines were full of adventures connected with the move to the dacha, with sudden May frosts, and other episodes in dacha life.

This dacha way of life has retreated into the past forever. The dacha is no longer the prerogative of the privileged classes and the wealthy. A new life has arrived, with new habits. In our times workers have ever widening opportunities for summer vacations: a large network of sanatoria and holiday homes, a system of tourist expeditions, and organised holidays for children.

How different all these types of recreation are from the dacha life of the past, when a few people had a great deal, but nothing was left over for others, for the exhausted toilers who had the greatest need for summer rest!

Translated by Stephen Lovell

Docking at St Petersburg on your cruise? We can arrange a great selection of tours for you - all without the need for a Visa MORE Visit a Russian dacha in the countryside near St Petersburg (1 day tour). Modern Russia currently has the largest number of owners of second homes in the world with an estimated 50% of Russian families living in large cities also owning dachas. You'll discover that the air is so fresh outside of the city you can almost "taste" it and you will quickly begin to understand why the dacha remains an important and integral of Russian life and identity. You'll get back to the city in the evening around 6 pm. Prices for this tour are dependent on options chosen and are available upon request. Transportation and guide services and lunch at the dacha are included. Life at the St Petersburg Dacha. P. Piskarev, L. Uralab, *Dacha Life in Petersburg at the Start of the Twentieth Century*. Albin Konechny Institute of History of Arts, St Petersburg. The past few years have seen the appearance of numerous studies devoted to the St Petersburg, and more broadly, to the Russian, dacha [Deotto 1997; Deotto 2004; Lovell 2003; Utekhin 2004]. As an introduction to the two previously unpublished early twentieth-century memoirs of the Russian dacha by P. Piskarev and L. Uralab below, let me give a short outline of the history and specific character of this type of tempor Life at the St Petersburg Dacha P. Piskarev, L. Uralab. *Dacha Life in Petersburg at the Start of the Twentieth Century*. Elza-Bair Guchinova. 'All Roads Lead to Siberia'. *Two Stories of the Kalmyk Deportation*. Reviews. Andy Byford. *The Russian Intelligentsia Now: Alexei Elfimov. Russian Intellectual Culture in Transition: The Future in the Past*. Münster, Hamburg, London: Lit Verlag, 2003. 209 p. Polly Jones. *Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. 320 p. Michael S. Gorham. *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia*. DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003. 277 p. Andrew Jenks. *(Re)-Inventing Russian Traditions*: Laura Olson.