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America's Lost Russian Paintings:
Frank C. Havens and the Russian Collection of the 1904 St. Louis Exposition

The saddest side of art—the material side—is the cult of the exhibit.
N. K. Roerich, November, 1904

If any case since my connection with the Treasury Department has had more exhaustive, patient, or respected attention than this case, I am not aware of it.
Franklin MacVeagh
Secretary of the Treasury
23 March 1912

In late June, 1904, the liners “Hellig Olaf” and the “United States” arrived in New York from Copenhagen.1 On board was an unusual cargo: seventy

1. A number of people helped make this study possible. From the outset, Mrs. Peggy Cole Ives has been most helpful in providing me with access to the papers of her grandfather, Halsey Coolidge Ives, at the St. Louis Art Museum. Mr. Charles E. Buckley, Director of the St. Louis Art Museum, allowed me to utilize those papers during a sabbatical year made possible by Washington University in 1973-74. The Missouri Historical Society provided me with useful materials from the papers of David R. Francis and the files of the World's Fair Bulletin. Mr. Douglas A. Bakken, Archivist of the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company, Inc., kindly gave me information about the painting which initiated my search, Denisov-Uralskii's "Forest Fire," and a photograph of it.

In New York Ms. Sina Fosdick of the Roerich Museum not only guided me through the collection of Nikolai Roerich's paintings, many from the St. Louis Exposition, but also gave me useful information about the artist. Mr. Alexis Coudert of Coudert Brothers, Attorneys at Law, would have given me more help had the firm's file on "Grunwaldt Paintings versus the Russian Government" not been destroyed. Finally, Mr. Charles McGee, Public Information Officer of the U.S. Customs Service in New York, was most helpful in directing me to the Bureau of Customs records in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Here Ms. Janet L. Hargett was able to reproduce the complete case files concerning the paintings from 1905 to 1913. In addition, I am indebted to Mr. John C. Broderick, Chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, for references to some additional correspondence in the William Howard Taft Papers not contained in the Bureau of Customs files.

As my search turned to California, I received considerable aid from Ms. Marjorie Arkelin of the Oakland Museum of Art, Ms. Terry Alexander, Assistant Director of the Mills College Art Gallery, and Mr. Frederick Snowden, Registrar of the M. H. De Young Museum in San Francisco. In addition, I was able to obtain rare biographical material on Frank C. Havens with the help of Ms. Mary Ashe of the San Francisco Public Library and on
wooden cases of Russian paintings, photographs, sculptures, and other art objects to be exhibited at the great Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri. Their sponsor, Edward Mikhailovich Grunwaldt, Councillor of Commerce at the Ministry of Finance, guaranteed the collection's security while in the United States by procuring warehouse bonds Nos. 67863 and 67864 at the Port of New York, good for three years' insurance. The Russian government had allowed Grunwaldt to organize the exhibit after it became clear that the Russo-Japanese War would prevent full Russian participation in the Exposition. Instead, Grunwaldt drew up his own private contracts with artists as their paintings arrived at his fur company on the Nevskii Prospekt in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1904. Each artist sending a work would receive 70 percent of the purchase price for any item sold; Grunwaldt himself would receive a 30 percent commission to cover his expenses. Most important, Grunwaldt in each contract promised that "in case the products of ________ should not be sold, I agree to return them to St. Petersburg at my expense; in case any or some of the art products be lost, I agree to pay the whole sum for it or them."²

Thus began one of the most bizarre and little-known incidents in twentieth-century Russo-American relations and art history. For the complete collection of Grunwaldt's Russian art works never returned to Russia again. The artists themselves, along with more recent Soviet historians, believed that the paintings were shipped to New York again in 1905, then to Canada by Grunwaldt's lawyer, and most probably on to Argentina, where they were assumed to have been sold off to private buyers on the eve of World War I.³

Henry Kowalsky from Mr. Jay Williar, Reference Librarian of the California Historical Society.

Special thanks go to Mr. William Chiego, Associate Curator of the Toledo, Ohio, Museum of Art for providing me with superb photographs of their Russian paintings from the Exposition, and for agreeing with me that they had eight such paintings, and not six, as they had previously thought. Locally I am indebted to my colleague Professor Glen Holt who not only tolerated but encouraged the intrusion of a strayed Russian historian into the archivally greener pastures of American history.

². M. Fedorov, Ministry of Finance, to E. M. Grunwaldt, 28 February 1904; found in the Bureau of Customs Case Files 25634 and 25892, Record Group 36, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Hereafter abbreviated to Customs.

³. In 1910 the painter Il'ia Repin knew only that his "Portrait of Madame Korevo" had disappeared, and assumed that the Russian collection had been sold in St. Louis "for some sort of duties and sold . . . for nothing." The Congress of Russian Artists which met in St. Petersburg in the winter of 1911-12 believed that Grunwaldt had sold off a number of paintings in New York for an estimated 100,000 rubles, and then shipped the unsold ones on to Canada and Argentina. More recently, a note in the collected letters of Repin (1969) reveals that Grunwaldt "sold some of the paintings in St. Louis and took the unsold ones to New York from where they were taken to Canada by an agent, and then to Argentina, where they were ultimately sold. Russian artists' protests to Baron Rosen, the ambassador in America and two to the tsar, brought no results." See I. Repin, Izbrannye pism'va v dvukh tomakh 1867-1930, 2 vols. (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1969), II, 274-75; N. A. Koshelev, "Chto nuzhno nastoiaitel'no khudozhnikam, v sluchae neschast'ia