

Russian Immigrant Estimable Russian-American Historian



Alex Doll in His Study

Collection of Russian-American Textbooks Most Complete

By LAEL MORGAN

One of the most exciting collections of rare books on Alaska belongs to Alex Doll of South Laguna, California, and he's generous about letting visitors research it.

The only problem is that the bulk of the texts are in Russian. Doll has no trouble with it because it's his native language but the majority of Alaskans find it rough reading, indeed.

Doll is a historian, one of the most knowledgeable in the country on Russian-American history. His collection of Russian-American textbooks translated into Tlingit and Aleut is probably the most complete in the United States.

And last year, when National Geographic was preparing a story on Russians in Alaska, the editors contacted Doll as a consultant after three independent Russian organizations in New York reported he was their main source of information.

Born in the Kuban Cossacks, Doll was one of 300 men who joined the White Russian Army in 1917 in a revolution against the Communists.

"I got out with my gun in my hand," he recounts gustily, "I never surrendered. I never submitted."

He immigrated to New York with a vocabulary of 500 English words.

"Just enough to get me in trouble," he recalls ruefully. But he learned quickly, touring Boston, New Jersey and Washington, D.C. Then he drove across country landing in Los Angeles, California with \$2 in his pocket.

Eventually he made good in the movie industry as a technician, working on special effects, building sets and miniatures.

Privately he pursued historical research, however, and on retirement from Hollywood, he became a full-time historian.

Doll writes for publication mainly in Russian (New York and Los Angeles have three Russian language newspapers each) and he is proud of the fact that he never accepts payment for what he writes.

"I work because I love it," he explains. "Not for money."

His name is also on the masthead of the Alaska Journal, a handsome historical publication edited by Bob DeArmond in Juneau, and he keeps current on Alaskan material.

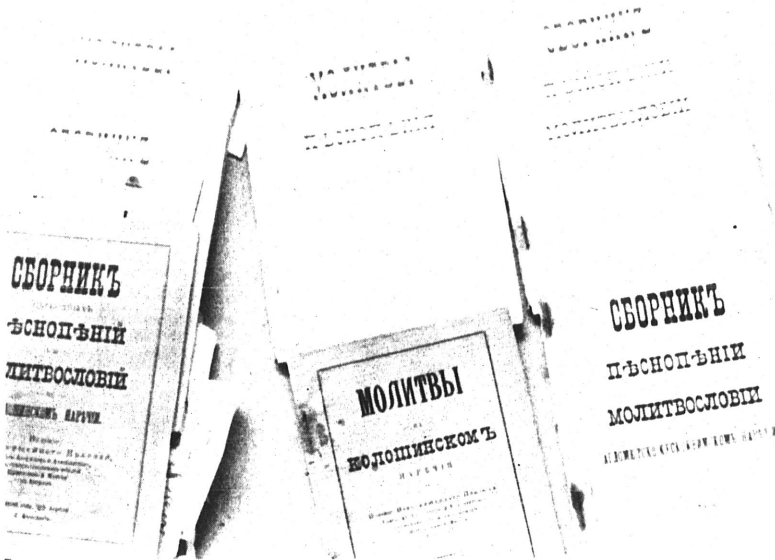
Doll gained an extensive knowledge of Alaska by studying the dusty records of the Russian American Company and other long buried historical accounts. He was dissatisfied with the published English translation of Bering's log so he obtained a copy of the original and translated it himself.

His small study is crammed full of obscure texts most researchers don't realize exist and he's currently working on a bibliography of this little known material.

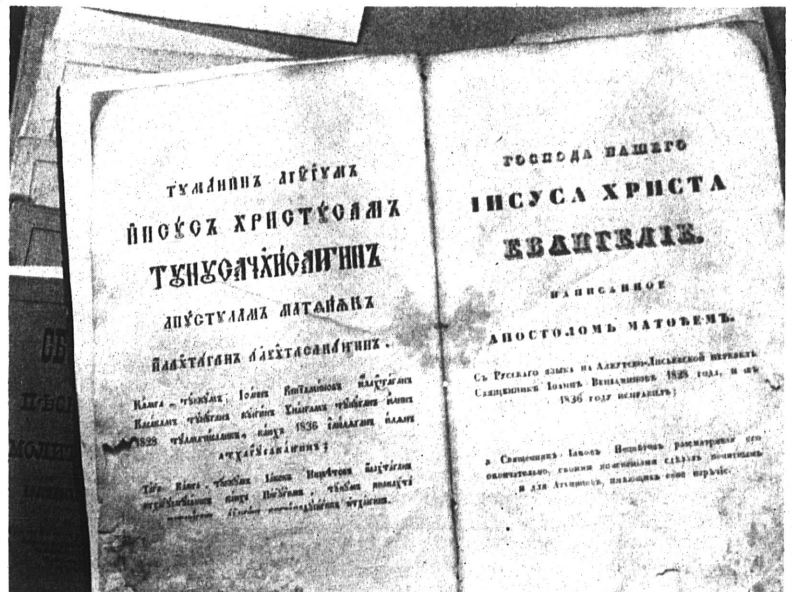
Despite his deep interest in Alaska, Doll did not get a chance to visit it until 1969. His tour of two months was not long enough, he complains, although he unearthed a lot of new material (including some 18th century Russian cannon balls from Sitka.).

Now he's planning a return visit for next year if his finances work out. This time he wants to see something of the Aleutian chain which he missed last time and to update his view of Russian America.

— Photographs by LAEL MORGAN



Russian Textbooks



Some Textbooks Translated Into Tlingit and Aleut