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Personal recollections of Ilya Alekseevich Popov
by John Woodsworth, Literary Translator, Ottawa

Like many of his admirers, I was saddened to hear of the recent passing of someone I considered a faithful friend: Ilya Alekseevich Popov. He will be sorely missed, not only by his fellow Doukhobors, but also by others who had the opportunity to talk with him on topics dear to his heart.

I have three specific memories of Ilya Alekseevich I would like to share, based on my diary. (I keep my diary in Russian, so I have only the Russian variant of the Doukhobor names mentioned.)

1) The first time I met Ilya in person was at the Doukhobor Youth Festival in May of 1998. I was staying in Castlegar, but the day of Friday 14 May I spent mostly in Grand Forks, the other major Doukhobor centre in the Kootenays of British Columbia. After my getting acquainted with him and his son Dmitry Il'ich at the offices of the Doukhobor journal *Iskra* (where Dmitry was editor at the time), Ilya took me around to local Doukhobor places to meet a number of interesting people: museum director Pyotr Mikhailovich Gritchyn, Doukhobor Youth Choir director Fyodor Petrovich Vanzhov, Doukhobor restaurant owner Aleksej Alekseevich Semënov (who employed Ilya's grandson Matvej), Doukhobor videographer Stepan Ivanovich Malov and a neighbour, Savelij Savelievich Malov, who lived right on the American border. Later I met Ilya's wife Evdokija Ivanovna, fondly known as Dunya in Russian.

2) For the following year's Youth Festival in 1999, I met Ilya at a special opening ceremony held at Gyro Park in Grand Forks on 20 May to mark the centenary of the Doukhobors' arrival in Canada. I remember touring the local museum after the ceremony in the company of Ilya, CBC producer Karina Semyonova (herself a Doukhobor) and the then Russian ambassador to Canada Vitaly Churkin (who was later appointed Russia's ambassador to the United Nations). On this occasion I stayed two nights in the Popovs' home. The next morning my University of Ottawa colleague Andrew Donskov and his wife Natasha joined us for breakfast. On the second morning the Popovs' breakfast guests included Leo Tolstoy's great-great-grandson Vladimir Ilyich Tolstoy (at the time the director of the Tolstoy Museum Estate at Yasnaya Polyana), who had flown over especially for the occasion (and whom I had met the previous autumn at a Tolstoy conference at Yasnaya Polyana). Several other Doukhobors were present, as well as Vladimir's wife Katya. I then had the privilege of driving Ilya to Castlegar for the continuation of the Youth Festival ceremonies at the Doukhobor Cultural Centre in nearby Brilliant. We were later joined there by Vladimir Tolstoy and the Russian ambassador. I remember thinking that Ilya was not only a learned scholar but a warm and gracious host.

3) My third memory of Ilya was later that autumn, when he came to Ottawa to give one of the keynote addresses at the Doukhobor Centenary Conference sponsored by the Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa (the other keynote speaker was Svetlana Inikova, a Russian researcher from Moscow's Ethnographical Institute). This time my wife and I had the privilege of returning Ilya's hospitality as he joined us with several other guests for dinner at our home. During these moments of unofficial conversation, Ilya was kind enough to share with us some of his own precious insights into Doukhobor history — a field at which he was an acknowledged expert. At the conference's closing banquet on Parliament Hill, Ilya was one of the guests singled out for special recognition for his valued contribution, as an experienced Doukhobor researcher, to the multicultural history of Canada.

As a long-time Slavic teacher and translator, I feel honoured to have had the privilege of personal acquaintance with this prominent and well-beloved, albeit modest (in the Doukhobor tradition) Canadian historian. Long may he be remembered as an outstanding spokesman for his people and as a great Canadian!