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THE GRAND DUKE ALEXIS IN THE U.S.A.

BY SUZANNE MASSIE

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Suzanne Massie is a

noted specialist on Russian culture and history. A lecturer and author, she has written a number of books, including *Land of the Firebird: The Beauty of Old Russia*; *The Living Mirror: Five Young Poets from Leningrad*; *Journey* (with her husband); and was editor and researcher for *Nicholas and Alexandra* written by her husband.

She has lectured on the history and culture of Imperial Russia as well as the contemporary Soviet Union to audiences ranging from the Metropolitan Museum of Art to West Point Cadets to Tulsa Town Hall.

Massie speaks Russian fluently and has visited the USSR more than a dozen times. She is a member of numerous boards including the International League for Human Rights, and is also a Fellow of Harvard University's Russian Research Center and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Imperial Russia. Her research led her to museums and libraries in New Orleans as well as in several other cities including New York and Boston and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. where she combed newspaper files of the period.

The result is this merry account of Russian American relations which is an excerpt from a longer account which she is developing into a book.

It is especially appropriate that readers of the *Gilcrease Magazine* have the first opportunity to enjoy this description of Grand Duke Alexis' visit since the buffalo hunt described here is the subject of an important painting by Charles Russell in the collection of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art. This painting, "Running Buffalo" (1918), depicts the famous buffalo hunt with General Philip Sheridan, Grand Duke Alexis and William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. This painting is a favorite of visitors to Gilcrease Museum and adorns the cover of this issue as an introduction to *Grand Duke Alexis in the U.S.A.*

THE GRAND DUKE ALEXIS IN THE U.S.A.

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BY SUZANNE MASSIE

PART I

In these days of acerbic language and mutual sabre rattling between the United States and the Soviet Union, it is difficult to recall that throughout our history, with the exception of recent times, Russia and the United States enjoyed the most amicable relations. In the era of Imperial Russia, gestures of friendship between the land of the tsars and our young republic abounded and the United States considered Russia to be one of its firmest supporters in the international community.

These friendly relationships reached a peak in the 1860s and 70s during the reign of Tsar Alexander II. The Emperor, who instituted many social, economic and political reforms, in addition to his crowning achievement, the liberation of the serfs in 1861, was an object of respect and even veneration in the United States. During these decades Russian interest in the United States also increased greatly. Russians eagerly read the works not only of Poe and James Fenimore Cooper, but also of Washington Irving, Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow, Whitman, Lowell, Holmes, and Bret Harte. Russians soaked up American adventure novels and learned the names of our states, cities and rivers. Young Russians dreamed of America as the land of excitement and romance. The novelist Ivan Turgenev hailed Americans

as “the greatest poets of our time — not the poetry of words — but of action.”

In 1860 Alexander II wrote admiringly of the United States as “presenting a spectacle of a prosperity without example in the annals of history,” and the Tsar and his ministers were firm in the belief that the Union must be preserved. At the outbreak of the Civil War, a number of young Russians offered their military services to Lincoln and the Union, one graduate of the Imperial Artillery School rendering such outstanding services to the Illinois Volunteers that he was raised to Brigadier General. When the French urged the British and the Russians to join them in full recognition of the Confederacy, the Imperial Government refused. And when, in 1863 at a critical moment in the Civil War, a Russian steam frigate and two Russian corvettes steamed into New York harbor, the event caused as much joy in the United States as it did surprise and consternation in France and England. Mrs. Lincoln paid a visit to the frigate *Oslabyia*, the first time a First Lady had set foot on a foreign warship. Toasts were drunk to Tsar and President, “toasts,” chortled the press, “that will be heard with dismay in the palaces and aristocratic halls of Europe.” When the overland telegraph brought the additional good news that another Russian fleet had arrived in San Francisco, jubilation reigned all over America. Years later, one gentleman recalled that his mother had clasped him to her bosom exclaiming, “We’re saved, the Russians have come!” Lincoln referred to the Russian visits in his Thanksgiving Proclamation as “God’s bounties of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate the heart.”

In New York, the Russians were greeted by cheering crowds and ecstatic newspaper headlines which proclaimed “New alliance cemented.” The Brooklyn Navy Yard was placed at their disposal. Russian officers and New York councilmen made a triumphal parade down Fifth Avenue to City Hall. Tiffany’s and Lord and Taylor’s were draped with Russian emblems and flags. An elegant ball was given at the Academy of Music where the tables were decorated with huge figures of Peter the Great, Washington, Lincoln and Alexander in sugar and cake. Among the Russian officers was the young Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakov, who at 18 was doing his obligatory graduation cruise as a young lieutenant in the Imperial Navy. He and his comrades whirled hoopskirted New York ladies who wore on their bodices buttons from the coats of Russian officers and blue and white ribbons in the form of the St. Andrew’s Cross.

The timely appearance of the Russian fleet caused the French and English to hesitate in giving support to the Confederacy. And, after the war, a grateful United States did not forget. In 1866, after an assassination attempt on the life of Alexander II (one of seven such terrorist attempts which ended with the tsar being blown up by a bomb in 1881), President Andrew Johnson sent a formal message to the Emperor and the House and Senate passed a joint resolution congratulating the Russian people on his escape. This was a unique event in American history; never before had a message been sent to a foreign nation expressing personal feeling for its sovereign.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox personally delivered the message, crossing the Atlantic in a new *Monitor* class ship which anchored in St. Petersburg. He was nearly overwhelmed by the spontaneous outpouring of enthusiasm by the Russian people. He was wined, dined and stuffed. (“I was like a bee among flowers,” he wrote.) The flag of the United States flew everywhere and, Fox said, “Our national airs have become familiar to the people.” In the city of Kostroma, people threw their coats on the road for American visitors to walk on. Fox was made an honorary citizen of several Russian cities, including Moscow and St. Petersburg. The University of Moscow presented letters of Peter the Great, Pushkin and other treasures as gifts to the United States. Alexander’s letter to President Johnson,

thanking him for the resolution of Congress, was suffused with warmth:

“The two people find in their past no recollections of old grievances, but on the contrary, memorials only of amicable treatment. On all occasions they add new proofs of mutual good will. These cordial relations which are as advantageous to their reciprocal interests as to those of civilization and humanity conform to the views of Divine Providence, whose final purpose is peace and concord among all nations.

“It is with a lively satisfaction that I see these bonds continually strengthening . . . I pray you to express them to Congress and to the American people, of which that body is the organ. Tell them how much I — and with me all Russia — appreciate the testimonials of friendship which they have given me, and how heartily I shall congratulate myself on seeing the American nation growing in power and prosperity by the union and continued practice of the civic virtues which distinguish it.

Your good friend,
Alexander”

It was in the glow of these good feelings that Russian-American negotiations for the sale of Alaska were completed in 1867. The huge territory, known as Russian America, was too far from St. Petersburg for Russian administrators to exercise effective control. American whalers and fishermen, Canadian fur traders, and gold hunters of all nations were crowded in, making the exposed colony even more vulnerable. Thus, despite the vigorous opposition of some American senators who regarded the acquisition as “Seward’s folly,” the Secretary of State accepted the Russian offer of sale and arranged the purchase of one-fifth of the present area of the United States for \$7,200,000.

The Alaska purchase was a solid achievement, but for the general public it lacked bright colors, drama, and a human figure on whom to focus. In this sense, the high point of Russian-American friendship was the good will visit in 1871-72 of the Grand Duke Alexis Alexandrovich, the third son of the Tsar Liberator. The United States had only one previous royal visitor in all its history; this was the visit in 1860 of the Prince of Wales who came officially incognito. The Grand Duke Alexis was our first and only Imperial visitor, an authentic Romanov who came from far away Russia trailing the glamor of the tsars! The excitement of the American people and press boiled over.

Grand Duke Alexis arrived on our shores on November 20, 1871 and left on February 23, 1872. In those three months he visited 34 American cities, hunted on the prairies and made so pronounced an imprint on the Mardi Gras in New Orleans that he is still remembered and enshrined in that city. Most of the population of the United States turned out to get a look at him and cheer. All over the land he was winned, dined, pampered and ogled. He became the object of adulation of most of the feminine population of democratic America.

At the time of his visit Alexis was 21 years old, a lieutenant in the Imperial Navy. Tall — well over six feet — blonde and husky with huge hands and feet, a fact which few newspapers failed to notice. He wore tidily clipped mutton chop whiskers and had a pensive expression in his blue eyes. Alexis was no intellectual, but he had a kindly manner, and like other members of the Russian aristocracy, he spoke several languages, including fluent but accented English. His speeches were short, always gracious and to the point. He was a sportsman, good at wrestling, hunting and riding. He was jolly, enjoyed good cigars and wine, loved opera and musical comedies and delighted in singing in his fine bass voice. Although not a

very good dancer, he exhibited extraordinary stamina on the dance floor, surviving a marathon of balls during his visit and leading out in quadrilles, waltzes and galops a small army of cooing ladies.

It was correctly rumored that the young Grand Duke had fallen in love and wished to marry one of the Empress' ladies-in-waiting. The object of his affections was a childhood friend, Alexandra Zhukovskaya, seven years older than himself, the daughter of the famous poet Vasily Zhukovsky who had been a friend of Alexander Pushkin and the enlightened tutor of Alexis' father, the Tsar. Yet because of rigid decrees modeled on those of the German and Austrian courts and adopted early in the century by Nicholas I, members of the Imperial family were forbidden to marry any but members of reigning royal families. Alexis had been brought up in the strict discipline of the Imperial family which brooked no contradiction and demanded a life of service. Thus it was said that the young man had been dispatched on his American tour, to be immediately followed by a lengthy tour of China, in order to forget his Alexandra. And, although in the United States he had a lively eye and appreciation for lovely ladies, photographs show him always with saddened eyes. Perhaps this was the reason.

The Grand Duke was expected to arrive on November 11, 1871, in New York City, and from that day on, Russian flags were waving in anticipation. But, due to storms at sea and a rough Atlantic crossing, the three-masted Russian flagship *Svetlana* was unable to use her engines and had to make the entire crossing from Madeira to New York under sail. As the days passed with press bulletins expressing great fears for the Grand Duke's safety, and a U.S. Navy squadron of four ships sent by President Grant maintaining a "ceaseless vigil," public excitement mounted.

Finally, on November 20, the *Svetlana* and her Imperial passenger safely anchored in New York's Lower Bay. It was a dismal, rainy day, but nothing could dampen the enthusiasm of the expectant public. Newsboys ran up and down the streets with special editions. *The New York Herald* trumpeted, "His safe arrival in our waters after a long and stormy voyage was known to our citizens on Sunday and yesterday the telegraph told the glad tidings from Maine to California . . . The impatience of our citizens to greet our royal visitor is almost boundless. Crowds in the neighborhood of the Battery remained for hours in the pouring rain waiting to greet him when he landed."

The first person to lay eyes on the Grand Duke was the pilot of the boat that towed the *Svetlana* into the harbor. Full of curiosity, he asked to have the Russian sailors point out Alexis. The pilot was incredulous, and exclaimed, "That young fellow with the black cap and brass buttons? He was on watch when I went down the channel to give you a tow. He's no royalty! No more'n I am." And when it was explained that, as a lieutenant, Alexis had to stand watches just as other ships officers, the pilot snorted, "Heck, he ain't no different than other folks. If he ain't got a bodyguard and a special cabin, what's a Grand Duke for?"

End of Part I

The Grand Duke Alexis in the U.S.A.



A SYNOPSIS

The Grand Duke's official trip lasted six weeks packed with official receptions, balls, parades, reviews, toasts and testimonials to Russia, "our most steadfast and unswerving friend," from governors, senators, congressmen, mayors and presidents of universities. America was seized with a Grand Dukeomania. Huge cheering crowds greeted the Grand Duke wherever he went. Every local band practiced "God Save the Tsar."

In New York, he led a splendid parade up Broadway festooned for the occasion with Russian and American flags. Trinity Church bells chimed the Russian anthem and in front of elegant Grace Church there was an enormous floral display. Along the route signs proclaimed "Grand Duke Alexis. Son of a Noble Father. Representative of this Nation's dearly cherished ally." Chefs named dishes for him and bartenders created an Alexis cocktail. Merchants sold clothes patterned on his and a shoe shine boy hung out a sign guaranteeing a "genuine Alexis polish." Letters from smitten ladies appeared daily in the newspaper. Alexis went up the Hudson to West Point and also inspected America's latest coastal artillery and torpedoes at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

In Philadelphia, the Grand Duke was cheered at the Baldwin Automotive Works by 2,100 workers. President Grant received him at the White House where Alexis also met the famous war hero and Indian fighter, General Phil Sheridan. The Grand Duke, an accomplished rider and hunter, expressed a keen interest in hunting buffalo and talked enthusiastically with the President and Sheridan about the wonders of the American West.

At the Union Metallic Cartridge Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut, which was largely devoted to furnishing large orders from the Russian Army for revolvers, Alexis was treated to a demonstration of the Gatling gun and in Springfield, Massachusetts, at the pistol factory of Smith and Wesson he was presented a fancy revolver of the latest model.

He spent a week in Boston, complete with crowds of cheering students in Harvard Square, a sumptuous Grand Ball in the Boston Theater attended by all Boston society and a gala banquet at Revere House to which flocked 200 distinguished gentlemen, including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Richard Henry Dana, James Russell Lowell, the Mayor of Boston and the Governor of Massachusetts. The Grand Duke went to Canada, visiting Ottawa and Toronto and Niagara Falls. In Buffalo, more than 20,000 people, including former President Millard Fillmore waited in the snow on Christmas Eve to greet his train. Then it was onward to Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago, where Alexis peered through the world's most powerful telescope at the University of Chicago and inspected the devastating effects of the recent great fire. Upon leaving, the Grand Duke left a donation of \$5,000 in gold to the Mayor to be distributed among the victims. He stopped in Milwaukee and finally in St. Louis. There his official tour ended on January 11, 1872. But the best was yet to come. In the weeks that followed, the Grand Duke was to live some of the adventures of which Russian boys then dreamed, savoring the excitement of the Wild West, hunting on the prairies with General George Custer, Buffalo Bill, the U.S. Cavalry and a troop of Sioux Indians. Ending his trip with a flourish he would go on to rollicking days in New Orleans where the inhabitants had prepared a special welcome for him.

THE GRAND DUKE ALEXIS IN THE U.S.A.

PART II

From
Buffalo Bill
to the
Mardi Gras

BY SUZANNE MASSIE

While Alexis was occupied touring the Midwest, inspecting waterworks, foundries, grain elevators and public schools, General Phil Sheridan had been busy. Before Alexis had left the White House, President Grant had instructed that the War Department's entire Western division would be at his disposal and Sheridan had offered to personally organize a buffalo hunt somewhere south of Fort McPherson and North Platte, Nebraska, in the Republican River region where the General had personally fought several Indian battles in 1868-69. As a national war hero, who also had the backing of the President, Sheridan was in a position to organize in grand style the buffalo hunt he had promised Alexis.

To transport the Grand Duke and his party from St. Louis to North Platte, Sheridan requested a special five car train of spanking new Pullman cars from the Pennsylvania Railroad. These included two sleeping cars, a dining car, a luxurious parlor car and an Adirondack refrigerator car stuffed with turkeys, geese, duck, quail, chickens, eggs and butter. To make sure that no one got thirsty as the train rolled over the prairies there were also cases of Bass Pale Ale, Glenlivet Scotch, Holland Gin, bourbon, rye, cognac and many cases of champagne.

Sheridan had wired Buffalo Bill Cody, the most famous citizen of North Platte, and hired him to come along. The flamboyant Indian scout and Pony Express rider at 25 already had a national reputation for his adventures on the prairies. Once, within 17 months, he had managed to kill 4,250 buffalo; now he was considered the finest buffalo hunter in the West. The notorious Bill made the trip to St. Louis to call on the Grand Duke and offer his services for the hunt. Alexis received him graciously and presented him with a bottle of whiskey. Bill later wrote that the Grand Duke had impressed him as "a large, fine-looking young man . . . a democratic fellow, a jovial lively body." To provide authentic local color, Sheridan had also asked Bill to find the famous Sioux Chief Spotted Tail and hire him to come, along with a thousand Indians, male and female. Cody closed the deal by promising Spotted Tail 1,000 pounds of tobacco.

To receive the Grand Duke, the U.S. army had been working to set up a proper camp which was to be named "Camp Alexis." A spot had been chosen in a grove of cottonwoods at the foot of a small canyon in the middle of rich buffalo country some 50 miles south of North Platte. In mid-winter Colonel James Forsyth led troops and wagons into the desolate terrain and worked to get the camp ready in time. Four acres were cleared of snow 18 inches deep in some places. Privies were dug, flagpoles raised, mountains of firewood cut and bonfires laid. Two huge hospital tents and six wall tents were pitched for the Grand Duke, the Generals and their friends; 40 more tents were erected for the attendants of the ducal party and military escort, as well as a large dormitory tent for orderlies and servants. Sibley stoves were installed inside. New bedding, carpets, tables and chairs arrived from Chicago. "Everything," wrote a slightly awestruck reporter on the scene, "was furnished with a degree of comfort and elegance rarely found out here on the wild plains of Nebraska."

The Grand Duke arrived in Omaha on January 12 and even before his train was transferred over the ice, 2,000 people had gathered to greet him, including classes of schoolchildren and their teachers. With Sheridan, two other generals, their staffs and a Citizen Committee of dignitaries, he was taken on a quick tour of the city. He viewed the huge recently completed Union Pacific Railway Bridge and

lunched with the Governor before riding off to board his special train in a smart carriage drawn by four gray horses.

Waiting at the station to join him was General George Custer. The fiery Custer, who at 23 had been the youngest Union General in the Civil War, was said to be the country's finest Indian fighter. When he met the Grand Duke, Custer was 32, his victory over the Cheyennes behind him, his sad end at the Battle of Little Big Horn four years away. To Custer's joy, Sheridan had summoned him from his quiet duty commanding a cavalry regiment in Kentucky to be grand marshal of the four day hunt.

At 3 p.m., with its engine draped with Russian and American flags, the train rumbled off across the prairie. During the 15 hour trip the group enjoyed themselves hugely over a superb banquet, talking, laughing and singing until the wee hours. Nevertheless they were up at 6 a.m. to find all the inhabitants of North Platte, some three or four hundred people, out to greet them in the gray dawn. To Alexis' surprise, unlike the cheering crowds in American cities, this assembly seemed struck by a sort of reverential awe. As the Grand Duke alighted from the train, wrote the local paper, "the rustic inhabitants" formed a long line along the platform, and "without a sound involuntarily and simultaneously removed their hats."

Buffalo Bill, mounted on a splendid horse, was also waiting. Over six feet tall, he cut a fine figure in his spangled buckskin suit and coat trimmed with fur, his black slouch hat and his long hair hanging in ringlets to his shoulders. So impressive was he, in fact, that a reporter present wrote, "White men and barbarous indian alike are moved by his presence and none of them dare do aught in word or deed contrary to the rules of law and civilization."

The whole town watched as the extraordinary caravan of over 500 people formed. "It constituted a scene," continued the reporter, "as never before witnessed on these broad unbroken prairies." Six ambulance wagons and a baggage wagon drawn by horses and mules had been provided. The Grand Duke and his suite, accompanied by Custer and Sheridan, rode in the finest wagon, while two companies of infantry piled into others. The cavalcade also included two cavalry companies and the Second Cavalry's Regimental Band, outriders, couriers and cooks (including Alexis' chef), three wagons of champagne and spirits, a few Indians and two enterprising reporters who left a lively account of the experience.

The sky was uncertain on that cold January day and, "although not a man dared utter a word of fear," there was apprehension that one of the great plains blizzards might suddenly fall on them. Nevertheless, the caravan set off with the "supple and attentive Bill" galloping ahead and the Grand Duke's wagon closely following. Six cavalry officers cantered on either side of the Grand Duke's wagon. Ever so often Bill would drop back to chat and point out wolves and antelopes. As they traveled, the American officers entertained their Russian visitors with "thrilling tales and reminiscences of their life and adventure on the Plains." Along the way a few groups of wandering Sioux greeted the Grand Duke "full of joy and enthusiasm" and he acknowledged their salutes with a wave.

Eight hours later, as the sun was setting, the caravan reached Camp Alexis where everything was in readiness. The Stars and Stripes waved from the flagpole on the bank of Red Willow Creek, bonfires blazed merrily and the Second Cavalry Band broke into the Russian national anthem. Only after the picturesque group gathered around the campfire was it noticed that a few of the party was missing — their wagon having broken down five miles away. The helpless group was forced to tramp five miles through the snow, but, writes the reporter cheerfully, "this only sharpened their appetite for the excellent meal," which was duly served and consisted of the different varieties of game to be found on the Western Prairies washed down with choice wines.



Courtesy of The
Historic New Orleans
Collection, 533 Royal Street

"Grand Duke Alexis" (1872), wood engraving

After dinner, "songs were sung and yarns spun over the blazing campfire and all retired happily to their cozy tents to dream of the next day's hunt."

January 14 dawned with a brilliant sun and an unbroken blue sky and was so unusually warm that the company did not need overcoats. It was the Grand Duke's 22nd birthday so the day began with a hearty breakfast washed down with generous champagne toasts. Buffalo Bill returned from his early scouting to say he had sighted a large herd of buffalo some 13 miles away. Custer was to initiate the Grand Duke into the art of buffalo hunting and the three men "armed to the teeth . . . all hardy hunters, large and powerful, attracted the attention of everyone." They made a colorful sight: Bill in his customary fur trimmed buckskins, Custer in his buff-colored buckskin suit and small sealskin cap, and Alexis wearing a jacket and trousers of gray-green cloth trimmed with green, with buttons bearing the Imperial Russian coat of arms. His wide trousers were tucked into his boots Russian style and on his head he wore an astrakhan cap. At his side he carried his sharp Cossack dagger and his new revolver, the present of Smith and Wesson.

Off they galloped, followed by an intrepid reporter and the rest of the company. The country was slippery and rough, the snow in some places quite deep. Bill led them around ravines for some 13 miles, sometimes within sight of howling wolves. Along the way the Grand Duke questioned Custer closely and practiced running and shooting buffalo. Suddenly, coming down a rugged slope they sighted the herd. Custer and Alexis charged together, with Bill urging them on. Alexis fired six shots but — perhaps from too much champagne at breakfast — his aim was bad, so Bill handed him his "old reliable Lucretia," a Springfield rifle. "Now's your time!" cried Bill and Alexis fired and brought down a big buffalo bull. The Grand Duke was so excited by his first kill that he leaped from the saddle, turned his horse loose, threw his rifle on the ground and cut off the tail. Then sitting on the carcass, Alexis "let out a series of howls and gurgles like the death song of all the fog horns and calliopes ever born." His fellow Russians galloped up and embraced him and let out a stream of congratulations in their native tongue which quite astonished Buffalo Bill. Servants appeared with baskets of champagne, a bottle for each hunter. After the second buffalo, more champagne appeared, leading Bill to remark, "I was in hopes he would kill five or six more before we reached camp, especially if a basket of champagne was to be opened every time he dropped one." After a 30 mile ride, they galloped back to the camp at sunset. Exhilarated with their success, they announced their return with wild Indian yells and whoops which were answered in kind, for Spotted Tail and his Sioux braves and squaws had arrived and were camped on the other side of the creek.

The next day Sheridan, the Grand Duke, Bill and Custer set out, this time accompanied by Spotted Tail, Pawnee Killer, Red Leaf, Whistler, celebrated chiefs all, and their bands of Sioux braves. Everyone rode out with the exception of Vice-Admiral Poissiet of the Duke's suite, who, to his great disappointment, was left behind to answer dispatches from the Emperor. The Indians were armed with bows and arrows only and Alexis rather annoyed two of Spotted Tail's braves by inquiring curiously why they used "these little toys." He was to have an unforgettable demonstration of Indian prowess.

The ground was rougher and the snow deeper than before and the group rode over 15 miles before Bill sighted a large herd. They advanced silently and were able to surprise the animals in a long and narrow canyon. Seeing the danger, a member of the Imperial Suite, Count Olonsoff, cautioned the Grand Duke but Alexis, riding with great skill, enthusiasm and daring, plunged into the chase, took aim, and brought down a large buffalo cow with huge horns which were later sent back to Russia as a trophy of the hunt. For a time the hunters lost the fleeing herd. Then the Indians swung into action. Silently examining

the signs in the snow, they suddenly galloped off with Spotted Tail leading and the Grand Duke following. They reached a spot, halted and Spotted Tail motioned for them to approach. The Indians had found the lost herd. With wild whoops they charged over the rugged terrain into the fleeing herd with such superb riding skill that the Grand Duke was "forcibly reminded of the Cossacks in his native country." Taking aim with their strong bows, they let fly a stream of arrows leaving behind a plateau strewn with dead buffalo. Two Lance, a young brave only 18 years old, shot an arrow with such force that it penetrated a buffalo's shoulder and came through the hide on the other side. In accordance with the Indian custom of recovering arrows after the game was killed, the young Sioux traced the arrow from the blood on the snow. He retrieved it, then presented it to Custer with the request that it be presented as a trophy to the Grand Duke, whom he called "the Royal Chief."

That night a great Indian powwow took place in front of Grand Duke Alexis' tent. Before dinner, Sheridan sent for Spotted Tail and presented him with a scarlet cloth cap embroidered with white beads, a handsome brown morning robe trimmed with scarlet, an elegant mounted hunting knife and a general officer's belt made of Russian leather wrought with gilt. Spotted Tail promptly adorned himself in his new finery to the admiration of his people.

While Alexis and his party dined, the Indians made preparations for a War Dance in his honor. The warriors painted their faces and decked themselves with ornaments and feathers. A huge log fire was built and lamps hung on the flagpole. The Indians formed a large circle on the ground with their squaws. Some were wrapped in blankets, others almost completely covered with buffalo robes. The glow of the blazing fire cast reflections on the yellow, carmine and scarlet colors painted on their faces. To the insistent beat of the tom-toms, the young braves danced and chanted their exploits. While they told of scalps secured and victories achieved on the warpath, their chiefs, Black Bear, Fast Bear, Conquering Bear, Two Strike, Little Wound and Brave Shield, sat in silence. An interpreter stood near the Grand Duke to answer his many questions and explain the important points of each man's tale. Spotted Tail with his wife and daughter by his side impassively watched over the scene.

Spotted Tail's daughter was a blushing maiden of 16, so lovely that she almost stole the show. The young American cavalymen and Russian officers seemed more interested in her than the exploits of the warriors stamping in the circle. They began to shower her with tokens of their admiration: confectionery, fruits and whatever trinkets they could produce. Miss Spotted Tail responded only with a shy smile and downcast eyes.

When the War Dance was over, gifts brought by the Grand Duke for Spotted Tail's tribe were presented to him — a generous number of red and green blankets which the Indians admired greatly and a large bag of silver dollars. Sheridan presented him with the 20 wagonloads of provisions, enough for his people for three months. The Grand Duke then invited Spotted Tail, his wife, daughter and a number of chiefs into the dining tent for champagne and food. The chiefs enjoyed the champagne hugely and grew joyous, but it was noticed that Miss Spotted Tail, after she had finished her supper, carefully gathered up all the fragments of food and tucked them in her blanket, taking them away with her. A serious council followed in General Sheridan's tent to discuss matters of import to the tribe, to which the Grand Duke was invited. He reclined on Sheridan's bed, Custer sat on the table and Spotted Tail and his wife on Sheridan's baggage. First, according to Indian custom, all smoked the peace pipe after which Sheridan and Spotted Tail discussed Indian petitions to the President.

The next day before leaving, an enterprising photographer who had made his way to the camp

lined up the whole company for photographs. At the Grand Duke's request, he took pictures of the camp, of Custer and Bill in their hunting buckskins, of Spotted Tail and his chiefs, and a view of the party as they sat at breakfast. The Russians gathered up their souvenirs: horns and Indian arrows; one local man who had managed to insert himself into the company posing as a bootblack made off with a pair of the Grand Duke's boots.

Bronzed and happy, the Grand Duke and General Sheridan jumped into their open wagon, the band struck up "an appropriate air, and with Buffalo Bill ahead again as guide, all dashed across the open country headed northward toward the line of the Union Pacific Railroad."

There was one final adventure. On the way back, disaster was narrowly avoided when Buffalo Bill took the reins of the Grand Duke's wagon to demonstrate to him the fine points of stage coach driving. As he was driving at breakneck speed, he suddenly came to a hill and the wagon, which had no brakes, went out of control. Bill had to let the horses go and he later reported that every time they hit a rut the wagon would not touch ground for 20 feet. He believed they made six miles in three minutes and the Grand Duke was reported to have said later that he would "rather return to Russia by way of Alaska and swim the Bering Straits rather than repeat that ride!" When they reached the train at North Platte, Alexis presented Bill with rich presents; one account describes a purse of gold and a diamond stickpin, another a Russian fur coat and jewelled cuff links.

Today the only remaining sign of this unique chapter in Russian-American relations in a modest plaque erected in 1931 by the Nebraska Historical Society on the grounds of a private ranch. Nestled among the prairie flowers it reads:

*Commemorating
Camp Ground
Famous buffalo hunt
Grand Duke Alexis of Russia 1872
Sponsored by Bill Cody
General Sheridan
General Custer Cap. Hays
Cap. Egan with Spotted Tail
and tribe and other noted buffalo hunters as guests*

Custer and Alexis had become such good friends as they galloped recklessly together over the prairies that the Grand Duke asked General Sheridan to grant permission for Custer to accompany him for the rest of his stay in America. Sheridan agreed and Custer invited Alexis to visit Kentucky then to travel down the Mississippi for a visit to the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. But first Sheridan had arranged a trip to Denver and the Rocky Mountains. Traveling by train from North Platte, they whistle stopped through small western towns where, even in the dead of night, crowds turned out. In Cheyenne the whole town came to the station to serenade them. Eventually, after 19 hours on the train, they arrived in Denver to find several thousands of people waiting for them in the snow.

In Denver, the Grand Duke was presented to the Governor and the entire legislature which included several Mexicans which quite surprised Alexis. He was taken to visit the extensive breweries of the Denver Ale Company, where he downed a few draughts and then, of course, to inspect the Hilly



General George Armstrong Custer, Grand Duke Alexis, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody (1872),
black and white composite photograph

Water Works where he quaffed the beverage known locally as "Adam's ale." The Pioneer Club, an organization composed exclusively of the early settlers of Colorado and the Rocky Mountain Territory, organized a ball for 200 couples at the American House. Although less lavish than Boston, the ball had a certain breezy charm. The ballroom was decorated with a large Russian flag made by the seamstress of the Governor's wife who had copied it from a dictionary. Such was the excitement of the ladies over the Grand Duke that they fought over mementos: a bit of velvet plush was clipped from a chair in which His Highness was seated, a stub of his favorite Havana cigar was retrieved from a spittoon and even a piece of steak filched from his plate; a glove which had touched the Grand Duke's hand was later preserved under glass. A cowboy musician who played in the band wrote reverentially, "You knew in a minute you saw him that he did not belong to the common herd . . . So easy was Alexis in his ways that not even a cow puncher would have thought of taking a liberty with him."

On an arctic winter day the Colorado Central Railroad invited the party to visit the mines in Golden City. Alexis got a splendid look at the Rockies, of which he said he had heard and read much, and despite frostbitten ears and uncomfortable feet the day was a huge success. General Sheridan entertained them on the way by singing old Army songs with the Grand Duke and even the elder Russians

joining the chorus. They admired the lofty peaks of the Rockies and two mountains were christened that day: Sheridan's Peak and Peak Alexis.

In Kit Carson, Colorado, there was more buffalo hunting with a band of what the press called "almighty elegant horses." Custer gave Alexis a demonstration of knee control horsemanship, at a gallop firing his pistol on targets with both right and left hands. They both rode with such joyous abandon that they lost control of their horses and simply raced them full out. Alexis was charged by a buffalo bull, but rode so superbly that he escaped harm, shot the animal and a dozen more. At the end of the day he was so happy that he jumped off his horse, grabbed Custer, embraced and hugged him. On the way to Topeka, Alexis and Custer, armed with Spencer rifles, took positions in the baggage car and shot at buffalo as the train rolled along.

There was a whirlwind tour through the South. In Louisville, the Grand Duke met Libby Custer, the general's spirited wife. A ball was held that was counted the "outpouring of Kentucky's fairest and brightest daughters and most chivalrous sons," with a splendid banquet of Southern specialties that stretched along three sides of the room. Alexis toured the elegant mansions of the city and saw the locomotive works. He spent four hours visiting Mammoth Cave with Libby and George Custer. The visitors peered into the bottomless pit and shivered and were inspired with "wonder and awe" in the star chamber. The Grand Duke made "many minute inquiries on the history of the cave." They tried out the echos and shouts in many places and in others were anxious about the hollow sound of the floor under their feet.

They went on to Memphis where the Grand Duke was much impressed with the beauty of the ladies. At the ball the Duke who, said the paper, "was an expert at such things" as receiving lines, "merely inclined his head to each person," at the same time giving a decisive shake of the hand, and in this way met two hundred couples in 40 minutes." Southern cooks outdid themselves, covering the tables with pyramids, meringues, charlotte russes; a Russian cottage in nougat was particularly admired. Alexis was taken to visit a cotton shed and was presented by a Memphis man of Russian ancestry with a prize bale of cotton. He visited the jail and was driven to admire the "mammoth" cotton press. One evening a young black named Albert Thomas, noted for his artistic skill, presented him with an original sketch. He and the Grand Duke conversed at length "concerning his present status and former status as a slave," and the Grand Duke spoke of the similarity between Russia and the United States in the freeing of the serfs by his father.

And then it was on to the Mardi Gras.

To make the four day trip down from Memphis to New Orleans, the Grand Duke chartered the 320 foot *James Howard*, the largest sidewheeler on the Mississippi, known affectionately as "Oil Cake Jim." The lengthy parlors of this huge vessel were luxuriously furnished with armchairs, felt covered tables, oriental rugs and chandeliers. Comfortable pot bellied stoves disposed at regular intervals warded off the occasional evening chill. Joining the Grand Duke and his suite of nine for the pleasant trip down the Mississippi were General Custer and Libby, two Louisville belles, the Misses Sturgis and Duncan, and from Memphis, a Mr. Vance, whom Mrs. Custer describes as "a cultivated Southerner with moderate liberal views," and his two charming daughters, making a group of 17 in all.

As always, to watch over Alexis were the venerable Vice-Admiral Poissiet and a Mr. Machin, who, says Mrs. Custer, “. . . is a highly cultivated Englishman who has had charge of the education of all of the sons of the tsar. With his merry brown eyes that nothing escapes,” she continues, “he has noted many of our peculiar provincialisms. I did not know we had so many. The Admiral is all sunshine and sweet simplicity. He strives to interest Alexis in the towns we pass, length of rivers and the like. But Alexis is not concerned with the outside . . . only with pretty girls and with music. He sings magnificently and has already learned Lydia Thompson’s music hall ditty, which he renders ‘If effer I cease to luf’ . . . in his eternal cigarette and in joking with his suite and with the General.”

Sitting next to the Russians at dinner was a real pleasure, says she, for “should an American gentleman take the amount of wine they do, the last would be forced to listen to the idiotic mumbled sillinesses a man, politely tight, inflicts on her. The cold climate of their country enables these Russians to drink what seems like a vast quantity without effect on them.”

On February 11 the *James Howard* tied up at Carrollton, some 10 miles above New Orleans where the boat made fast in preparation for the entry into the city in the morning. There a rather special welcome had been prepared for Alexis. At first, when they had heard the news that the Grand Duke was coming, the detested carpetbagger government of the city had made no special plans to greet him. But, only two weeks before his scheduled appearance, a group of New Orleans gentlemen who were accustomed to gather regularly around the fireplace of their favorite Hotel St. Charles decided that this situation would never do. The group, which included Colonel Walter Merriman, “a man of culture, taste, liberality and public spirit” and owner of the Crescent Billiard Hall, Edward Hancock, assistant editor of the *New Orleans Times*, and Lewis J. Salomon, a banker, deciding that the hospitality of their famed city, the belle of the Mississippi, was at stake, dreamed up a plan. Why not form the previously motley and disorganized masquers who roamed the streets into a proper procession that would honor the Grand Duke? Why not create a royal personage, a king, who would rule over the proceedings and be able to welcome the Grand Duke on equal footing, so to speak?

Within 24 hours of hatching the idea, they had collected a group of 30 members (this later rose to 40). Salomon was delegated to try to raise the \$5,000 necessary to mount their plan. Salomon was so successful, promising every contributor of \$100 that he “would make him a Duke,” that he was named Rex (although his identity was kept a closely guarded secret until the day after Carnival).

The first clue the city had that something was up was a mysterious announcement appearing on February 1 in the *Picayune* declaring that “His Majesty Rex was planning to pay his first official visit to the city and commanded the populace to do all honors.”

At first the city government was horrified, but the group quietly went to seek the permission of the mayor and the police chief who agreed, and after that the mysterious Rex asked no more permissions. Imperious and comically pompous edicts and proclamations from the new king in his “Carnival Palace” were published daily in the newspapers. These were attributed to Hancock, a man of “ingenious mind and fluent pen” who wrote them in a clever travesty of monarchical usage which very closely resembled the real thing. They were so funny that the whole city quickly and joyously fell into the spirit. Rex ordered the masquers to organize “to do him honor” and the artillery to turn out, he commanded the Governor to keep his offices open for the day but the banks to close, and all businessmen including the president of the railroad to close and give their employees the day off. “A proper consideration of his regal state and sovereign care,” declared Rex, “demands abrogation of all laws that might interfere with public enjoy-

ment." The Louisiana State Lottery was to stop functioning, the Congressional Investigating Committee to stop investigating, the Collector of Internal Revenue to stop collecting. Further, Rex set the price of cotton and the value of money, ordered Dan Rice's famous circus to appear in the parade, forbade malicious mischief and the throwing of flour. (Breaches of the Peace were to be punished by malefactors being forced to attend the meetings of the Academy of Science for one year.) Punishments of children were to be canceled, "parents not complying to lose their night latch key." All inhabitants of the city were commanded to decorate their houses with his official colors, purple, green and gold, and, a most practical measure, to reinforce their balconies. All bands were commanded to play his "official" anthem.

So that Rex would be properly attired, Hancock and Salomon went secretly to the Variety Theater where Lawrence Barrett was playing Richard III and the actor offered his costume and ermine cloak. A search of the wardrobe department turned up a scepter, crown and flowing Arab style robes for the "Dukes."

As the pace of the merry edicts mounted, even the city fathers began to fall into the spirit. A week before the Grand Duke's arrival workmen began erecting an elaborate reviewing stand extending out in a semi-circle from the ionic columns of the City Hall. The railings were decked with evergreens and the red, white and blue Imperial Russian flag. In the center, under a canopy of crimson silk fringed with gold, stood an Imperial Throne for the Grand Duke, bearing the emblems of Russia and the United States and flanked with flags of France, Prussia, Britain, Russia and the United States, and, said the newspapers, "emblems dear to those who labored for the lost cause." Overhead, a great arch of gas jets with crystal shades in many colors for viewing the night time parade were installed. Festoons and lanterns covered the entire facade of the building; galleries with similar illuminations were erected opposite for 2,500 ladies and children. The *New Orleans Republican* reported that all city officials were busily engaged in studying "Chesterfield and the Court Journal for points in protocol," and that "the Mayor himself, when not occupied in supervising the workmen erecting the platform studied it diligently." The Mayor's parlor was set aside for use as a practicing room for the rehearsal of "such bows, genuflections and graces deemed essential for the occasion."

As the news of all these unusual preparations spread over the countryside, flocks of visitors came streaming into the city. Every hotel, every rooming and boarding house filled to overflowing. Side-wheelers and trains every day discharged more people into the city. On the day of the Grand Duke's arrival, February 12, the *Republican* wrote, "the Opelousas train yesterday brought 550 visitors to the carnival. They continue to flock in from all parts of the country. Let 'em come."

Shortly after 8 a.m. on February 12 in nearby Carrollton, Alexis took his station on the hurricane deck of the *James Howard* smoking his favorite Havana cigar, and spy glass in hand, gave command to cast off the lines and proceed to New Orleans. He removed the cigar and waved his spy glass at the huge crowd that bade him farewell. One old black man stood doggedly on the dock watching until the boat appeared around the bend saying, "Neber saw a real Juke before and was bound to watch him out of sight."

Belching black smoke from her 104 foot stack, the *James Howard* steamed down to the levee at the Gravier Street Wharf. The wharf was a waving sea of handkerchiefs and as the boat approached, a rippling murmur of "Alexis" could be heard rising from the shore. Steamboat whistles shrilled, flags were raised and lowered, people on other river boats and ships hung from the railings cheering and waving their caps, church bells rang out. The Grand Duke was met by the Mayor, whom both Alexis and Admiral



Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, 533 Royal Street

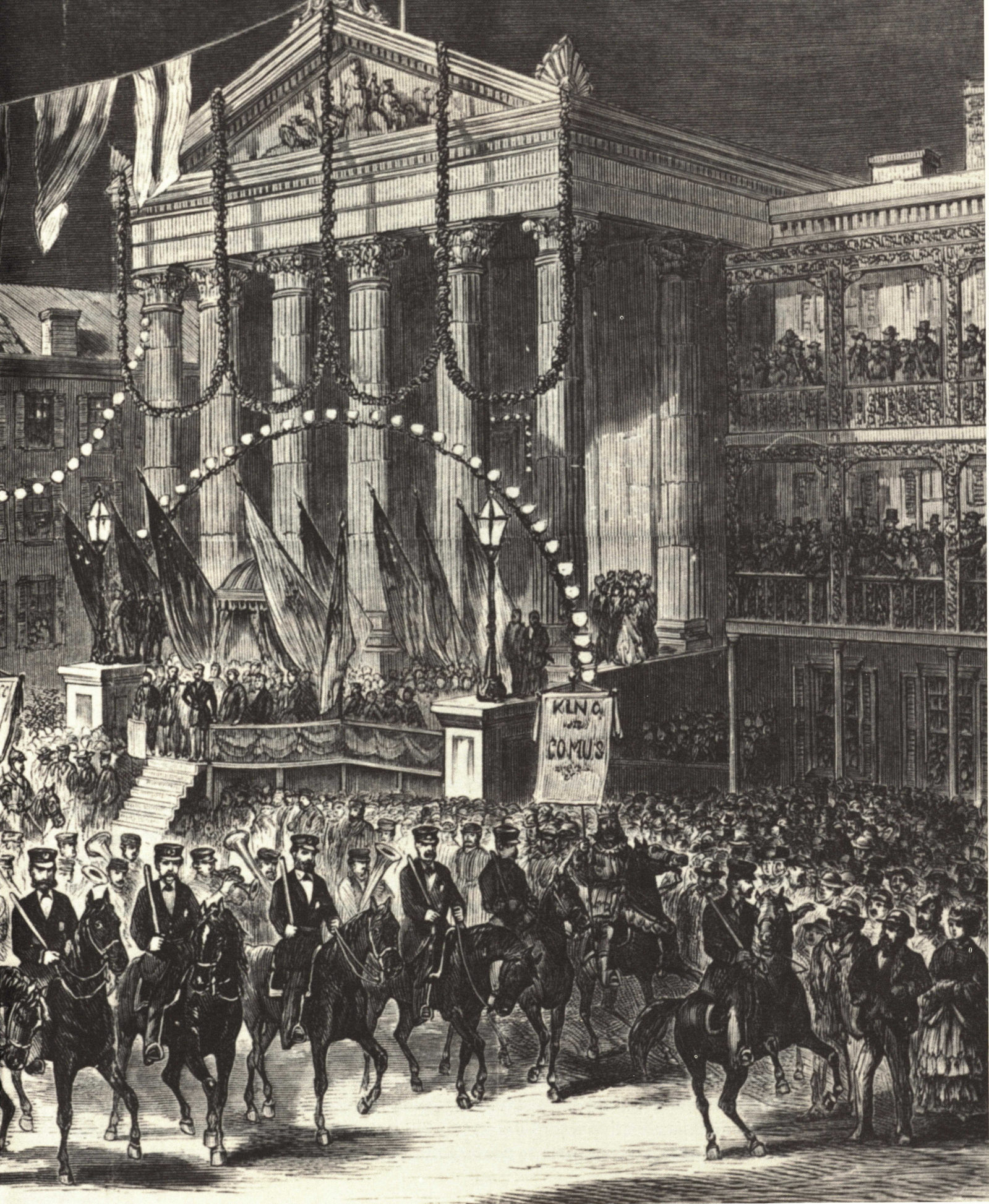
"The St. Charles Theatre" (1872), wood engraving

Poissiet attempted to address in French. The Mayor did not understand a word and, reported the French language newspaper, *L'Abeille*, the Grand Duke seemed astounded "dat dere were no French among zem." The *New Orleans Republican* described the Grand Duke: "He is about six feet five inches high and stout. His hair is light brown — some call it auburn — you can take your choice. He parts his hair in the middle which is a good sign." They commented on his "large pedestrial appendages" and mentioned that although he spoke English fluently, he preferred French "because it is more fashionable."

Alexis was escorted to the elegant St. Charles Hotel where the Imperial ensign of black double eagles on gold was flying. He was escorted to the bridal suite with Custer and Libby occupying an adjoining suite next door. That very afternoon he attended a matinee of the light opera *La Dame Blanche* and pronounced it "a treat." That evening he attended a performance of *Trovatore*, entering his lavishly



"The Carnival in New Orleans — The Torchlight Procession of Maskers Passi



Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, 533 Royal Street

before the Grand Duke Alexis at the City Hall" (1872), wood engraving

decorated box in the middle of the "Anvil Chorus" which was interrupted for the cheers of the audience and the playing of the Russian hymn. At the opera, wrote the *Republican*, "the Duke seemed to enjoy the performance very much. He also seemed to admire the ladies as he was constantly directing his glasses at them." He, in return, "was ogled by the fair sex."

It was delightedly whispered about the city that there were other inducements that had attracted the young Grand Duke to the romantic city of New Orleans besides flagreed porches and scenic attractions. Two of the most popular musical comedy stars of the American stage were appearing simultaneously in the city during the carnival; one was Lydia Thompson and her troupe of "British Blondes," and the other, Lotta Crabtree, "the fairy comedienne" of the nation, so famous that she was known simply as "little Lotta." Such was the fame of these two charming ladies and the affection of their enthusiastic public that in New Orleans two baseball teams were proud to bear their names.

At the time, the comely and curvacious Lydia was 32. The public flocked to applaud her in such hits as "Kenilworth" and "The Rose of Stinging Nettle Farm." They loved her saucy songs, admired her soft blonde beauty and her shapely legs "not clad in the customary skirts."

In New Orleans it was said that the Grand Duke had first managed to attend a performance of Lydia's smash hit, "The Burlesque of Bluebeard," in New York and highly appreciated her songs, "The Mandolin," "Up in Mormon Land" and especially "If Ever I Cease to Love," which he warbled on the *James Howard* as he approached the city. Indeed, a careful scrutiny of his schedule indicates that he had been discreetly attending Lydia's performances all over the country, whenever he was in a city in which she was appearing. His official calendar notes simply "attended a theatrical performance" but a St. Louis newspaper spoke of his presence at Lydia's show and of a white flower being delivered to the stage every night. ("We shall watch for that white flower tonight" ends the item.) In New Orleans the *Republican* mentioned that "Miss Lydia Thompson had appeared in St. Petersburg where she was a recipient of testimonials of royal favor" and "that the Councillor of State had called on her in St. Louis to inform her of the pleasure the Grand Duke took in her performances." Indeed, in New Orleans it was duly noted that the Academy of Music where Lydia was playing had the colors of the Grand Duke hung over the box office.

The petite, vivacious, laughing-eyed Lotta Mignon Crabtree was, at 24, already the most famous musical comedy actress in America. Lotta had been born over a bookstore in New York and began her career at the age of 12 in the West, supporting her family by singing to the goldminers of Colorado during the Gold Rush. The miners flung bags of nuggets at her feet and, said a biography, "she soon found herself getting rich." The famous Lola Montez taught her to dance the fandango and the highland fling. Lotta's most famous roles were *Little Nell* and *The Little Detective* in which she played five roles, entralling her audiences with her natural bubbling charm, her clog dancing, virtuoso banjo playing, and her impassioned playing of the snare drums as well as her acting talent. She played street urchins so believably that they worshipped her. It was part of her legend that soft-hearted Lotta was prone to pick up ragged newsboys on the street and take them in to buy a new suit of clothes. They, in turn, reciprocated by rushing up and down the aisles in theatres where she played, extracting greater applause from the audience. For 25 years Lotta was the darling of America, her name a household word, with earnings unmatched on the stage. She sang in prisons and dispensed largesse to feeble horses, building a special fountain for them in San Francisco. She acquired race horses, hotels, theatres and office buildings. Lotta was the second largest tax payer in the Boston area and when she died, still unmarried at 75, she left an



"The French Opera House" (1872), wood engraving

estate of four million dollars with instructions that it be distributed among disabled soldiers and returning jailbirds.

In February, 1872, in New Orleans, she was appearing at the St. Charles, the finest theatre in the country, grandly designed in the French style with a portico supported with filagree iron columns. The St. Charles seated over 4,000 people and when Lotta played there it was packed every night. The newspapers ran mentions of her every day. All over the city boys ran around wearing the insignia of the Lotta Baseball team on their shirts.

Hardly had Alexis arrived when he expressed his desire to meet the lovely Lotta and the night before Mardi Gras, before attending the opera, he invited her to dinner at the St. Charles Hotel. The first meeting of little Lotta and the Grand Duke was comical. She was tiny, barely over five feet tall, and he well over six feet. When she curtsied to him it was as if she were sinking to the foot of a great oak and when he responded by kissing her hand he was forced almost to his knees.

Lotta was lively and charming, with dimpled cheeks and light red curly hair which she sprinkled with cayenne pepper so that it would catch the reflections of the footlights. Rakishly, she smoked thinly rolled black cigars. At supper, seated between the Grand Duke and Custer, Custer told her that the Grand Duke had been joking about going to the masked balls the following evening dressed in wide top boots filled with little children and suggested that Alexis might also take her into his boots. Lotta replied gaily, "Oh, but I would so much prefer stepping into his shoes!" The dinner, reported the newspapers, was a "simple" one, served in the gold service of the St. Charles and elegant porcelain furnished by a gentleman of New Orleans. It included two soups, Filet of Sole Normande, a Relevée, Filet de Beouf Parisienne, Suprême de Volaille au petit pois, Becassines, salads, Pommes meringues, Fondues,

pâtisseries, assorted cakes, ice cream, fruits and coffee and a wide variety of wines — including the famous 20-year-old St. Charles sherry and the celebrated American Imperial wine known as “Ike’s Cook’s” which Alexis especially called for and “relished highly.” And then with Alexis puffing away on one of his favorite Espaneles cigars, it was off to the opera in a splendid open carriage lined with satin.

After the opera performance, the public rooms of the St. Charles were thronged with the great and the beautiful of the city all vying to see the Grand Duke. Their toilettes were so dazzling and the spectacle so grand that the *Republican*, trying to describe the event, simply ran out of words and wrote simply, “It was baffling of description.”

On February 13, the day of Mardi Gras, it was obvious that the whole town had faithfully followed the edicts of their new king, Rex. Every house and place of business was covered with purple, green and gold ribbons and streamers. Rex’s flag (three wide bands of purple, gold and green with a band of gold cutting diagonally across and a crown in the middle) fluttered from housetops and balconies. A popular tradition was begun that day, for so dear did these colors and emblems become to the population of New Orleans that they are still the symbol of carnival.

At 3 o’clock the Grand Duke took his place on the elaborate stand at City Hall where he was received by the Mayor, the Governor of Louisiana and the Military Governor (in the words of the day, a carpetbagger and scalawag). To their intense disappointment, Alexis politely refused to sit in the imperial throne that had been erected for him, preferring to stand somewhere to the side. The population was in a dither of excitement, wrote the paper. “Small boys seemed to be everywhere, scrambling under the legs of bystanders, shinnying up inaccessible awning posts and statues, perching on window sills, under the bellies of horses and making faces at policemen.”

Preceded by a battery of Napoleonic guns, the Mounted Police, the Artillery and a Grand Marshal with attendants, the first formal Mardi Gras parade in history, organized in the Grand Duke’s honor, began. And what a grand sight it was!

It was more than a mile long, divided into sections. So enthusiastically had Rex’s commands been followed that estimates of the parade ran as high as 15,000 people, all in costume. Never had the maskers exhibited such a variety, nor had costumes been more elaborate. Riding a bay charger, Rex appeared, masked, his white hair flowing from under his crown, dressed in purple velvet sparkling with gems and a long cloak trimmed with ermine. He was followed by “Boeuf Gras,” a milk white ox (actually a decoy bull known as “Old Jeff” used in the stockyards for “beguiling beeves aboard the ships”), wearing a bright silk coverlet, his horns decorated with flowers and ribbons. Boeuf Gras was attended by his “Pack,” clad to represent 52 playing cards with mottos carried by Chinese youths in costume. The “Dukes” rode alongside Rex and their Guards rumbled along in drawn furniture wagons. A firm of Chinese merchants doing business on Chartres Street exhibited themselves clad in the rich ceremonial robes of the Celestial Empire. Horace Greeley appeared with a banner, “What I know about Farming;” the carpetbaggers and President Grant were spoofed. The Grand “Juke,” an Ethiopian in splendid regalia, armed with a sledge, appeared. Dan Rice paraded with his famous circus animals and gymnasts, Carré’s Plantation Cabin was mounted on wheels with little black children peering out the windows.

When the two distinguished royal personages met at the reviewing stand, the King of Carnival presented the Grand Duke with a scroll of greeting which read:

*His Royalovitch Hignessoff King of the Carnival, officia llywelc, omest
one worle ansh isroy alcous inth emostp uiss ant Duke Alexis
Alexandrovitch Romanoff, andwi llh oldaspe ciala udie ncef orh Isrece pti
on atsu nse ton Mardi Gras*

which the Grand Duke acknowledged with a graceful bow.

Along with colors and flags, Rex had also commanded that his “official” anthem be played by all bands. It was the best joke of the day, for when the bands broke into “If Ever I Cease to Love,” Lydia Thompson’s hit song, set to march time and dedicated to the Grand Duke, the crowds went wild. This anthem with its rollicking verses, “If ever I cease to love, may cows lay eggs and oysters have legs . . . May Grant return all the presents he’s got,” and a new verse, added especially by the fun-loving folk of New Orleans, “May the Grand Duke Alexis ride a buffalo to Texas, If ever I cease to love!” that day won a sure and cherished place in the heart of New Orleans which has lasted 109 years, for it is still the beloved theme song of the Mardi Gras today.

It was a grand show for a Grand Duke and Alexis seemed delighted with it all. Returning salutes, wrote the *Republican*, “with that grace which is characteristic of a Russian and one of noble birth,” he raised his hat twice to Dan Rice’s circus. He seemed especially delighted with those parts of the procession which referred to him, laughing heartily when a wagon containing a large group of children fantastically dressed and bearing a large poster of himself passed.

When Rex reached the end of his route he disbanded his followers but he ordered that the bands continue to play through the night on each street corner for dancing and merrymaking and the parade of Comus that night.

Alexis, after viewing the torchlight parade of Comus from the reviewing stand illuminated with many colored gas lights, attended the Comus ball. He watched the tableaux and the maskers as they danced, then he went on to a ball at the Academy of Music in his honor, and finally to one at the St. Charles Theatre where he remained until 2 a.m. Everywhere he went his new “anthem” was played and he was wildly cheered.

The Grand Duke was having such a good time in New Orleans that he postponed his departure from day to day. During the mornings he remained in his rooms at the St. Charles, breakfasting with the Custers, and sometimes joined by the Governor. He received a constant stream of visitors from a group of foreign consuls to the representatives of the local Greek Orthodox Church. The unmasked Rex, Lewis Salomon, came for a chat. In the afternoons there were private luncheons and receptions and he and Custer strolled the city to take in the sights. The Grand Duke, reported the newspaper, “was dignified and charming to all,” while Custer, said they, “enjoyed his vacation as keenly as a schoolboy.” Alexis picked Valentine’s Day to go see Lotta in her famous virtuoso performance in “The Little Detective” and from his decorated box applauded loudly for an encore. When he returned, he and the Custers were serenaded by a group of 50 musicians on the Grand Portico lit by a double row of gaslights. At midnight a “Grand Orchestra” appeared to play the especially arranged “Grand Duke Alexis March” based on the Russian national anthem. With Custer, he went to the Dan Rice Circus where they applauded and later were presented to the famous child gymnasts, the man on the flying trapeze and the horse trainer.

On February 16 the Grand Duke requested that “If Ever I Cease to Love” be introduced into Lydia Thompson’s performance of “Kenilworth.” But alas, entertained at a sumptuous dinner, which started in the afternoon and ended in the early morning hours, at the exclusive Jockey Club, surrounded “by Creole beauties with champagne flowing like water,” he apparently ceased to love: Alexis missed Lydia’s command performance. And when he left, it was Lotta who received a token of his admiration. The *Republican* reported that delivered to her at the theatre was “an elegant piece of jewelry of European manufacture,” a bracelet “set in turquoise, two large pearls and inlaid with small diamonds, the edges enameled in black.” It was, the paper approvingly noted, “a chaste, elegant present . . . crowning

evidence of the Duke's good taste when he so admires our favorite."

Finally, on February 19, three months after he had arrived in New York, the Grand Duke boarded his special train. He warmly embraced his friend Custer and saluting the crowd of 2,000 who waved their handkerchiefs in farewell, he left to rejoin the *Svetlana* and the Russian fleet in Pensacola, from where he sailed for China.

Although they were never to meet again, Alexis Alexandrovich Romanov did not forget his friend George Armstrong Custer. For the next four years, until Custer's death at Little Big Horn, the two men regularly exchanged letters, a correspondence which according to a friend, Custer found "extremely gratifying."

As for Alexis, his experience with the fleet stood him in good stead and in later years he became Admiral of the Russian Navy. But his personal life was never really happy. An old photograph of Alexis was recently found in New York. On the back in the Grand Duke's handwriting is a tender inscription which begins, "To Alexandra, my dear wife." The date is 1871. Unbeknownst to his father, Alexis had secretly married his Alexandra in Austria before he was sent to the United States to "forget her." This explains that sad look which, despite his appreciation for America's lovely women, lingers in his eyes. His marriage was never officially recognized in Russia and the couple were forced to live together where they could, in Germany and Italy. Alexis and Alexandra had a son, later given the title Count Belovsky. In 1899, when Alexandra died, Alexis insisted on wearing official mourning. A bonvivant, who all his life retained his love for music and beautiful women, Alexis died in 1909 in Paris at 59, close to his mistress, a French actress. His life was another example of the fact that the existence of princes is sometimes less satisfactory than that of lesser mortals. Ironically, the rule governing Imperial marriages was changed in 1911, only two years after his death.

The Grand Duke's visit to the United States and his days galloping over the prairies with his friend Custer were perhaps the most carefree and joyous time of his life. The world of Bill and Custer, Lydia and Lotta, is gone now. The Romanovs have been swept away and we are left with a colder and grimmer present. But in New Orleans the Grand Duke permanently captured the imagination of the people. After his visit, Mardi Gras was declared an official state holiday. The dynasty of Rex endures. Every year in New Orleans, the purple, green and gold flags wave and "If Ever I Cease to Love" rings joyously in the streets, the lasting legacy of what was certainly the coziest and most intimate chapter in the history of Russian-American relations.

End of Part II

The Grand Duke Alexis in the U.S.A.





Howard Chandler Christy, "Chief Bacon Rind," 52 inches by 36 inches, oil on canvas

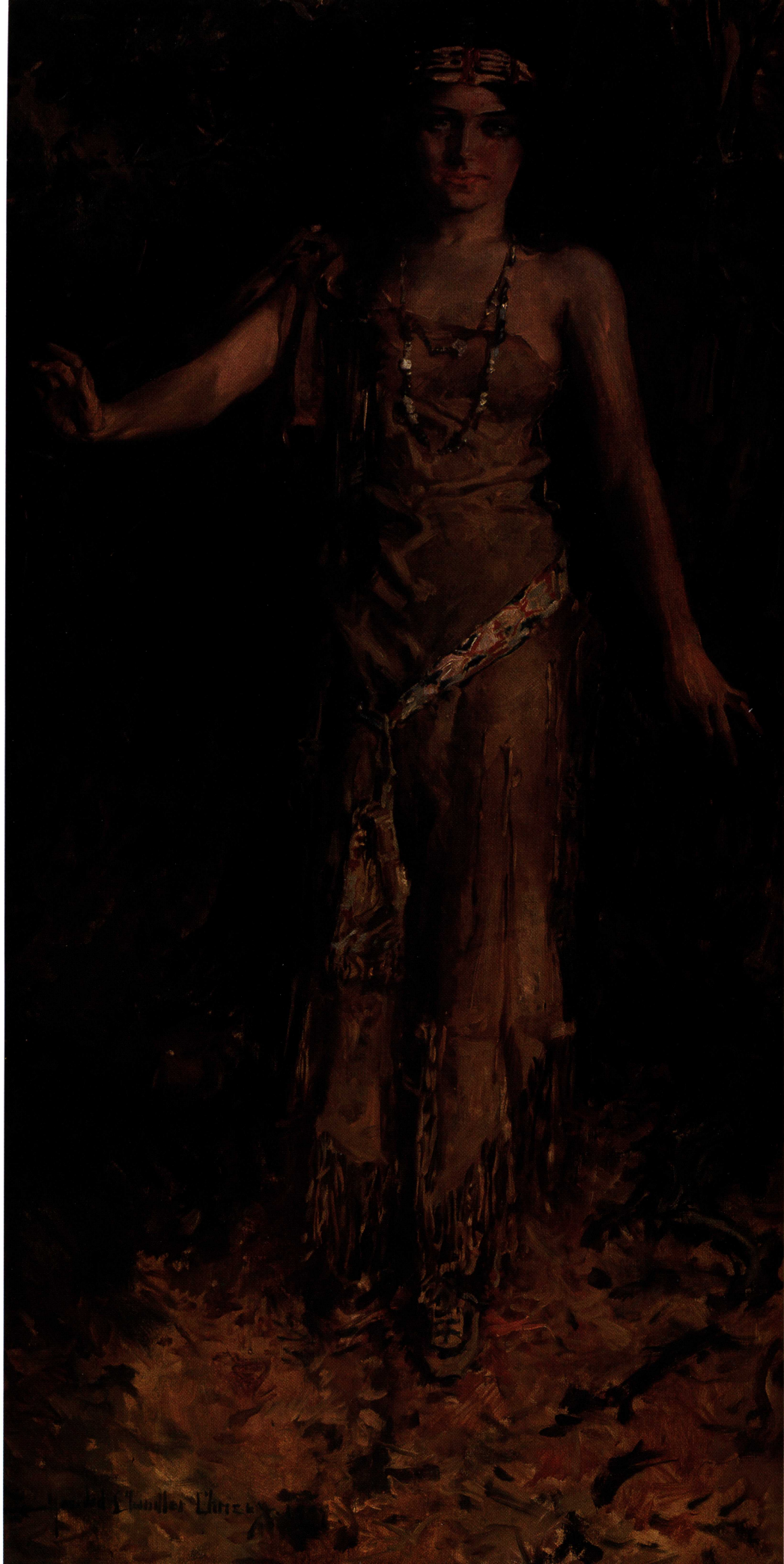
Howard Chandler Christy at Gilcrease Museum

BY LOUISA B. COLLETT

"LIFE SIZE PORTRAITS of two late and great Oklahomans — Will Rogers and Osage tribal leader Bacon Rind — were hung today in the galleries of the Thomas Gilcrease Foundation north of Tulsa," trumpeted the *Tulsa Tribune* in the edition of September 13, 1949.

The portraits of those notable Oklahomans will be on display again at Gilcrease Museum in the exhibition, "Hidden Treasures of the Gilcrease Collection," July 22 through September 2, 1984. The paintings by Howard Chandler Christy evoke memories of the late forties when the museum was new and the art collection growing.

Howard Chandler Christy,
"Pocahontas" (1952), 64½ inches
by 32½ inches, oil on canvas





Howard Chandler Christy, "Will Rogers" (1935), 60 inches by 40 inches, oil on canvas

The *Tribune* further reported in 1949 that "both were painted by New York artist Howard Chandler Christy, who wrote to Foundation founder Thomas Gilcrease, 'These two portraits I had carefully put away until they could find their proper place in history.'"

Christy was to paint several portraits of Will Rogers, the one acquired by Thomas Gilcrease, a second of the cowboy philosopher which hangs with a Christy portrait of Mary Rogers in the Rogers memorial ranch home in California. The third may be seen in the Will Rogers Memorial at Claremore, Oklahoma.

The subject of the other portrait, Chief Tom Bacon Rind,

was an Osage tribal leader who was prominent in Indian affairs until his death in 1932. In a letter to Gilcrease, Christy recalled that the portrait of Bacon Rind was done in the old Ketchum hotel in Tulsa in the early 1920s. The Indian leader and his wife spent the day with Christy while he made sketches for the painting. Christy later recalled that when the work was finished, "The chief said this portrait was the finest portrait ever painted of an Indian."

Thomas Gilcrease purchased several paintings from Christy for his collection. The two men, collector and artist, met when Dr. Robert Lee Humber, who had been head of the Societe Petroliere Gilcrease in Paris and was then a vice pres-

ident of the parent Gilcrease Oil Company, recommended Christy to paint Gilcrease's portrait for the museum. Gilcrease's partners in the Gilcrease Oil Company approved Humber's choice and commissioned Christy to paint the portrait in 1949.

Thomas Gilcrease sat for his portrait in Christy's imposing studio at the Hotel des Artistes at One West Sixty-seventh Street in New York City. There Christy had established a magnificent studio full of French and Italian antiques, tapestries, oriental pieces and selections of his own works in the manner of William Merritt Chase who had been his teacher, first at the Art Students League, then at Chase's noted Shinnecock school.

Also to sit for her portrait by Christy on that memorable 1949 visit to New York was DesCygne Gilcrease, Thomas Gilcrease's daughter, then 20 years old and a striking beauty. Posing for the artist did not occupy all their hours. DesCygne spent her time happily shopping of Fifth Avenue while her father prowled the New York art galleries.

These Christy portraits of DesCygne and Thomas Gilcrease may also be seen in the "Hidden Treasures of the Gilcrease Collection" exhibition, along with two other Christy works, "Hiawatha's Wooing" and "Pocahontas." The latter two paintings are allegorical in style and grand in size.

Thomas Gilcrease planned to have a Christy Room in the museum and had commissioned Christy to do a series of four Indian portraits for the gallery. Death came to Christy before they were painted, but evidence of his skill as a painter may be seen in the portraits on display at Gilcrease.

Howard Chandler Christy was one of the nation's best-known artists in his lifetime. He grew up in Ohio and from his early boyhood evidenced an interest and ability in art. In 1886, at age 13, Christy had his first work published, a sketch of "The Old Log Schoolhouse," in the *Toledo Blade*.

Four years later he moved to New York City to study at the Art Students League, returned briefly to Ohio in 1891 to earn money to go back to New York, and returned in 1892 to the East. He taught briefly at the Art Students League and Cooper Union and won many prizes at the National Academy of Design.

Then in 1895 Christy was commissioned to illustrate novels for Dodd, Mead and Company, and with this commission and his sales of drawings to *Life* and *Leslie's Weekly*, began his career as artist/illustrator. For 25 years he was a favored illustrator for most of the leading magazines. After 1920 Christy concentrated on painting portraits and historic and decorative murals.

Christy's paintings and drawings clearly reflect the style of his age. He was the creator of the "Christy Girl," his idealized American beauty who set the look for feminine beauty and fashion at the time.

Christy's serious interest in portraiture led him to devote



Howard Chandler Christy, "Hiawatha's Wooing" (1951), 9

himself to that art beginning in the early 1920s. Politicians, celebrities, socialites and business leaders flocked to have their portraits painted by Christy and critics praised his ability to capture the character of his subjects. The portraits range from oil sketches to carefully executed works like the ones in the Gilcrease collection.

Christy formed lasting friendships with many of his portrait subjects, as he did with Thomas and DesCygne Gilcrease. He painted President Warren G. Harding, President Mr. Calvin Coolidge, Benito Mussolini, John Nance Garner, Amel



by 16 feet, oil on canvas

Earhart, Governor "Happy" Chandler of Kentucky, and a host of other well known figures.

Christy continued to paint actively until his death at age 79 in 1952. Upon his death were left unfinished a portrait of General Douglas MacArthur and a number of pending commissions.

Christy left a distinctive mark on American painting of his day, as illustrator, as landscape artist, as muralist, as creator of patriotic posters, and as a painter of the notable figures of more than 50 years of American life. ◡



MIDDLE CREEK NEAR MT. BLACKMORE, M.T.
William Henry Jackson, "Middle Creek" (1871), sepia photograph



PHOTOGRAPHERS AND A NEW LAND

BY ROBERT C. BILLINGS

IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING the Civil War, the minds of Americans turned from the war torn battlefields to the largely unknown and unsettled American West. Government sponsored expeditions were sent to explore these areas, reporting their findings to a waiting and curious Congress. Each expedition included a photographer, assigned to capture these scenes with a camera — often for the first time. Great importance must have been placed on the photographic image, since transporting the camera and related hardware through the wilderness was a feat not easily accomplished.

Expeditionary photographers were not only exploring a new land, but a new medium as well. The *collodion wet plate* process came into being slightly over a decade after the introduction of the daguerrotype, the first widely accepted method of photography. This new process made possible the printing of many photographs from a single glass plate negative, unlike Louis Daguerre's one-of-a-kind image.

One of the earliest applications of the wet plate process was during the Civil War, when a team of photographers under the dispatch of Matthew Brady shocked the country with images that for the first time recorded the true realities of war. These

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John K. Hillers, "Navajo Church Near Ft. Wingate" (1872), sepia photograph

men were the first combat photographers and some would later play an active part in documenting the Old West.

The complex and delicate wet plate process began with treating a glass plate with a mixture of collodion and potassium iodide and then silver nitrate before placing the wet plate in the camera and making an exposure. Before the plate was allowed to dry, it required development, fixing and washing to complete the process. Should the finished plate not meet with the photographer's approval, he could reluctantly choose to clear the silvered image from the glass plate and begin again.

The array of equipment required to carry out this procedure was formidable and often required the services of an assistant, mules and, for the fortunate, a wagon that served as a darkroom. The frustrations of transporting this equipment were described by Frederic S. Dellenbaugh, who wrote of John Wesley Powell's 1871 survey of the Grand Canyon, "The camera in its strong box was a heavy load to carry up the rocks, but it was nothing to the chemical and plate-holder box, which in turn was featherweight compared to the imitation hand organ which served for a darkroom. This dark box was the special sorrow of the expedition, as it had to be dragged up the heights from 500 to 3,000 feet."

One of these expeditionary photographers was John K. Hillers who, as a Brooklyn policeman traveling west with his ailing brother, approached Major John Wesley Powell looking for work. It was the spring of 1871 and Powell, a one-armed veteran of the Civil War, was organizing his second survey of the Colorado River and its canyons. Powell saw in Hillers a sturdy boatman and hired him immediately.

Not long into the survey, Hillers showed great interest in the work of the staff photographer, E. O. Beaman. He joined Beaman's group whenever possible and assisted in transporting the heavy equipment during the photographic excursions. Due to a dispute between Beaman and Powell, the photographer left the survey and was replaced by James Fennemore, a photographer from Salt Lake. By this time Hillers had learned a great deal about the photographic process and exhibited the great patience and stamina required to accomplish the task of picture making. It was for these reasons that he was installed as Fennemore's assistant.

"Jack" Hillers and James Fennemore worked together always, with "Fen" allowing Hillers on occasion to try his hand at taking the pictures. Fennemore generously gave Hillers credit, with 27 of the expedition's plates listed as "Fennemore and Hillers." Due to an illness in the fall of the year, Fennemore was forced to leave the party and Hillers was installed as the expedition's photographer. Thus began a life-long association between Jack Hillers and John Wesley Powell.

Although Powell had traveled the Colorado before, the river still presented the voyagers with a most treacherous assignment. At one point along the river the *Emma Dean* capsized and Hillers saved Powell's life in the churning waters. A week later Powell ended the river voyage.

In later years Hillers accompanied Powell on many expeditions and was among the first to photograph what is now Zion National Park. Powell's interest turned toward the Native American and in 1879 he established the Bureau of Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, where he named Hillers as staff photographer. Hillers documented many Pueblo Indians throughout the Southwest and, unknowingly at the time, was

John K. Hillers, "Shini-Mo Altar" (1872), sepia photograph







William Henry
Jackson,
"Teton Range
and
Jackson's Lake"
(1872), sepia
photograph



John K. Hillers, "View in DeChelly Canyon" (1872), sepia photograph

witness to the demise of many of these cultures. His photographs of these Indians and their surroundings are august images of a people and their relationship to the fragile landscape that was their home.

William Henry Jackson was a portrait photographer working in Omaha with a hunger for the out-of-doors. His wanderlust resulted in a series of landscape photographs which caught the eye of Ferdinand Vandever Hayden, then organizing a survey into the Yellowstone country of Wyoming Territory. Another member of this party was the painter Thomas Moran, who worked with Jackson throughout the trip. The two men would often leave the party to explore artistic view points.

The cumbersome wet plate process provided no fewer problems for Jackson than for any other of his pioneering colleagues. When photographing the Tower Falls, Jackson wanted to record an image at the base of the falls, but was unable to transport his darkroom to the camera's position 200 feet be-

low through the trees and underbrush. "Backing my plate with wet blotting paper and wrapping the holder in a wet towel and the dark cloth," Jackson later wrote, "I scrambled and slid down to the rocky bed of the stream, with plate holder and camera in hand. After taking the picture, I had a slow, laborious climb back again, and reached the top out of breath and in a wringing perspiration. Four round trips gave me the desired number of negatives, a full day's work, making a stiff price in labor for one subject."

Armed with Jackson's photographs and Moran's paintings, Hayden returned in March of 1872 to Washington and convinced Congress to establish Yellowstone as America's first National Park. Jackson enjoyed great success from his Yellowstone photographs and spent many seasons photographing western scenes with Hayden until the final survey in 1878.

Jackson's celebrated career contained many firsts and, while on an expedition through the Southwest, Jackson



William Henry Jackson, "Tower Falls" (1871), sepia photograph

sought for and located the lost cliff cities of the Mesa Verde. His photographs were the first of the prehistoric canyon dwellings and are part of a large body of Jackson's work devoted to photographing the Indians of the Southwest and their habitat.

John K. Hillers and William Henry Jackson were but two of many expeditionary photographers assigned to record the charting of new lands, the building of railroads, and many other events that provided testament to the taming of the Great

American West. To look at these photographs is to stand quietly beside a tripod holding a dark cloth and lens cover, while the light makes its imprint on the sensitized plate within the camera. The image registered is that of a wild land which has not yet become accustomed to the passing of wagon wheels or the voices of men as they chart its forms and capture its shadows. ◡



William Henry Jackson, "Shoshone Falls" (1871), sepia photograph



Message from the Director

WITH THE COMPLETION IN 1981 of the Gena Gilcrease Gallery our museum gained a flexible space suitable for displaying changing temporary exhibitions. I suppose it was then as inevitable as day following night that Gilcrease Museum would grow into a full schedule of such exhibitions. (Whoever said that program comes first and building second, that form follows function? Not a museum director, I am sure).

This year we will have had nine such exhibitions. Just closing is our Rendezvous '84 display of works by Grant Speed and Frank McCarthy. Highlighting the schedule a year from now will be Rendezvous '85 with paintings by Howard Terpning. As with past Rendezvous there will be a retrospective show of important works selected by Terpning as highlights of his career and a selection of nine recent works that will be available for purchase. Terpning is one of the most skillful and respected painters now doing western subjects. His many fans both in Tulsa and throughout the country are looking forward to this largest ever assembly of his works.

The exhibition season actually begins right now, of course, with "Hidden Treasures of the Gilcrease Collection" July 22 through October 21. One of the best things about Gilcrease is that our collection is large and varied enough so that special exhibitions can be organized within our own walls. As the centerpiece of "Hidden Treasures," reappearing this summer for the first time in many a moon, is "The Wooing of Hiawatha," a large painting by Howard Chandler Christy, a favorite of Thomas Gilcrease and the focus of many pleasant memories for long-term Gilcrease Museum fans.

Even such friends will be surprised and pleased by the early fall showing of "The Prints of Mary Nimmo Moran," on display September 7 through December 2. These large and complex prints have always been part of the huge Moran holdings at Gilcrease but have been eclipsed by the seductive works of

Mary's husband Thomas. Helping Gilcrease staff with the emergence of Mary Nimmo have been print experts at the University of Tulsa and the exhibition will feature restrikes made by these T.U. helpers from the copper plates in Gilcrease's holdings.

The mid-fall exhibition November 3-25 will be classic black pottery as made at the Santa Clara pueblo centering on the production of two generations of the Youngblood family. A special event will be a demonstration firing at the museum by Nathan Youngblood.

Next, just before Christmas, comes an exhibition of small paintings — no larger than 9 by 12 inches — by contemporary American painters. Past and potential Rendezvous artists are featured in this exhibition. All works will be for sale.

James Earle Fraser, the exhibition that begins 1985, has been in the making for three years. Using material that is in the collections of the University of Syracuse, the exhibition will focus new attention on Fraser whose public monuments are so familiar that his creative achievement is strangely obscured, a case of familiarity breeding invisibility. In addition to the "End of the Trail" and other well known bronzes, the exhibition will include six new bronzes cast for the exhibition from never-before-used Fraser plasters in the Syracuse collections.

All in all, Gilcrease anticipates a full year of changing exhibitions — exhibitions planned to make repeat visits to Gilcrease Museum intriguing and to extend the richness of the permanent exhibitions of the Gilcrease collections.

Fred A. Tupper

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	Inside Front
The Grand Duke Alexis in the U.S.A.	Cover
Howard Chandler Christy at Gilcrease Museum	25
Photographers and A New Land	31
Message from the Director	39

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The photograph on page 13 is from the collection of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.

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