

THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MOSCOW CANAL

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Executive Summary

It would be hard to overestimate the significance of the Moscow Canal and the Stalin Waterworks. Together they supply between sixty and eighty percent of all potable water to metropolitan Moscow. Critical to this new direction was the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the opening of the Moscow Canal, an event that revealed the tensions that still exist vis-à-vis the very meaning of the Canal itself: the continuing struggle between those who would rather ignore the past for the sake of the future and those who believe that forgetting the past will doom Russia to repeat it. This, then, is an account of how Russia feted the Moscow Canal and how that celebration attempted to reconcile these opposing tendencies.

Introduction

It would be hard to overestimate the significance of the Moscow Canal and the Stalin Waterworks. Together they supply between sixty and eighty percent of all potable water to metropolitan Moscow.¹ The Moscow Canal itself is viewed as a waterway of strategic importance not only to Russia's capital, but also to the country's system of waterways in European Russia. As the official web site for the Moscow Canal notes, the canal is essential to defense as well as to sanitation: "To strengthen the security and anti-terrorist defenses--not for the arrival of dignitaries and commissions--but in order to warn against extraordinary events and to prevent the obstruction of the operation of this especially important strategic object--this is our current task." ("Укреплять безопасность и антитеррористическую защищенность не для приезда вышестоящего начальства и комиссий, а для того, чтобы предупредить чрезвычайное происшествие, не допустить прекращения функционирования особо важного стратегического объекта — это наша сегодняшняя задача.")² As the city of Moscow grows, so too will its demand for potable water, a condition that makes the Moscow Canal even more vital: it is literally the lifeline of Moscow.

Precisely this strategic significance suggests why the Canal's directorate was unwilling to speak with me during and after the 70th anniversary celebration of the Canal's construction. The notion of an American scholar probing not only the history of the Moscow Canal but also its current condition and future exploitation seemed to make the Canal's directorate uncomfortable. At least this was the explanation offered by Russian colleagues who marveled at the bureaucratic

¹ This working paper is part of a larger project on the history and legacy of the Moscow Canal, provisionally entitled "Red Waterway: The Moscow Canal and the Creation of Soviet Space."

² <http://www.fgup-kim.ru/go/present>. Referenced on March 29, 2009.

barriers that confronted me at every turn as I attempted to interview one of the Canal's administrators, Aleksander Anatolievich Sidorov, Assistant Director for Economic Development.

Instead, the newly hired public relations specialist Liudmila Viktorovna Shvedova was entrusted with the task of answering my questions and providing me with the information I sought concerning the current operation of the Canal.³ Indeed, Shvedova's hiring demonstrates both the desire of upper management to have a skilled public relations specialist run interference and the newly re-discovered importance of the Moscow Canal. The Canal suffered chronic underfunding following perestroika, a fact that damaged both its administrative hierarchy and its physical structure. Only recently have attempts been made to reconstruct, restore, and rehabilitate the Canal itself and the unique historical and cultural space it inhabits.

Critical to this new direction was the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the opening of the Moscow Canal, an event that revealed the tensions that still exist vis-à-vis the very meaning of the Canal itself: the continuing struggle between those who would rather ignore the past for the sake of the future and those who believe that forgetting the past will doom Russia to repeat it. This, then, is an account of how Russia feted the Moscow Canal and how that celebration attempted to reconcile these opposing tendencies.

³ Shvedova had started her job just days before I met her in June 2008; she is neither an engineer, nor a long-time Canal employee, and therefore not a specialist on the Canal. After I made numerous attempts to meet with Sidorov--over the course of almost a year--he told me he would have his secretary call me to set up an appointment. When no call was forthcoming, I contacted the secretary only to find out that I had to submit an official letter requesting an interview. I then had to call another office to determine if my letter had been officially received and recorded at which time I was given Shvedova's name and told that she, not Sidorov, would see me. The meeting with her almost did not occur because she needed over a week to set up and clear such a meeting with the Canal Administration. Literally three days before my departure from Moscow, I met with Shvedova and, in the meantime, requested and received a meeting with Nina Nikolaevna Ermakova, head of the hydro-engineering department.

The 70th Anniversary Celebrations

In preparation for the 70th Anniversary, the Moscow Canal administration launched a web site to promote the Canal's activities and its jubilee. The site's homepage--www.fgup-kim.ru-- features a picture of the Canal's sixth lock as well as various useful links: Administration, History, Employment, News, Contact Information, About Us, and Production. Users can view archived news items and photographs for each year since 2007, as well as current articles about the Canal. This initiative, instigated by Assistant Director Sidorov, brought the Moscow Canal into the 21st century.

The Canal administration building on the corner of ulitsa Vodnikovskaia and Volokolamskoe shosse also received a partial renovation. The entire first floor of the building, originally constructed by forced laborers from Dmitlag,⁴ was now restored to its former grandeur. Marble floors, ambient lighting, and a pale azure ceiling reminiscent of the color of water all grace the main hallway. In addition, the first-floor auditorium, formerly used for official gatherings, has been transformed into a conference room equipped with the latest technology and comfortable furnishings. Even the security screeners no longer block the entrance, but rather sit in a redesigned, well-lit alcove in the main hallway. Turnstiles, regulated by either the security team or employee identification badges, mark the boundary between the outside world and the Canal's administrative territory. While limited finances derailed renovation of the entire building, its elegant first floor now presents a more polished, professional space to visitors and staff.

The Moscow Canal's actual anniversary fell on Monday, July 15, but July 14, 2007 was the date chosen to mark the 70th anniversary of the FGUP-Moscow Canal. The waterway was

feted with a celebratory concert and buffet supper at the Moscow International House of Music.⁵ Admission was free, although by invitation only. These elaborate invitations, adorned with “before” and “after” photographs of the Canal in 1937 and 2007, were designed especially for employees of the Canal and important bureaucrats. The Minister of Transportation of the Russian Federation, Igor Levitin, was on hand to celebrate, as were members of the Canal administration, the Moscow City and Regional Administration, and many Canal employees with their families. Workers who had faithfully served the Canal received commendations that applauded their service. Speeches were delivered, a variety of performers appeared, and the audience joined in the singing of the Moscow Canal’s official anthem, words and music helpfully provided in a program bearing the Canal’s signature symbol—the Columbus caravel.⁶

Participants also received a souvenir pin noting the Canal’s name and “age” and embellished with the ubiquitous Columbus caravel. The pins were attached to postcards that sported a photograph of the Canal. An emblem of *the USSR* (rather than Russia) was emblazoned on the lower right corner. A Canal employee, engineer-dispatcher E.P. Vasil’eva, even penned a new “anthem” entitled “The Romantics of the Azure Highways” in honor of the Canal’s 70th

⁴ Dmitlag—the Dmitrov lager’—was the NKVD camp that provided the labor to construct the Moscow Canal, 1932-1937.

⁵ The official Russian name of the entity that oversees operation of the Moscow Canal is FGUP-KiM—Federal’noe gosudarstvennoe unitarnoe predpriatie-Kanal imeni Moskvyy (The Federal State United Enterprise—The Moscow Canal). This title takes into account that the Moscow Canal system consists not only of the Canal itself, but also of the Stalin Waterworks and its supply canal, the Oka and Moscow Rivers, and the Uglich and Rybinsk Reservoirs. This working paper focuses only on the Moscow Canal with references to the FGUP-KiM administration as warranted. Throughout the paper the Moscow Canal will be referred to as the Moscow Canal, the Canal, or KiM.

⁶ <http://www.fgup-kim.ru/news/company/5/>. Referenced on August 6, 2008. The caravel, modeled after Columbus’ ship the Santa Maria, is a carefully selected official symbol for the Moscow Canal. The image of the ship appears on all of its promotional materials. During the Stalinist era the caravel was chosen because it symbolized the quest for and discovery of the New World. This image was especially important when the Canal was constructed since the Moscow-Volga Canal was the waterway that would link land-locked Soviet Moscow with the rest of the world. Moscow would become the “Port of the Five Seas”, thereby connecting it with other world capitals while simultaneously bringing the world literally and figuratively to the Kremlin’s doorstep. Likewise, the values and ideology of Soviet Moscow would flow from Moscow to the rest of the world. At Lock Number 3 the pair of caravels grace the northern towers of the lock and face *away* from Moscow and toward the Volga, a placement that

anniversary.⁷ This seemingly spontaneous individual initiative dovetailed nicely with the official tenor of the Canal's 70th jubilee.

The crowning piece of anniversary memorabilia, however, was a commemorative volume entitled The Moscow Canal's 70th Anniversary (70 лет Каналу имени Москвы) (KiM). Replete with lavish illustrations the 105-page book provides concise histories of each decade of the Canal's existence and concludes with a brief discussion of the Canal and its constituent regions in the 21st century.⁸ These celebratory albums were not sold commercially, but instead were presented to participants at the Jubilee event and to other official bodies, a practice reminiscent of the 17th Party Congress in 1934 when participants received a souvenir copy of The History of the Construction of the Stalin White Sea-Baltic Canal.

The allusion to the 1934 Congress is by no means frivolous. The Moscow Canal's 70th Anniversary was marked not only by the august gathering at the House of Music, but also by an equally fitting, more sober group of officially sanctioned events that paid tribute to the darker side of the Canal's anniversary—its Gulag past and coincidence with the Great Terror. This second set of events demonstrates the conflicting discourses that still compete for attention and legitimacy in contemporary Russia. Given the circumstances under which the Moscow Canal was opened, such complexity is not unexpected.

further underscores the notion of Moscow's ability to extend its reach and create a new world. The caravels were destroyed during WWII, but fortunately were restored to their original glory.

⁷ I am indebted to N.N. Ermakova, hydro-engineer on the Canal staff, who supplied me with a copy of this song, as well as with a copy of the official Jubilee invitation, the official KiM anthem, the commemorative pin, and the commemorative album.

⁸ According to informed sources the publication of this volume was fraught with difficulty. The firm originally charged with producing it suffered financial problems. The woman who compiled the work had no connection to the Canal and was viewed as a less-than-adequate writer and editor. The book was not ready in time for the July 14, 2007 celebration. When it did appear, it contained egregious mistakes, including misidentified photographs and factual errors. A revised edition of the book appeared only in spring 2008 with most of the errors corrected. Sources note, however, that the book with its sparse content and relatively prosaic format reflected poorly on the Canal Administration. Given that the volume was conceived of as the single celebratory print souvenir of the

The Great Terror and the Building of the Moscow Canal

The construction of the Moscow Canal was completed in 1937 at the height of the Great Terror. In fact, the head of the Dmitrov camp Semyon Firin was purged in spring 1937, even before construction of the Canal was completed. Co-workers and associates from an alleged “Firin Group” were purged as well, as was nearly everyone in the upper administration of the NKVD who had associated with or enjoyed the patronage of former NKVD Chief Genrikh Yagoda. This traumatic legacy received limited provincial press coverage and went unnoticed by the majority of the KiM workforce as the 70th Anniversary approached. Yet precisely this difficult past was marked in a more modest, but no less compelling, way in a series of events in May, July, and August 2007.

On May 29, 2007 under the auspices of the FGUP-KiM and the Dmitrov Regional Museum, a conference was held to commemorate the Moscow Canal’s 70th Anniversary. By holding the conference in Dmitrov, organizers recognized the importance of the city in the history of the Moscow Canal: Canal Operational Headquarters and the Main Dmitrov Lager’ (Dmitlag) camp administration had been located there. Dmitrov, situated midway on the Canal route, served as the geographical, political, and cultural focus for Canal activity throughout the 4 years and 20 months of its construction.

The May conference, entitled “The Moscow-Volga Canal: Past and Present,” featured presentations by a variety of scholars and canal devotees. In addition to the presenters, the audience included FGUP-KiM employees who were interested in the scholarly presentations or had been chosen to enjoy the afternoon cruise along the Canal. Conference topics ranged from Canal architecture to music; from the quality of the concrete used to build the Canal to the

Canal’s 70th Anniversary, some observers believed that a more ostentatious volume, worthy of this milestone, should have been produced. Kanal imeni Moskvy: 70 let. Moscow: OOOPrzhdnik, 2007.

exploitation of state resources to address economic issues; from ecology to the Gulag. In all 15 presentations were scheduled. Upon entering the conference venue participants encountered paintings of the KiM from the Dmitrov Museum's collection and viewed segments of a documentary film taken during Canal construction.

The planned cruise took conference goers along the Canal from the third lock at Yakhroma to a point approximately 4 kilometers north of Dmitrov. A tight schedule had to be maintained in order to adhere to the transit schedule at Lock #3. Participants listened to a lecture on NKVD officers who served at Dmitlag, observed a wreath laying at the monument to those who perished building the Canal, and partook of a buffet during which the Canal and its contemporary work force were toasted. Dmitrov Mayor Valery Gavrilov, as well as one of the FGUP-KiM's Assistant Directors A.A. Sidorov, hosted the cruise.

This event produced mixed impressions. On the one hand participants routinely referred to the Gulag and its central role in the construction of the Moscow Canal. There was a palpable sense of sorrowful remembrance among many conference-goers. On the other hand, several Canal employees, especially Assistant Director Sidorov, focused exclusively on the Canal's place in contemporary Russian society and chose to accentuate not its past, but its present and future.

Yet precisely the theme of remembrance triumphed on July 5, 2007 when the first stone was laid for the foundation of a chapel on the grounds of the Yakhroma District FGUP-KiM office in the village of Dedyenovo on the banks of the Canal. Officially the chapel is dedicated to the "new martyrs" (новомучеников), among whom were the Dmitlag camp inmates who suffered and died building the Moscow Canal. The mayor of the dacha settlement "Turist," S.N. Tiagacheva, promoted the idea for the chapel with support from the Canal Administration and

the blessings of the Russian Orthodox Church.⁹ Local dignitaries, Church officials, and Canal employees participated in the event.¹⁰ By June 2008 the chapel had been completed and was open for visitors. In fact, several people noted informally that there had been talk that the chapel would become a tourist stop for cruise ships that routinely ply the waters of the Canal on their way to and from Moscow. It remains to be seen whether or not this idea will reach fruition.

A museum commemorating the Moscow Canal also opened on July 5, 2007 to modest fanfare at the Yakhroma District Headquarters. As a local paper noted, “In the framework of the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Moscow Canal two events took place in the village of Dedyenevo, each of which could be considered unique.”¹¹

Although the event was low-key, the official delegation included the Director of the FGUP-KiM A. A. Sokurenko, along with Dmitrov’s mayor Gavrilov, Serpukhov Bishop Roman of the Moscow Patriarchate, and Mayor Tiagacheva and her husband. The museum, which overlooks the memorial chapel on the banks of the Canal, was a labor of love for Galina Ivanovna Yurchenko, an engineer at Yakhroma, who had worked tirelessly to collect artifacts, documents, photographs, and any information related to the construction of the Moscow Canal and to those who built it.

Situated in a relatively spacious wing on the second floor of the building, the museum affords visitors the chance to immerse themselves in the history of the Moscow Canal from the earliest mention of the project in Petrine times to the present. Artifacts, including an exact replica of the wheelbarrows used on the Canal construction site (with then-contemporary photographs displaying the wheelbarrows), a desk used by NKVD officers, numerous

⁹ Tiagacheva’s husband, Leonid Tiagachev, is the President of the Russian Olympic Committee.

¹⁰ <http://www.fgup-kim.ru/news/company/3/>. Referenced August 7, 2008.

¹¹ “Istoriia bez kupiur.” *Zerna*, August 2007, 2.

photographs, books, and interpretive texts provide a wealth of information.

Perceptive visitors to the Museum will be struck by the subtle tension that the expositions create. The dark history of the construction of the Canal is catalogued in a side room that is not immediately visible to visitors, while the main exhibition room is festooned with flags, banners and all manner of artifacts celebrating the post-WWII life of the Canal and its work force. Were it not for the wheelbarrow and assorted tools on display to the left of the entrance, a visitor might not even realize that the Moscow Canal was forged from the labor and lives of Dmitlag prisoners. As one journalist noted, “The museum is open to visitors of all ages. One hopes that history teachers will bring their students here on excursions and tell them the whole story of a construction project that we, the older generation, did not know.” (Zerna, 2)

A final remembrance of both the Great Terror and its connection to the Moscow Canal occurred in August 2007. A steamship transported from Solovki to the Butovsky Poligon¹² in southern Moscow a twelve-meter memorial cross dedicated to the victims of the Great Terror. The route from Solovki to Moscow included both the Belomor and Moscow Canals. On the Moscow Canal the steamship docked at the Yakhroma Lock (Lock #3). Pilgrims who accompanied the cross on its journey were met by an official delegation from Dmitrov that included Mayor Gavrilov, Serpukhov Bishop Roman of the Moscow Patriarchate, and Mayor Tiagacheva and her husband. In Dmitrov the official delegation attended services in the Monastery of Boris and Gleb, the erstwhile headquarters of the Dmitlag during the construction of the Canal. Upon its arrival in Moscow, the cross was greeted by the peal of church bells as it made its way along the Moscow River southward to the Butovsky Poligon.

The Struggle over the Meaning of the Moscow Canal

These seemingly minute details of the commemorative events connected with the Moscow Canal's 70th anniversary expose the complicated tug-of-war between official and unofficial discourses that seek to claim the KiM's physical and metaphorical space as their own. Like so many other relics from the Stalinist era, the Moscow Canal continues to prick the conscience of Russia by its mere presence.

In an effort to downplay the events of the past, many current FGUP-KiM employees, as well as the Canal's administration, strive to ignore that past in an effort to build for the future. This position is understandable given the increasing importance fresh water will assume in the 21st century. Even more than oil, in the coming years the abundance or lack of fresh water—blue or liquid gold, as it is often called in official parlance—will become the single most important natural resource in the world. As the main water supply for Moscow, the Canal will play an essential role in what could be a war for fresh water.

This public posturing, however, is counterbalanced by assorted private reactions to the Moscow Canal in its past, present, and intended future incarnations. Often individuals, rather than official organizations, have been devoting themselves to the preservation of the Canal, not only within its historical context, but also in its contemporary milieu, as a tangible reminder of both the positive and negative outcomes of Soviet and Russian power.

Indeed, these responses just as forcefully attempt to define the space the Canal occupies as an historical, geographical, political, and personal artifact whose history should be neither denied nor ignored. The struggle involving public and private reactions underscores how spatial relationships—between individuals and their government, between the landscape and its agents,

¹² The Butovsky Poligon in southeast Moscow was an area used by the NKVD to execute “enemies” of the Stalinist state. The site is now a memorial to victims of the Great Terror and features a church and museum.

between memory and reality—shape not only individual reactions to the space, but official policy initiatives that rely on and affect the space as well.¹³

These dualities characterize continuing attempts to reshape, reinterpret, and reframe the highly contested space of the Moscow Canal in order to reconcile it with the time in which it currently exists. This question of contested space suggests numerous interpretive dichotomies that merit further investigation. Particularly apparent in this regard is the tension between public and private historical space that the 70th Anniversary celebration of the Canal's opening highlighted.

Contradictions between public and private historical space shape the question as to which elements of the Canal's past are memorable and worthy. For example, the KiM's administration and its official pronouncements, coupled with the publication of the Canal's 70th Anniversary souvenir album, emphasize the waterway's importance as the main source of potable water for Moscow. Equally central to this position is the notion that the Canal must operate as a commercial enterprise that generates electricity, provides relatively cheap, if slow, cargo transport, and offers a unique recreational experience.

Because the Canal literally flows to the Kremlin, the spatial and political metaphors remain intact. Indeed for the Luftwaffe in WWII the Canal functioned like a roadmap to Moscow. Similarly, the Canal's name (changed from the Moscow-Volga to Moscow Canal in 1947 in honor of Moscow's 800th anniversary) underscores the symbiotic relationship that the Russian capital has with its namesake waterway, a bond that reinforces Moscow's dependence on the Canal regardless of its past.

13 The following discussion on contested space, especially in regard to public and private re-interpretations of historical space, owes much to the following foundational works (among others) on the examination of "space" and "place" as critical constructs. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Tr. by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000; Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995; Soja, Edward W.

It would be unfair to insist that the KiM administration routinely fails to acknowledge the Canal's history: the organization's web site features a link that discusses, albeit in generalities, how the Moscow Canal was constructed. Moreover, neither the chapel nor the Canal Museum could have been erected, had it not been for the support of Canal administrators. Equally as clear is the fact that the chapel and museum projects would not have been realized had it not been for the personal initiatives of interested parties who individually pursued this spatial reclamation to ensure that the past and present co-exist, even if this co-existence proves troublesome.

Certainly these "private" initiatives to dedicate, describe, and preserve the historical space of the Moscow Canal reveal that personal reactions to a public space often convey the actual opinions held by citizens more accurately than official pronouncements. For example, the efforts of Galina I. Yurchenko to gather original Canal artifacts, to reproduce an authentic Moskva-Volgastroi wheelbarrow, and to insist on the establishment of a Canal Museum illustrate how a private initiative may attempt to reclaim history in order to preserve and honor it. According to her colleagues Galina Ivanovna struggled for years to make the Museum a reality until the impending 70th anniversary when KiM officials realized the necessity of such an enterprise; they literally and figuratively gave the space onto which the history of the Moscow Canal could be re-inscribed.

Personal Histories of the Moscow Canal

Personal history can parallel public history as well. Hydro-electrical engineer Valentin Sergeevich Barkovsky, for example, marks the course of his personal history on a timeline of over forty years of employment at the Canal. Barkovsky devoted his entire working life to the Canal. He received his apartment, dacha in "Turist," and pension, thanks to his service to the

KiM, and he can mark this journey according to the hydroelectric stations that he helped maintain and upgrade along the Canal route. Like his colleague Yurchenko, Barkovsky has melded his personal history with the Moscow Canal's more public historical narrative to reclaim the Canal's physical space as an historical one where public and private memory intersect.

In 2007 Barkovsky published a slim booklet entitled The Secrets of the Moscow-Volga Construction (Tainy Moskva-Volgastroiia), subtitled "A Collection of Stories about the History of the Construction of the Moscow Canal." He quietly collected pertinent documents, reports, publications, and personal reminiscences that resulted in a personal archive on the Moscow Canal that fills ten file boxes. Thanks to his employment on the Canal, Barkovsky had access to the official KiM archive. This afforded him the chance to examine historical materials that heretofore have not been made widely available to researchers, given the potentially sensitive nature of the documents.

In addition, because Barkovsky regularly traversed the Canal on work assignments, he was able to talk not only to fellow Canal employees, but also to denizens of the areas around the Canal. The materials he gathered focused not on the technical aspects of the Canal, but on the history of the Canal's construction and existence up to WWII. As such this booklet reads not as a scholarly monograph on the KiM, but rather as a series of vignettes that acquaint the reader with particularly poignant and instructive moments in the Canal's early history. As Barkovsky himself notes in a brief preface, "The impetus for the creation of this small book was the wish of the author who, having worked at the Moscow Canal since 1960, wanted to raise the curtain of secrecy that had been created around the construction of the Moscow-Volga Canal...On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Moscow Canal I succeeded in finishing the first part of a

larger work on the Canal—about the time of its construction.”¹⁴

The table of contents reveals that the majority of Barkovsky’s narratives are devoted to revelations about the Dmitlag camp, the NKVD’s supervision of the KiM’s construction, and the philosophy behind the Canal’s architecture. Photographs of the Canal’s supervisory brigade Semyon Firin, Lazar Kogan, and Sergei Zhuk¹⁵, of Dmitlag survivor Nikolai Kravchenko, and of the placement of Dmitlag settlements along the Canal route, enhance Barkovsky’s narrative. Barkovsky’s choice to foreground the NKVD and camp experience on the Canal reveals a tension between official duty and responsibility and personal conscience. Barkovsky was motivated both by his long years of faithful service to the KiM and his sense that the full history of the KiM needs to be written to secure its builders a place in the collective history and consciousness of the nation. The metaphorical space that is created covers precisely this intersection of the public with the private.

Consider, on the other hand, Galina Aleksandrovna Gerke who worked for the KiM for fifty years and rose through the ranks to the politically important position of personnel director (отдел кадров). Like Barkovsky, Gerke’s entire working life is tied to the Moscow Canal, as is her personal life: she met her husband while working at the KiM and has the Canal to thank for her apartment and current position as Director of the KiM Museum.

For Galina Aleksandrovna the historical space that merits reclamation focuses on the

¹⁴ From Barkovsky, V.S. *Tainy Moskva-Volgostroi*. Moscow, 2007: 4. While no additional publication information is provided in the booklet, Barkovsky informed me that the production of the book was underwritten by the Memorial organization. Interview with V.S. Barkovsky in Moscow, November 17, 2007. It should be noted that Barkovsky’s book is not a work of traditional scholarship, but rather an amateur historian’s attempt to record key events in the history of the construction of the Moscow Canal. According to GARF archivist Alexander Ivanovich Kokurin, a leading authority on the NKVD and the Gulag, Barkovsky’s text contains some factual errors that are not detrimental to the overall effect of the book, but that, to Kokurin’s thinking, underscore Barkovsky’s less scholarly approach.

¹⁵Firin and Kogan were NKVD officers, while Zhuk was an NKVD civilian employee. Semyon Firin headed Dmitlag 1933-1937, Lazar Kogan supervised Canal construction—Moskva-Volgastroi—as it was officially called, 1932-1936, and Sergei Zhuk served as the chief engineer of Moskva-Volgastroi 1930-1937.

efforts and dedication of the post-WWII KiM staff, especially the engineers and their subordinates, who devoted their careers to the maintenance and operation of the Moscow Canal. When Gerke speaks of Canal history, these are the people she remembers and reveres. The historical space of the Canal is realized not through the problematic days of its construction, but rather through the years of dedicated service rendered to the Canal by cadres of specialists, particularly in the sixties and seventies. Perhaps the most striking evidence of Gerke's and G.I. Yurchenko's contrasting views are their photographs taken by this author in the Canal Museum: whereas Yurchenko chose to stand by the exposition of Canal tools, including the aforementioned wheelbarrow, Gerke opted to pose next to the photographs of the Canal directorate that she served.

The negotiation between private and public space that the Moscow Canal engenders is not limited to those who worked for the Canal administration. In fact, various circumstances continue to contribute to this reclamation of Soviet space within the Russian context. Mikhail Ivanovich Bulanov's work typifies this kind of spatial re-appropriation. A science and ecology high school teacher by training, Bulanov began his research on the Moscow Canal for two compelling reasons: his personal fate was linked to its construction, and he is a native of the city of Dubna which stands at the entrance to the Moscow Canal.

Bulanov literally grew up on the Canal and its landmarks in the Dubna area: the lighthouse, the Ivankovo dam, the first Canal lock, and the enormous statue of V.I. Lenin that still towers over the Canal's entrance.¹⁶ His father lived in the village of Ivankovo, territory that

¹⁶ This statue of Lenin is the largest in Russia. Designed by the sculptor S. D. Merkurlov, the monument was erected by Dmitlag inmates in record time—7 months. At 37 meters above ground Lenin towers over the northwest bank of the Canal, while a similarly gigantic statue of Stalin, also 37 meters high, used to rise above the southeast bank of the waterway. The Lenin statue weighs 450 tons, while the Stalin monument weighed 540 tons. According to Bulanov, the Stalin statue remained in place until 1962 when it was demolished, with great difficulty. It is said that Stalin's head from the monument still rests on the bottom of the Canal. For the complete discussion of these

was appropriated to the Canal and flooded in the process. The entire village was moved in order to make way for the Ivankovo dam, the first lock of the Moscow Canal, and the so-called “Moscow Sea” which officially is the Ivankovo reservoir. The physical, social, cultural, and psychological space—arable land and a village that had stood on the same spot for centuries—that was lost during the flooding of the village of Ivankovo has been metaphorically regained through Bulanov’s research efforts. His book, Канал Москва-Волга: Хроника волжского района гидросооружений (The Moscow-Volga Canal: A Chronicle of the Volga Region’s Hydro-Structures)¹⁷ systematically traces the construction of the Moscow Canal where it intersects the Volga River, while describing the NKVD officers, local politicians, and Dmitlag inmates who participated in the project.

Bulanov’s reclamation efforts are not limited to reconstructing lost space on the page. He is actively engaged in on-going research about the Moscow Canal and hopes to facilitate not only the preservation of current Canal structures, but also the creation of new ones intended to re-occupy the space of original buildings. Prominent in this plan is his desire to see the Canal’s “avant-port,” a floating passenger terminal, reconstructed.

At the time of the Moscow Canal’s opening, a floating ship was anchored to the shoreline immediately ahead of the first lock. Here passengers could disembark from and board the steamships that ferried tourists up and down the Canal and along the Volga river. Indeed rebuilding this structure would not only increase tourist traffic and support the local economy of Dubna, but also afford visitors the chance to tour the site of the former Stalin monument and the extant Lenin monument.

For Bulanov this physical and metaphorical reclamation of seemingly “lost” space

monuments see Буланов, М.И. Канал Москва Волга: Хроника волжского района гидросооружений. [No place given, 2007]: 127-132, footnote 5, 135.

accomplishes two important goals. First the rebuilding of the avant-port recaptures a lost historical space that would link the past and present and create a useful feature on the Canal. In addition, such a restoration encourages a re-examination of the Canal's construction and achieves Bulanov's main goal—to reestablish this history in the consciousness of contemporary Russians, both the denizens of Dubna and the tourists who would visit this site.

Conclusion

Clearly the tension between private and public responses to the 70th Anniversary of the Moscow Canal remains unabated, and perhaps it has even been exacerbated by the Canal's jubilee. The Canal, a contested space since its inception, continues to provoke discussion and debate. As this working paper suggests, metaphorical, historical, cultural, and physical space affords a productive interpretive structure through which the history and the current "life" of the Moscow Canal can be examined. While the preceding discussion has highlighted the tension between public and private space that pervades any examination of the Moscow Canal, it also suggests future avenues of investigation.

¹⁷ Буланов, Канал Москва Волга.