Bridge between Worlds:
Biological and Cultural Interactions across the Bering Sea
before and after the Russian Discovery of Alaska in 1741.

Overview of Project

Conceptually, my research fits under the heading “Environmental History.” Environmental History is an interdisciplinary field that examines human history within its geographical, biological, and ecological contexts. In this vein, I have previously published books and articles exploring the development of species protection laws and practices in Russia, the impact of the Russian Revolution on forest resources, Russian geographical exploration, and other similar topics. My sabbatical was used to begin a new project, in this spirit, examining the Russian arrival in the North Pacific region both in terms of its environmental context (geography, climate, available natural resources) and its environmental impacts on the region’s flora and fauna. I conceived my project loosely, intending to follow where the sources led.

Results

I had a productive year with several and ongoing outcomes. Trips to the archives at The University of Alaska, Fairbanks and The Library of Congress in Washington, DC netted me hundreds of original documents, many handwritten, and a greatly expanded list of secondary materials. I spent much of my sabbatical going through these. Although I originally was thinking in terms of a book, the nature of the material, and the leads it has provided, lend themselves better to articles. I am currently writing up two and have others planned. One explores the manner in which the unique geographical-environmental conditions of the Bering Sea region have helped shape Russian national identity. The other looks at the challenges of food production in the region.

I was able to use my sabbatical for two other related projects that presented themselves early in the year. One was an invitation from the European journal *Global Environment* to write an article analyzing Russian Environmental History as concept and surveying its development as a field. I did this during Summer and Fall 2013. The article was published quickly as:

The second project grew out of a Russian archival source brought to my attention by a colleague in St. Petersburg, Russia. It related directly to an article I had published in 2007 (“For the ‘Preservation of Friends’ and the ‘Destruction of Enemies’: Studying and Protecting Birds in Imperial Russia.” *Environment and History* 13 [2007]: 71-100). Briefly, the source allowed me to frame another article on the subject of Russian and European species conservation, focusing on the economic and agricultural roles of wild birds and debates between entomologists and ornithologist in the nineteenth century. The article required considerable further sources and research, which I also worked on during the sabbatical year. I am close a final draft currently and plan to submit this also to one of the major Environmental History journals.