

VIDEO OF RUSSIA

FROM CATHERINE THE GREAT
TO GREAT RUSSIA



The Free Economic Society
of Russia: 260 Years with
the Country

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THE FREE ECONOMIC SOCIETY OF RUSSIA:
260 YEARS WITH THE COUNTRY

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and one of the oldest in the world, founded in 1765 by Empress Catherine
the Great. It introduces readers to the key milestones in the history of the
VEO of Russia, which are intricately linked with the development of the
Russian state itself.

The book highlights the Society's achievements, initiatives, and endeavors
that, under its banner, advanced significantly and profoundly influenced
the course of the country's history.

The jubilee edition features a portrait gallery of the Presidents of the VEO
of Russia.

This book incorporated materials from previous publications, including
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THE TRIUMVIRATE
OF SCIENCE,
EDUCATION, AND
ENLIGHTENMENT

UNDER THE MOTTO
“USEFUL”



THE TRIUMVIRATE OF SCIENCE, EDUCATION, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

**On the occasion of the 260th Anniversary
of the Free Economic Society of Russia**



SERGEY BODRUNOV

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Russian history knows many significant dates. Some are connected with great or tragic events, others with personalities who have contributed to our history. Some events are large-scale, visibly influencing the course of history, while others are local.

However, there are among them some that, while not marked in mass festive calendars, in reality quite significantly “turned the Russian “historical wheel”, and only over the course of decades, or even hundreds of years, did it become clear how substantial the events marked by such dates were, how important they were for “changing milestones” and the vector of development of Russian society.

The establishment in Russia on October 31 (November 11, according to the new style) 1765, of the Imperial Free Economic Society, should rightly be included among such events.

The publication of “VEO of Russia: 260 Years of Serving the Fatherland” is timed to coincide with this significant date. In 2025, the country’s first civil society institution, the organization — now the Free Economic Society of Russia — will celebrate its anniversary — 260 years. On this day, Empress Catherine the Great issued a decree establishing the Imperial VEO, allowing the use of her personal coat of arms and motto in its symbolism: “A bee bringing honey to the hive”, with the inscription: “Useful”.

The idea of creating an organization, whose main purpose was popular enlightenment, bringing the most advanced practices to the national economy, developing ideas for reforming the economy, social life, and state administration, taking into account Russian realities, foreign experience, and the interests of the population, belonged to the great Russian scientist Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov.

Today, from the historical “distance” of almost three hundred years, it is possible to unequivocally assess the depth of the concept of our brilliant compatriot. Understanding the importance of raising the overall level of “knowledge-intensity” of the national economy and society as a whole for the historical development of Russia, he, while dealing with many reformist issues of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which was then embarking on the path of supporting domestic science, on the one hand, and the actual creation of Russian university education (within the framework of Moscow University) on the other hand — with rare foresight realized that for the sustainable development of the country on the basis of, as we would say today, scientific and technological progress, it is not enough for us to stand “on two pillars” — science and education (especially elite education). For sustainability, a “third pillar” is needed — popular enlightenment. Being himself of humble origins, he understood that neither



Empress and Autocrat
of all Russia

The founding of the VEO in the latter half of the 18th century was more than just significant; it represented a turning point in the history of Russia

new scientists, nor civil figures, reformers, or specialists will appear “out of nowhere”; only the Russian people can give them to Russia — but not “dark, “illiterate people, but enlightened ones”.

Lomonosov was deeply convinced that “our Russian land can give birth to its own Platos and Newtons quick of mind”¹, that it was precisely the trinity of science, education, and enlightenment that would allow us to ensure worthy economic development, and that precisely the triumvirate of “science — education — enlightenment” should become the true master of Russia’s destiny. M.V. Lomonosov’s note on the issues of establishing a Society that, among other important tasks, would aim at enlightenment, including through the implementation of progressive economic innovations in various spheres of life, became key to the decision to create the Imperial VEO.

The establishment of the VEO in the second half of the 18th century was not just important — it was a pivotal event in the history of our country. Thanks to the ideas of M.V. Lomonosov and the decisiveness of Catherine the Great, Russia gained the first platform that united leading scientists, public and state figures for a common goal: to find solutions to the pressing problems of the country’s economic life. The VEO became not only the first harbinger but also a forerunner of civil society, an authoritative centre of public and scientific thought, and a mouthpiece for public opinion on topical issues of socio-economic development of the country. Despite the fact that this opinion did not always fit into the official economic doctrine, and sometimes even contradicted it, the state took the VEO’s position into account. This has been the case at all times!

Why is the history of the VEO of Russia of great interest not only to researchers but also to a wide range of readers? The answer is obvious — by illustrating the process of the emergence, formation, and strengthening of the institutional foundations of civil society in Russia, the history of the Free Economic Society provides a key to understanding the past, present, and future of our country, the scale of activities of domestic public institutions, their determining role in the socio-economic development of the country, and the colossal contribution to culture, education, science, and economic practice.

Returning to the publication of the book that we open with this article, we note that its authors aimed not only to acquaint readers with the history of the VEO of Russia but also to look deep into the centuries, to analyse what processes, innovative approaches, and ideas stood at the origins of civil society in Russia and created the prerequisites for its emergence. To answer this question, one should turn to the personality of the outstanding domestic scholar-encyclopedist Mikhail Lomonosov. It was his ideas that formed the basis of the first charter of the VEO. According to the scholar’s deep conviction, socio-economic development of the country is possible only under the condition of synergy of three forces — science, education, and civil society. The essence of this breakthrough (for that time) approach is as follows: the results of fundamental research must be translated into the soil of public knowledge and discussion, and then — integrated into practice. Only in this case, the results of scientific work become the engine of progress and benefit the country. The VEO became the missing key link in the chain of “science — education — enlightenment”, the first tribune in the history of Russia, designed to promote advanced scientific and economic thought into practice.

Let us emphasize that Mikhail Lomonosov’s contribution to the creation of the triumvirate of “science — education — enlightened civil society” is unprecedented. Thanks to the academician, not only the first institute

The history of the Free Economic Society (VEO) provides a key to understanding the past, present, and future of our country, the scale of activity of domestic public institutions, their defining role in the socio-economic development of the country, and their colossal contribution to culture, education, science, and economic practice

of civil society in the country, the Imperial VEO, appeared, but also the oldest Russian university was founded — the Imperial Moscow University (now Lomonosov Moscow State University). The scientist also played a key role in the development of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences (today — the Russian Academy of Sciences).

From the moment of its foundation, the entire intellectual elite of the country was involved in the work of the VEO. The leading scientists of their time, the best minds of the Academy of Sciences, under the aegis of the VEO, developed comprehensive solutions to the agricultural and socio-economic problems of the country.

As the first historiographer of the VEO, Alexei Ivanovich Khodnev, wrote “For a long time, most of the members of the Academy were members of the Free Economic Society and took the most active part in its activities. Developing issues here with the closest application to Russia and studying its natural products, they brought science closer to life and wished to bring direct benefit to the country”².

The reader will undoubtedly have the opportunity to be convinced of this in the pages of this publication, so I will give only a few examples of how the VEO brought science closer to practice. Dmitry Ivanovich Mendeleev, the author of the periodic system of chemical elements, conducted experiments in the field of agricultural chemistry on behalf of the VEO and found a solution to one of the key tasks of that time — increasing crop yields. On behalf of the VEO, the famous Russian geographer Peter Petrovich Semenov-Tyan-Shansky and publicist Nikolai Yakovlevich Danilevsky explored the possibilities of involving the lands of the Chernozem region in agricultural circulation. Alexander Mikhailovich Butlerov, the creator of the theory of chemical structure of organic substances and head of the Beekeeping Commission of the VEO, developed advanced beekeeping practices in the country. Close cooperation between the Imperial VEO and the Academy of Sciences was always of great importance. Almost all members of the Academy of Sciences were members of the VEO. Thus, academics Jacob von Staehlin, mathematician Leonhard Euler, geographer Peter Rychkov, mineralogist Johann Lehmann, chemist and botanist Erik Laxmann, historian Ivan Taubert, mechanic and inventor Andrei Nartov, and many others took an active part in the life of the VEO in the second half of the 18th century.

In addition, the Academy of Sciences and the VEO equipped joint research expeditions. On behalf of and at the expense of the VEO, Academician Vasily Vasilyevich Dokuchaev undertook a series of expeditions to study chernozem in 1877–1881. The result of this work was the fundamental, unique work “Russian Chernozem”, which was awarded the gratitude of the VEO and the Makariy Prize of the Academy of Sciences.

Moreover, throughout the entire pre-revolutionary period of the history of the VEO, the Society was headed by members of the Academy of Sciences. In 1797–1813, Andrei Andreevich Nartov, an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences, was the president of the VEO; in 1823–1840, Count Nikolai Semenovich Mordvinov, an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences; in 1841–1845, Alexei Samuilovich Greig, an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences; in 1845–1859, Prince Peter Georgievich Oldenburg, an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences; in 1859–1860, Alexander Fedorovich Middendorf, an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences; in 1861–1865, Evgraf Petrovich Kovalevsky, an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences; in 1906–1918, Ordinary Academician Andrei Sergeevich Famintsyn³.

Emblem of the Free Economic Society of the 18th Century



The reader will learn more about these and other outstanding figures from the section featuring biographies and materials from the portrait gallery of the founders and presidents of the Free Economic Society of Russia, preserved in its archives as a tribute to the people who made significant contributions to the history of the Society, shaped and strengthened the traditions of patronage in Russia. With the personal funds of many of them, the VEO implemented grandiose projects: research expeditions were conducted, experimental fields were organized in different provinces of the country, educational institutions, museums, and agricultural workshops were opened, and advanced agricultural exhibitions were held.

The VEO played a leading role in many areas of agricultural development, in the establishment of domestic statistics, insurance, preschool, school, and commercial education, and healthcare. “There was not a single question in the economic and economic life of the country in which our Society did not participate, and often was not the initiator”⁴, noted Andrei Nikolaevich Beketov, secretary of the VEO and famous botanist, in 1890.

The anniversary publication examines in detail the main milestones in the history of the VEO of Russia over 260 years. Let us outline with broad strokes only the key storylines that give a general idea of the multifaceted and large-scale activities that the VEO conducted for more than a quarter of a millennium.

One of the most striking pages in the history of the VEO is the fight against smallpox. The Society helped to eradicate the most terrible disease of the 19th century by supporting universal vaccination. The VEO purchased medicines, trained medical personnel, and sent doctors to all regions of the country. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the educational activities of the VEO. In 1861, the Literacy Committee was founded. During its 35 years of operation, this structure published more than 2 million copies of educational literature, primers, books, textbooks, which were distributed through parish schools, vocational schools, and charitable institutions.

Today, 260 years later, the VEO of Russia continues to play an important role in the social, economic, and scientific life of the country, remaining a unique intellectual platform. A separate section is devoted to the newest history of the VEO of Russia, which is intended to show how the traditions and principles of the Imperial VEO are reflected in the work of the society today, and to give the reader an idea of the activities of the VEO of Russia in the 21st century.

Times change. But the values underlying the activities of the Free Economic Society of Russia remain unchanged. The VEO of Russia, as it was 260 years ago, is open to representatives of all economic and social movements who care about the fate of their country. I remind you, the VEO was never a closed club for the elect. This is evidenced by the memoirs of the writer Vikenty Vikentyevich Veresaev: “The meeting hall of the 3rd department of the Free Economic Society, where reports were made on topical economic topics, was bursting with the public... everywhere disputes were raging”⁵. More than a hundred years have passed since these lines were written, but the VEO, as before, respects any ideas and proposals, provided that their goal is the prosperity of Russia.

It is no secret that the best solutions are born at the intersection of competencies, industries, and disciplines. In search of answers to global challenges, we are forced to turn to knowledge and methods from various scientific fields, so the VEO of Russia has always involved the entire domestic scientific community in its work. And today, the society unites in its ranks not only economists, but also mathematicians, philosophers, sociologists, geographers, demographers, chemists, climatologists, hydrologists, ecologists, and other specialists.

At the dawn of the history of the Free Economic Society, Catherine II attracted foreign scientists and foreign researchers to participate in work for the benefit of the Russian economy. Many of them worked at the Imperial Free Economic Society. Today, the VEO of Russia preserves and develops this important tradition, taking international scientific research to a new level, strengthening and expanding scientific cooperation with foreign countries — including China, India, and other friendly countries. Today, in the “portfolio of contacts” of the VEO of Russia are well-known scientists and specialists from 60 countries.

And finally, even today, the key, fundamental principle of the work of the VEO of Russia is activity for the good and for the prosperity of our country, to be useful to Russian society, to continue to remain “a bee bringing honey to the hive”. In our days, the Society conducts active educational, scientific-expert and analytical work, develops recommendations and proposals for the development of economic education, ensuring technological, economic and scientific sovereignty of the country, and achieving the national development goals of the Russian Federation. The results of this work do not go unnoticed. The significant contribution of the VEO of Russia to the “organization of open discussions on the most important issues of the national agenda” and “active participation in the life of the country” was noted by the President of Russia Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.

It is clear that it is impossible to cover the entire history of the VEO of Russia in the pages of one book. The Society plans to implement a large-scale project of a multi-volume publication dedicated to the activities of the VEO of Russia in the near future, from the second half of the 18th century to the present day. It can be hoped, nevertheless, that even this short edition will allow the reader to appreciate the importance and necessity of the work of the VEO of Russia, as well as other public organizations, to ensure “social health” and the development of civil society. And, of course, to immerse themselves in the historical context and take a fresh look at the contribution of civil society institutions to the socio-economic development of the country, to realize how powerful a resource public organizations have always represented and represent today for the consolidation of intellectual potential and the progress of the country.

The highest award of the VEO of Russia is the Grand Gold Medal of the Free Economic Society



UNDER THE MOTTO “USEFUL”



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“A bee bringing honey to the hive” is the motto of Catherine the Great, given by her to the Free Economic Society at its birth in 1765. A very significant definition was added to it: “Useful”. And for 260 years, the Free Economic Society has been working usefully for the benefit of Russia. “Barrels of honey”, annually extracted by the Society in the form of practical recommendations, scientific articles, scientific conferences, have brought and continue to bring much benefit to the Russian economy, contributing to its progress.

Several important nuances are associated with “honey” to which I would like to draw attention. It is generally accepted that the bear is the national symbol of Russia, and the “United Russia” party even chose it as its symbol. And a bear is “one who knows honey”. So, if we take the bear as an image of Russia, then the symbol of the Free Economic Society, which for 260 years has generously given the country natural, healthy “honey” and faithfully served the Fatherland, echoes it.

The history of the VEO is inseparable from Catherine’s intentions, characteristic of the beginning of her reign, to implement the principles of enlightened absolutism. The Empress considered it important to educate the society that needs to be governed fairly, to introduce good order, to force everyone to comply with the laws, to make the state abundant and inspiring respect. The Empress reflected on these ideas in 1765, when she decided to found the Free Economic Society. Catherine understood that first of all she needed to strengthen the state and raise the economy. As in the days of Peter, there were also state-owned factories, but the basis, of course, was the noble household economy, agricultural production. Therefore, Catherine II favorably responded to the proposal of her associates to use Lomonosov’s project in his note

“Opinion on the Establishment of the State Collegium of Land Home Building” in creating a public organization that would deal with the development of agriculture. This project spoke of creating a public body that would deal with improving home building, land management, farming on the land, would take care of agriculture, forests, roads, canals, and village crafts. This project was written by Lomonosov back in 1763, but the Empress was acquainted with it later, when she was thinking about practical steps to raise agriculture as the basis for multiplying Russia’s prosperity. Lomonosov’s ideas, supported by Catherine II, were embodied in the organizational structure and in the principles of the Free Economic Society. Lomonosov’s reflections on the Collegium of Home Building, the very motto of the Society, indicate that it was created to serve Russia, to establish it as a great power, and was consistent with Catherine II’s overall planned program of restructuring Russia. If we set major milestones, reference points that define the scale of measurement of achievements in the development of the VEO of Russia, then what criterion should we choose to identify these points? It seems that the history of the VEO also contains the answer to this question. The Free Economic Society was not engaged in naked theorizing, not in scientific research of some abstract truth abstracted from life.

From the very first moment of its activity, it took on practical, pressing problems of the country, ways to improve its socio-economic arrangement.

Emblem of the Free Economic
Society of the 18th Century



The VEO has always been engaged in educational and enlightening activities, which were copious and diverse

In essence, in one form or another, the VEO has always been engaged in educational and enlightening activities, which were rich and diverse. From its first steps, the Society began to distribute printed products, invite the most authoritative authors to prepare materials, talk to readers about who manages their household, sought to buy new literature, significant foreign publications, translate them into Russian, make extracts from these works and publish them.

Such a fact is also characteristic. In 1861, the Literacy Committee was organized in the VEO, which operated until 1896, published more than 120 separate works on public education, textbooks, published books for reading, primers. The total circulation of publications exceeded 2 million copies. Parochial schools, vocational schools, and charitable institutions were provided with books. The society helped to distribute educational and special literature in remote regions of the country.

The educational activities of the VEO of Russia are developing today. An important role in the socio-economic life of the country is played by scientific, educational, and training projects of the VEO of Russia: the All-Russian Economic Dictation; youth competition of scientific works of youth; the All-Russian prize "Economic Book of the Year"; the All-Russian competition of economic journalism; publication of "Transactions of the VEO of Russia", economic journals, and analytical materials.

Today we have forgotten what smallpox is. Russia should be eternally grateful to the VEO for its enormous work in eliminating it. Why did the VEO take on smallpox? Smallpox was very widespread in Russia, knocked out the most hardworking population from productive labor, deprived a person of the opportunity to work at working age, and left marks not only on the face, but also on the map of the population, as entire regions died out. The VEO of Russia was engaged in smallpox vaccination, purchased medicines, necessary materials, organized vaccination, trained medical personnel, published the necessary literature, and sent doctors to various regions. Every year the number of vaccinated people increased and the disease receded. This was a solution to an important social problem of preserving the population, which can be compared with today's initiatives such as the payment of maternity capital, the creation of regional perinatal centers, and ensuring the health of the younger generation.

Among these reference points should be mentioned the support of scientific and technological progress, the dissemination of scientific and technological innovations in agriculture. The VEO took care that landowners could acquire new agricultural equipment, get acquainted with the best methods of land cultivation. The VEO always promoted the dissemination of technical innovations, had its own mechanical workshop, acquired new equipment for its exhibitions and distribution in the regions of the country.

There are many areas of activity of the VEO, but it has always had an attachment to the problems of today, which are important for the future of Russia. It is worth recalling the initiative role of the VEO in the creation of insurance companies, the production of fire-fighting equipment, and the use of new methods of fighting fires, and the drainage of swamps. If we talk about the discussions about the abolition of serfdom, the VEO was not just a participant, but an initiator. One of the presidents of the Society, K. Kavelin, proposed his own project for the abolition of serfdom and even tested several options for the emancipation of peasants in various farms owned by members of the imperial family. This experience served as invaluable material for the reform of 1861.

As examples of the VEO's economic initiatives, let us recall its role in the dissemination of potatoes, sunflowers, and cheese making.

* * *

The history of the Free Economic Society (VEO) is, in fact, the history of Russia. It has always been closely connected with Russian science, the Russian intelligentsia, with the economic life of the country, with its needs and problems.

Throughout its 260-year history, the VEO has proved the usefulness and extreme necessity for our Fatherland. Without the Society, without the discussions and debates, works and research it conducted, many events in Russian history would have acquired a completely different shade, a completely different direction of development.

All this can be assumed and asserted with a high degree of confidence, since the authority of the VEO, the significance of its research and conclusions were so high that the opinion of the Society was always heeded by the authorities, the opposition, the scientific community, publicists, right-wing and left-wing political figures — all who cared about the welfare of Russia. All of them adjusted their position taking into account the results and recommendations of the Society, which always stood on real ground with restrained and competent analysis of scientific facts, professing sound pragmatism, rationality and expediency. So what are the historical lessons of the Free Economic Society of Russia's usefulness to the Fatherland?

First. Focus on the future, on anticipating. Without breaking away from the realities of the current day, having a strategic view, not blinkered by immediate interests, but aimed at the future, the VEO in all its actions strives, tracking the essential connections of the past, to improve the present, to form a better future.

Second. Reliance on the entire scientific potential of the country, active involvement of the entire domestic scientific community in the work of the VEO.

In the activities of the VEO, many ideas expressed by Lomonosov, Mendeleev, Vernadsky, Kovalevsky and other famous scientists found their development. The contribution of the VEO to the study and forma-

“Transactions” of the Free
Economic Society



tion of domestic statistics, demography, historical science, education and culture, law, and publishing is invaluable. Thus, the VEO actively promoted craft training, the creation of a system of secondary specialized education in the country along with higher and primary education. The VEO often gave impetus, contributed to the development of new branches of agricultural and industrial production — the cultivation of potatoes, cheese making, the creation of new technology, the development of new deposits, etc. And all these problems were discussed in the Society taking into account the historical perspective, progressive directions of social development, with the involvement of the widest range of specialists, scientists, public figures. In the ranks of the VEO work not only econo-



***In all its actions,
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mists, not only business executives, but also representatives of other professions — geographers, chemists, sociologists, social scientists and political scientists. Among them are Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, Mendeleev, Chayanov, Przhevalsky, Sorokin... One can name many other surnames of prominent Russian scientists who collaborated with the VEO. In other words, the VEO never closed in its “corporate” apartment, was never an isolated, professional, “guild” union of economists. It attracted representatives of the most diverse branches of knowledge, everyone and anyone who could contribute to the solution of the tasks set by the Society.

Third. Systemic, comprehensive, fundamental scientific study of the national economic problems facing the country. With all obviousness, it can be boldly asserted that the VEO immediately came out of the narrow circle of its statutory tasks. After all, as you know, in the initial plan of work and the charter of the Society it was written that it was created to improve agriculture and home building. And Catherine the Great herself proposed for discussion the issue of land ownership of the peasantry, which did not fall under the statutory tasks, thereby showing that she gives the activities of the Society a higher status, expects from it “free”, independent proposals for the development of the socio-class, socio-estate, spiritual and moral structure of the Russian state.

The VEO's commitment to a deep, multifaceted study of its statutory tasks is maintained throughout its life. The fundamental works of the VEO were used in almost all sectors of the economy, and not only in Russia. The “knowledge” obtained in Russia was actively translated into foreign languages, thereby the VEO solved not only the image problems of Russia, but also contributed to the development of its economic science, new directions of culture, education. The VEO played its creative role in the accumulation of the country's cultural, social, and political potential.

Fourth. The high international status of the contests and studies conducted by the VEO, giving a broad international dimension to the activities of the VEO. If we turn again to the origins, to the competition announced by Empress Catherine, we should recall that on the problems of land ownership of the peasantry, out of the one hundred and sixty-odd works received, only seven were in Russian. The rest were in German, French and English. The winner was a French researcher who wrote that before deciding the question of land endowment for a peasant, it is necessary to decide the question of his educational training, to instill in him professional skills and the ability to use his labor. The Society, conducting this competition, immediately raised it to a prestigious level of scientific research of international level. All the best domestic and foreign minds took part in the discussion of the competition theme.

And this focus on attracting the best talent to work and collaborate with the VEO has also been maintained throughout its subsequent development.

Fifth. The liberty, independence, autonomy and proud authority of the VEO in all its actions and endeavors. The very name of the Society — Free Economic — speaks volumes, and above all that it is an independent, autonomous Society.

If we look at the history of the 19th century, pay attention to the socio-political currents that prevailed in the public thought of our Fatherland, an unprepared person can easily get confused in them. There were Westernizers and Slavophiles. There were intelligent Marxists and anti-Marxists, populists and refined anti-populists. One can also recall anarchists, cadets, socialists, SRs, Octobrists, monarchists, nihilists who recognized nothing, atheists, and all the other “zealots” of freedom.

Engraving illustrating the activities of the Free Economic Society (1870-1890)



And in each of these social movements there were many interesting personalities, interesting theories. But, most importantly, representatives of all these socio-political movements actively used the works of the VEO when justifying their “views” and conclusions. This also applies to works on statistics, measurements of the social climate in the country, to assessments of the educational and cultural level of its population, and much more. Such data were used as weighty, indisputable arguments in discussions. Many representatives of different social movements participated in discussions organized by the VEO on topical issues, and were often members of the VEO.

Characteristically, however, the VEO never took anyone's point of view for the only true and correct one. The position of the Society was like an axial, core line, through which all these currents and opinions intertwined, enriching each other. The VEO always stood on solid positions of real practice and had its own independent, sober, analytical, practical, objective calculation and view. This view was constantly riveted on the pressing problems of today and tomorrow of our Motherland.

* * *

The VEO plays a significant role in the life of Russia today. As the long history of the Society shows, agronomists and botanists, chemists and metallurgists, geographers and statisticians have actively collaborated in its ranks. And today the composition of the Society is very wide. It is not only and not so much within individual sciences, but at the intersection of various fields of knowledge that truths and breakthrough technologies are born. Hence the interest of the VEO in various forms of work with all specialists and with all organizations striving in their activities for the benefit of Russia. 260 years — more than a quarter of a millennium! Over the years, thousands of different “bees” — scientists, practitioners, government and public figures — have worked to ensure that the Russian state grows not only with talents, young scientists, but also with real, concrete, useful, practical knowledge and the results of their effective economic application. The Free Economic Society is a “hive rich in bees”, constantly filled with life-giving and healing honey. May it always be so!

HOW THE VEO OF RUSSIA WAS ENGENDERED



Portrait of Catherine II
in her coronation dress.
Vigilius Eriksen. Russia.
The 1760s.



The Free Economic Society appeared in one of the most interesting periods of Russian history — the golden age of Catherine the Great. The personality of Catherine II, the ideas, the rosy ideas about the role of supreme power at the beginning of her reign determined the appearance of the planned transformations, which the empress based on the philosophy of the European Enlightenment. In this sense, her reign is called the era of “enlightened absolutism”. Of course, in many ways enlightened absolutism was a utopia, an ideal dream of a strong union of philosophers and kings. The emergence of the Free Economic Society serves as proof of an attempt to conclude such a union.

In one of her notes, Catherine II recorded how exactly to carry out what she had conceived in the management of the state:

“There is no need to rush, but it is necessary to work without rest and every day try to gradually eliminate obstacles as they appear”.

These words are also true in relation to the brilliant activity of the Free Society. The 260th anniversary serves as a wonderful occasion to tell how the glorious path of the Society began.

From Lomonosov's idea to the Free Economic Society of Russia

Catherine ascended the Russian throne as a result of a palace coup, overthrowing her unpopular husband, but the legitimate sovereign, Peter III. This largely determined the nature of her reign, especially in the early years. She, as the famous writer N.I. Grech noted, “*had to redeem with hard work, great services and sacrifices... what lawful tsars have without labor. This very necessity was partly the spring of her great and brilliant deeds*”⁶.

In the early years of her reign, Catherine II often reflected on ways to improve Russian agriculture, the possibility of putting it on a scientific basis. At first, she wanted to organize a corresponding department at the Academy of Sciences, and began to think with whom of her associates to discuss this idea. Finally, she remembered Andrei Andreevich Nartov, who had just retired by that time and who had been recommended to her earlier by her librarian I.I. Taubert.

Meeting with A.A. Nartov, Catherine outlined to him her intentions. Nartov, being an ardent patriot of Russia and perfectly aware of how invaluable assistance to agriculture — at that time the main source of the country's prosperity — science could provide, promised the Empress to carefully consider and discuss her idea with Taubert.

I.I. Taubert, although he had many professional disagreements with M.V. Lomonosov, highly appreciated his work “On the multiplication and preservation of the Russian people” and advised Nartov to personally contact the famous scientist.

Mikhail Vasilyevich had long been concerned with the issues of improving Russian agriculture and rural home building. Lomonosov, like no one else in his time, sought to raise the level of agriculture, dreamed of scientific agriculture, which ordinary landowners, who built their economy on free labor and the oppression of serfs, hardly thought about. In his economic projects and proposals, Lomonosov calls for knowledge of the national economy of his country, a comprehensive study of the conditions of its economic development⁷.

Back in late 1759 — early 1760, M.V. Lomonosov outlines a project for a special State Collegium of Land (Rural) Home Building, which supplies theses on the nature of its activities⁸.

M.V. Lomonosov, lifetime image,
E. Fessar and K.A. Wortman, 1757



M.V. Lomonosov “Opinion on the Establishment of the State Collegium of Land Home Building”

Collegium

President	}	Advisors	{	very knowledge-
Vice-President				able in natural
Physicist	}	Advisors	{	Physicist
Chemist				Chemist
Botanist				Natural History and Physician
Foreman	}			Assessor
Gardener				
Lessee				
Noblemen	}			Correspondents
Secretary				
2 Chancellery Clerks				
Commissioner				
Junior Clerks				
Guards				
Translators				Printing House
Two Secretaries			}	for current affairs
				for publications
Procurator				

1. Instead of many members, relations with scientists and other bodies.
2. Although much is published in the German lands and elsewhere, it is little used, even though there are many literate people, while here there are only compositions. Where there are few literate people, there will be very little benefit.
3. Overseers. They should not be under the command of the chieftains, but should be given written instructions.
4. To combine with the Academy will bring no good.
5. Stress the need to ensure everyone receives an education.
7. Members throughout the state.
8. The duty of members is to read foreign books and conduct correspondence.
9. To read essays and theologize.
10. To report new natural occurrences to the collegium in kind.
11. How to publish books by the New Year.
12. Library.
13. Tasks with rewards.
14. Relations with the Academy and with the Medical Faculty and general meetings.
15. Meetings every day. And that this should not be done as a sideline, a small gathering.
16. News and information about the weather, harvests and crop failures, and droughts. See the economic reports.
17. Here in the vicinity there is a village and peasants, where there would be different places, mountainous and dry, swampy and clayey, and meadowy.
18. Permission for all kinds of people to submit information about the economy.



Grigory Nikolaevich Teplov

19. *Look into internal surpluses within the state. See..*
20. *Concerning forests.*
21. *Absent or honorary members should be located throughout the provinces, two or three per province, drawn from the nobility, managers of state and palace villages; and they should be summoned as the case requires.*
22. *Concerning roads and canals.*
23. *Rural crafts and trades.*
24. *Concerning products.*
25. *In the village, a manager oversees the peasants.*
26. *Although members of the college may compose pieces, their primary duty is to understand and discuss submitted writings, and therefore not all professions are needed.*
27. *They should know the Russian language.*
28. *Fundamental points.*
29. *Comparison with other colleges, and that the College of Rural Management is the most necessary of all.*
30. *Offices by region.*
31. *Revenues to the treasury.*

According to M.V. Lomonosov's idea, this should be a special scientific institution, designed to develop issues of agriculture according to a very broad program. The college should be headed by a president and vice-president, very knowledgeable in the natural sciences. The college's advisors should be a physicist, chemist, natural historian, and physician. In addition, it should include a botanist, a mechanic, a geologist, and practical specialists: a foreman, a gardener, and others.

The collegium should rely on a wide network of correspondents from the nobility and managers of state and palace villages. Lomonosov particularly emphasizes "permission for all kinds of people to submit information about the economy", that is, he is concerned with gradually involving a wider range of the population in the work of the college. The college should collect information about the weather, "about harvests and crop failures and droughts", monitor economic life related to agriculture, and study export opportunities, or, as Lomonosov says, "look into internal surpluses within the state".

Among the topics to be studied, Lomonosov outlines: "concerning forests", "concerning roads and canals", "rural crafts and trades", etc. In his project, M.V. Lomonosov envisages the creation of an experimental agrotechnical base, for which it is necessary to allocate a plot of land near St. Petersburg, "where there would be different places, mountainous and dry, swampy and clayey, and meadow".

The duties of the members of the college include "reading new foreign books" in order to use everything valuable for the needs of Russian agriculture. However, scientists should not bury themselves in literature, but constantly think about practice: "Although much is published in the German lands and elsewhere, it is little used".

The college should maintain contact with the Academy of Sciences and the Medical Faculty — centers of natural sciences of that time. At the same time, Lomonosov insists that the College of Rural Management be an independent institution, independent of the Academy⁹. He emphasizes the need for publishing activities of the College he conceived, the organization of a library, and the holding of scientific and practical competitions with encouragement and awards for the winners. In addition, he speaks about the importance of organizing frequent meetings


Right: M.V. Lomonosov.
Opinion on the establishment
of a state collegium of rural
management. 1763. Sheet 1.
Archive of the Russian Academy
of Sciences

№ А. 15. 2701
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Мнѣ о учрежденіи Государственной
 Архивной ~~Службы~~ ^{Академіи} ~~домашней~~ ^{статс}.

Архивная ^{Служба} ~~Служба~~ } ^{Решена} ^{завести} ^и ^{на} ^{каждой} ^{губерніи} ^и ^{на} ^{кавказѣ}.

сравнительно ^{хиланд} ^{Балканскій} ^{Университетъ} } ^{Составлена} ^{французскою} ^{Академіею} ^и ^{русскими} ^{учеными} ^и ^{кавказскими} ^{учеными}.



французскій ^{университетъ} } ^{Академія}
 Балканскій }
 Хиландскій }
 и др. } ^{Корреспонденты}.

Секретарь. ^{Корреспондентъ}
 2. Канцелярскій ^{указъ}
 Канцелярскій.
~~№ 25~~ ^{каждый} ^{въ} ^{своемъ} ^{окладѣ}
 Служба

Полученіи. Типографія
 для Секретаря } ^{для} ^{исполненія} ^{обязанностей}
 для Канцелярскій } ^{для} ^{исполненія} ^{обязанностей}

Трансакція.

Collegiums that should be dedicated to discussing serious issues, and not turn into formal gatherings.

M.V. Lomonosov considered the close connection between research activity and extensive practical agricultural experiments in the work of the College to be very important. He pointed out the necessity of drawing up the College's charter.

Lomonosov showed his project to Nartov, who had turned to him. Nartov found Lomonosov's ideas and considerations very reasonable and, in general terms, outlined his concept to I.I. Taubert and G.N. Teplov, another of Catherine II's closest associates. They enthusiastically supported the idea of creating a learned society of practitioners, independent of the rather unwieldy Academy of Sciences at that time and not having state affiliation. I.I. Taubert presented the idea to the Empress. She favorably received the proposed new format for the society and instructed them to begin its formation.

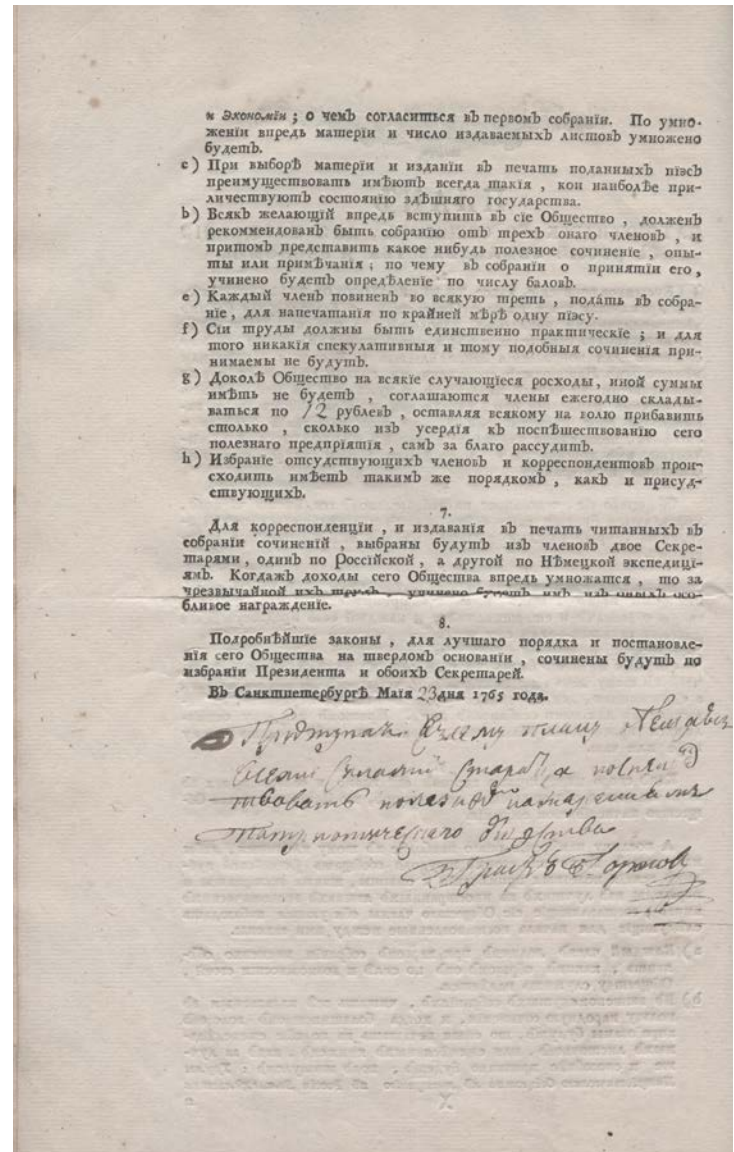
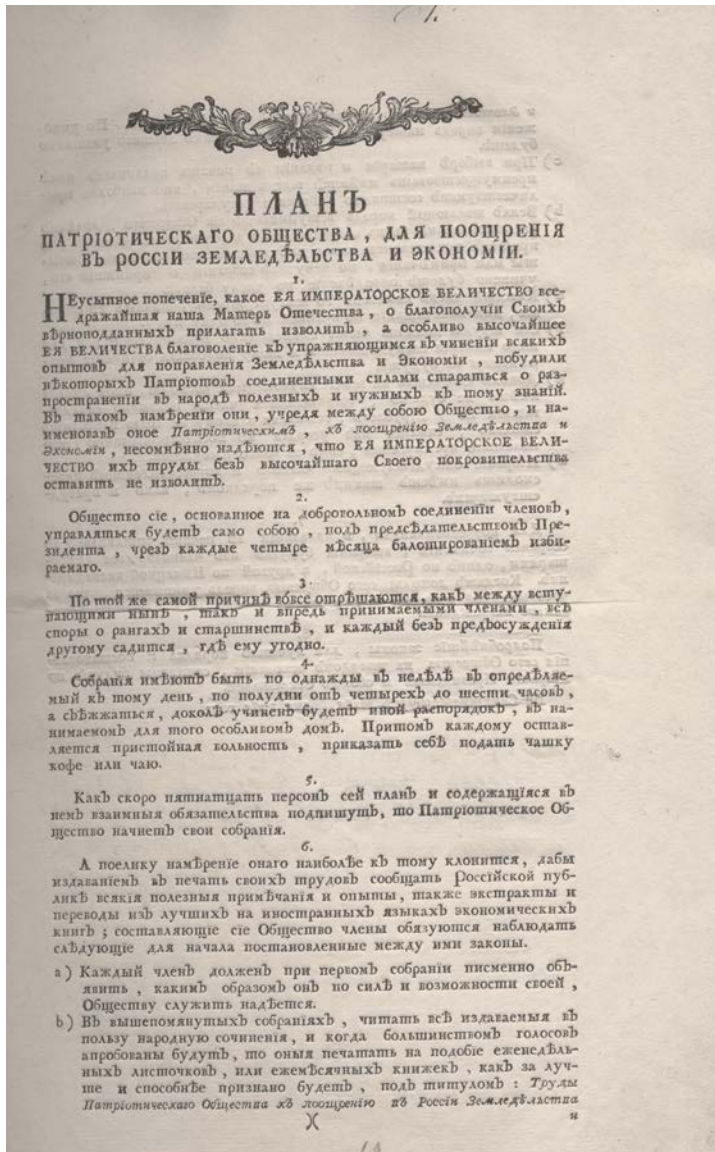
There is a version that I.I. Taubert wanted to hide Lomonosov's participation in the development of the project from Catherine¹⁰. After two and a half centuries, it is difficult to say whether this is actually the case. However, a careful study of the circumstances of Lomonosov's life does not confirm the existence of grounds for such intentions. Yes, the Empress was at one time wary of M.V. Lomonosov, but by 1764 he had once again become favorably viewed by her.

Nartov, Taubert, and Teplov began to develop a plan for the future organization — the Patriotic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Economy in Russia. It was decided that the founding group would consist of 15 people, and each of them would select four people to participate, thus, together with themselves, the core of the founders would be formed.

By the spring of 1765, negotiations with future participants were completed, and a composition of 14 people, "distinguished by learning and nobility", was determined¹¹:

1. Count Grigori Grigorievich Orlov, General of the Artillery, General-in-Chief, and Adjutant General to the Empress.
2. Count Roman Illarionovich Vorontsov, Actual Chamberlain, Actual Privy Council, Senator.
3. Count Ivan Grigorievich Chernyshev, Actual Chamberlain and Member of the Admiralty Collegium.
4. Adam Vasilievich Olsufyev, Minister of the Empress's Cabinet, Member of the State Collegium of Foreign Affairs, Senator.
5. Baron Alexander Ivanovich Cherkasov, Actual Chamberlain, President of the Medical Collegium.
6. Grigori Nikolaevich Teplov, Actual State Council.
7. Ivan Ivanovich Taubert, Librarian to the Empress, State Council.
8. Timofei Ivanovich Klingstedt, Vice-President of the Justice Collegium of Livonian, Estonian, and Finnish Affairs.
9. Andrei Andreievich Nartov, Lieutenant Colonel of Artillery, Member of the Berg Collegium of the Mint.
10. Christian Peken, Learned Secretary and Member of the Medical Collegium, Collegiate Council.
11. Johann Georg Model, Member of the Medical Collegium, Court Council.
12. Johann Gottlieb Lehmann, Professor of Chemistry, Member of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences and the Royal Prussian Academy of Mining.
13. Johann Peter Falck, Professor of Botany at the Apothecary Garden.
14. Ekleben, court gardener.

“As I embark on this plan, I promise to strive with all my might to promote the useful intentions of the patriotic society”, — Grigori Orlov



Typeset form of the Plan of the Patriotic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Economy in Russia, with the signature of Count Grigori Orlov (1765)

наго Патриота.

Франц Готлоб Леманн

Секретарь С. Императорского

Лейб-Библиотекарю

Гос. Библ. Москвитину

Г. Мейеру

Ивану Мавро

Андрею Хармю

Хенриху Ганову

Генералу Мюллеру
Графу Шернштуру

Хуберу
Графу Раммелю

Михайлу Соколову

Раневскому

The main significant change to the plan concerned the name of the organization; in the charter, it was already referred to as the “Free Economic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Household Management in Russia”

It was decided to meet for an organizational session without delay, at which to elect the fifteenth member, or include him later. The founders gathered for the first time on May 22, 1765. I.I. Taubert presented the developed plan for the Society.

The plan was adopted by those assembled, each of them placing his signature on a sheet where the plan was printed and, in its conclusion, inscribed:

“As I embark on this plan, I promise to strive with all my might to promote the useful intentions of the patriotic society”.

At this meeting, in addition to the plan, it was decided to develop “for the better order and establishment of the Society on a solid foundation” a charter for the Society, where the organizational structure and all positions in the organization being created would be clearly defined:

To review the charter, the founders gathered on June 15, 1765, in the so-called Shtengel'man House, at that time belonging to G.G. Orlov. Only Count Grigori Grigorievich Orlov and Count Ivan Grigorievich Chernyshev were absent, having valid reasons, and having notified the meeting of their absence in advance. The document, based on the previously signed plan, but expanded and supplemented with necessary details, was again presented by I.I. Taubert. The main significant change to the plan concerned the name of the organization; in the charter, it was already referred to as the “Free Economic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Household Management in Russia”. The word “free” in the name emphasized its status — freedom from state pressure and independence from bureaucratic structures. After making minor changes and additions, those assembled approved the Society's charter in the following wording.

Original Charter of the Free Economic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Household Management in Russia:

1. The Society is founded on the voluntary association of members and intends to be self-governing under the chairmanship of a president elected by vote every four months.
2. For the same reason, disputes about ranks and seniority are abolished in the relationships between members of the Society; everyone sits where he pleases, and everyone is granted reasonable freedom to order a cup of coffee or tea.
3. The Society consists of full members, correspondents, and auscultants.
4. The president, secretaries, and treasurer are elected from among the members: the president for four months, and the secretaries and treasurer remain unchanged until the Society decides to replace them, or they themselves wish to leave.
5. The President:
 - cannot order anything personally;
 - can only allocate expenses from the public treasury with the knowledge of the assembly;
 - has one vote, but in the event of an equal number of votes, the side on which the president votes gains the advantage;
 - signs letters on behalf of the Society, approves approved writings for publication, and, together with the secretaries, signs members' diplomas;
 - can convene extraordinary meetings, monitors compliance with the charter, and the prompt execution by members of the Society's assignments;

- in the event of his absence from a meeting, elects one of the members to perform presidential duties;
 - upon relinquishing the title, gives a report on the activities of the society and its members, and on the state of funds in the treasury;
 - proposes three members for election as president.
6. There are two secretaries, one for the Russian and one for the German expedition; in addition to keeping minutes and correspondence, they are responsible for maintaining the library and publishing "Transactions".
 7. Members and correspondents are elected, upon the proposal of three members and the presentation of a useful composition or experience, at the fourth meeting after the nomination of the candidate. Only governors are accepted without voting, for the sake of possible services to the Society from them, given their position. Each member must declare how he hopes to serve the Society.

Members are obliged to:

- conduct experiments in all parts of the national economy, from agriculture, animal and fish industries to mining and manufacturing, and report on them;
- give their own compositions on various parts of private and state economy;
- make excerpts from foreign writers on economics applicable in Russia;
- present new inventions in mechanics and rural architecture, which the Society itself will also promote by distributing models of new tools to such members;
- each member undertakes to submit at least one composition in every third of the year;
- perform the Society's assignments and contribute 12 rubles annually.
- Anyone who has not rendered service to the Society during the year is excluded.

Works must be practical and most applicable to Russia, and speculative works are not accepted.

The duties of correspondents are the same as those of members; auscultants are appointed specifically for translations, but have no vote.

8. Meetings are held once a week, on Wednesdays, from 4 to 6 o'clock in the afternoon; at the meetings, the minutes of the preceding meeting, letters, writings are read, and questions are proposed for discussion, writings are assigned to print by a majority vote; for a more accurate consideration of important matters, a special commission is appointed from among the members by the meeting; no one should prematurely announce the affairs of the meeting to outsiders.
9. Writings approved by a majority of votes are printed under the title "Transactions of the Free Economic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Household Management in Russia". As soon as 15 persons sign the plan, the meetings of the Economic Society should begin and officials should be elected from among the 15.

As needed, the charter is supplemented.

Thus, M.V. Lomonosov's idea found embodiment in the charter of the Free Economic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Household Management in Russia. The Society inherited many features of the project he conceived, but also had distinctive features. Lomonosov's College of Rural Management became the prototype of the first

The Free Economic Society still remains true to the ideals and principles generally formulated in 1765



Adam Vasilievich Olsufyev

public organization of the Russian Empire, whose members undertook to conduct serious scientific and practical work.

As the activities of the Society covered more and more areas, additions and changes were made to the charter. On February 24, 1770, the second edition of the charter was approved. It added the sections “About Committees” and “About Writings”. To evaluate incoming writings and answers to competitive tasks, it was planned to create special committees that would decide on the printing of works, give opinions on submitted machines, and so on. Now, at meetings, the writings were only read out, but the final decision on them remained with a special committee. If the members of the committee could not come to a common opinion, they would submit the question to a general meeting, where it was decided by voting. In addition, some changes were made to the procedure for electing the president of the Society, providing for the possibility of extending his powers for a second term.

In 1790, an additional charter on correspondents was adopted. The preamble noted that the Society had so far paid little attention to this group, and the adoption of the charter on correspondents should activate it. The following changes to the main charter were made in 1817, 1824, 1859, and 1872. For the most part, they were insignificant and related to issues of the Society’s leadership, the structure of which was constantly becoming more complex.

It is important to note that, despite all the changes to the charter, the Free Economic Society still remains true to the ideals and principles generally formulated in 1765. In this sense, it is a unique organization. Independence, freedom from bureaucratic structures, the assimilation of the experience of generations, and innovation — these are the components of the solid foundation laid by the founding fathers, on which the Society’s activities have been based for 260 years.

But let’s return to the events of 1765. On the day of the approval of the original charter, the assembled founders, without waiting for the fifteenth signature to the plan, began to elect the president of the Society. R.I. Vorontsov was the first to be offered this honorary title, as the most noble of those present. But Count Vorontsov did not risk taking on the duties of president due to insufficient knowledge of foreign languages, which, in his opinion, was necessary both for negotiations with foreign members of the Society and for reviewing writings, letters, and other materials received in foreign languages.

Then they wanted to elect the absent G.G. Orlov, as “an encourager and lover of all useful knowledge”. But someone suggested that, being heavily loaded with state affairs, the Count would not be able to take on these duties. Then they proposed A.V. Olsufyev for the presidency. Olsufyev demanded a “free” election by voting. He was immediately elected. After accepting congratulations, Olsufyev “sat down in the place prepared for the chairman”.

Secretaries were also elected by vote: A.A. Nartov for Russian, and I.G. Lehmann for German correspondence. They immediately took office, taking their places on either side of the president. T.N. Klingstedt was elected treasurer, who also became vice-president. In addition, President Olsufyev appointed G.N. Teplov to perform the duties of president in his absence. Over time, this duty was assigned to the vice-president, appointed by the president. It was decided that September 1 would be the beginning of the year and the time for payment of membership fees.

Due to the lack of the fifteenth member of the Society as required by the charter, A.A. Nartov suggested that either Count Fyodor Grigoryevich

Именно:

Указъ
о учрежденіи
общества
полезное
устройство
общества
полезное
устройство
общества

1. Всеподданнѣйше проситъ Ея
Императорскаго величества,
ѣтою учрежденіе сего общества
всеподданнѣйше удостоитъ
высокомонаршаго своего благово-
ленія и принять оное въ единствен-
ное Свое покровительство, конфир-
муя, при томъ планъ и регламентъ
общества, и дозволяя оному по вся-
кимъ перепискамъ именоваться
Вольнымъ Патриотическимъ обществомъ



2. ѣтою Ея величество въ знакъ
высочайшаго своего удовольствія о
такомъ полезномъ предпріятіи
соизволила пожаловать обществу
въ мѣсто герба собственнй спой-
деиць, а именно: улей со пчелами,
медъ съ цѣпью и пчелъ собираю-
щими съ подписью: полезное, которо-
рой гербъ изобразитъ на подобіе
груднаго щита въ двоголавному
орлу.

93^а
Генералъ Лавинъ

3. При принятіи членами сего об-
щества, для будущей народнй
пользы, псалнхъ развѣпаніяхъ и
опытахъ должно не прѣменно имѣть
корреспонденцію по всей провинціи
россійскаго государства, и для того

With their official duties allocated, the founders of the VEO considered how to secure its autonomy and concluded that the most effective means was to seek the Empress's patronage and have her take the Society under her protection

Document with points for discussion with the Empress, which the President may propose, containing the first draft of the Free Economic Society's coat of arms

Orlov, as a lover of science, or the president of the Berg Collegium, Ivan Andreevich Schlatter, who, having great practical experience, could be useful to the Society in mining affairs, be accepted for the vacant place. And if both of them wished to join the Society, then one of them should be included in the number of the first 15 members, and the other should be elected in the manner prescribed in the charter.

However, subsequently, at the meeting of September 21, 1765, on the proposal of G.G. Orlov, V.R. Polman, an Actual Chamberlain and Jägermeister, was admitted to the number of 15 founders, who signed the Society's plan and the minutes of the meeting of June 15.

Thus, by October 1765, the Society had settled all organizational formalities and consisted of persons who, in the words of T.I. Klingstedt, "have absolutely no intention of obtaining their own benefit, nor of vainly displaying their abilities, but are motivated by one hunt and a desire to be useful to the Fatherland to take on this work". Almost all of the founders of the Free Economic Society were noble courtiers or persons distinguished by the sovereign for various talents.

Having distributed official duties among themselves, the founders of the Free Economic Society began to reflect on how to ensure its independence, and decided that the best way to do this was to petition the Empress to take the Society under her patronage, so that it would not depend "on any government". Taubert suggested to President Olsufyev:

- to show the Empress Catherine II the plan and charter of the Society, asking for her favor and patronage;
- to ask Her Majesty to bestow, as a sign of her favor to this useful undertaking, the Society's motto, representing a beehive with bees collecting honey from flowers, with the inscription: "useful", which should be depicted inside the shield and the double-headed eagle;
- to ask the Empress for the freedom of the mail for the Society's correspondence within the state (so that no fees would be charged for letters and parcels sent on behalf of the Society and sent to its name). Olsufyev, in turn, suggested not burdening the sovereign with requests for a coat of arms and mail, but only asking for patronage. As a result, it was decided not to mention the mail, but to add a request to have the Society's seal and in it the motto, as well as permission to be called the Free Economic Society.

By the way, the founders disagreed about the motto. Some were in favor of the double-headed eagle and the motto, others wanted to have only the motto. The disagreement was resolved by a vote, which determined to have the state emblem with the motto. A letter to Catherine II was immediately drawn up, approved by the meeting and signed by all its participants. We will give this letter.

LETTER PRESENTING THE PLAN AND CHARTER OF THE SOCIETY TO THE EMPRESS, OCTOBER 12, 1765

«Most Radiant, Sovereign, Great Empress, and Autocrat of All Russia! Most Gracious Sovereign!

The reign of Your Imperial Majesty is the age for the fatherland in which our bliss is visibly being accomplished. Through Your Majesty's tireless labor and care for matters that constitute the integrity and well-being of the Empire, we see how much Your patronage influences the sciences and arts; and this encourages in Your subjects the hearts of those who love to educate themselves and enlighten others.



Seal of Empress
Catherine II

*Beholding this, we, Your most loyal subjects, have united by voluntary agreement to establish among ourselves an assembly in which we have resolved to strive by common labor to improve agriculture and household management. Our zeal and diligence, however great, will be without life if they are not strengthened by Monarchical patronage. For this reason, we boldly venture to ask Your Imperial Majesty to have the happiness of being under the sole patronage of Your Imperial Majesty, and that our Society be governed in its labors by its own obligations and institutions among ourselves, and that in all cases it be called the Free Economic Society, and that, as a sign of Your Majesty's Highest favor toward us, You most graciously grant us Your Imperial seal, and on it a motto such as Your Majesty most graciously sees fit. We consider these most loyal petitions to Your Imperial Majesty to be such that without direct approval, our Society cannot have it, and we hope that Your Majesty's care, coupled with daily labor for the benefit of our fatherland, will not deprive us of Monarchical grace, which we await, and with reverence prostrate ourselves at the feet, Most Gracious Sovereign
Your Imperial Majesty's most loyal servants".*

G.G. Orlov graciously agreed, "out of goodwill and his exceptional zeal for the Society," to deliver the letter and all the formulated requests to the Empress, and, in addition, to advocate for a personal presentation of all the founders of the Society to her.

Three weeks later, at the meeting on November 2, G.N. Teplov brought and handed to President Olsufyev a personally signed reply letter from the Empress, addressed to the Free Economic Society.

LETTER (RESCRIPT) OF CATHERINE II TO THE FREE ECONOMIC SOCIETY, OCTOBER 31, 1765

Gentlemen Members of the Free Economic Society!

"The intention you have undertaken to improve agriculture and household management is very pleasing to Us, and the labors resulting from it will be direct proof of your true diligence and love for your fatherland. We praise your plan and charter, by which you have bound yourselves to one another, and We most graciously approve that you have named yourselves the Free Economic Society.

Be assured that We accept it under Our special patronage; and for the seal you request, We not only allow you to use in all cases, in your labors, Our Imperial coat of arms, but also, as a sign of Our distinct favor toward you, We allow you to place within it Our own motto: bees bringing honey to the hive with the inscription: useful.

In addition to this, We most graciously grant to your Society six thousand rubles for the purchase of a suitable house, both for your meetings and for the establishment of an economic library in it: Your labor, with God's help, will be rewarded to you and your descendants with your own benefit, and We, as much as you strive, will not fail to increase it.

We grant You Our favour".

Catherine

On the day the letter was read, the founders of the Society were personally presented to Catherine II. The date on the Empress's letter — October 31, 1765 — became the date of the founding of the Free Economic Society.

The Free Economic Society was one of the first organizations of its kind in Europe. In the 18th century, they were only just beginning to emerge, and at the time, they could be counted on one's fingers

It must be said that the Society was one of the first organizations of this kind in Europe. In the 18th century, they were just beginning to appear and at that time they could be counted on one's fingers: in 1723, an agricultural society was founded in Scotland, in 1736 in Ireland, in 1747 in Switzerland, in 1753 in England. Almost simultaneously with ours, agrarian-economic societies appeared in France (in 1757 in the Rhine and in 1761 in Paris) and Germany (in 1762 — Thuringian, in 1763 — Leipzig and Zeller). And after — in Austria (in 1767) and Prussia (in 1770).

The founders of the Free Economic Society did not immediately develop algorithms for effective work. Since this was a completely new format of work, not previously practiced anywhere in Russia, the participants, by trial and error, adjusted the Society to the desired way.

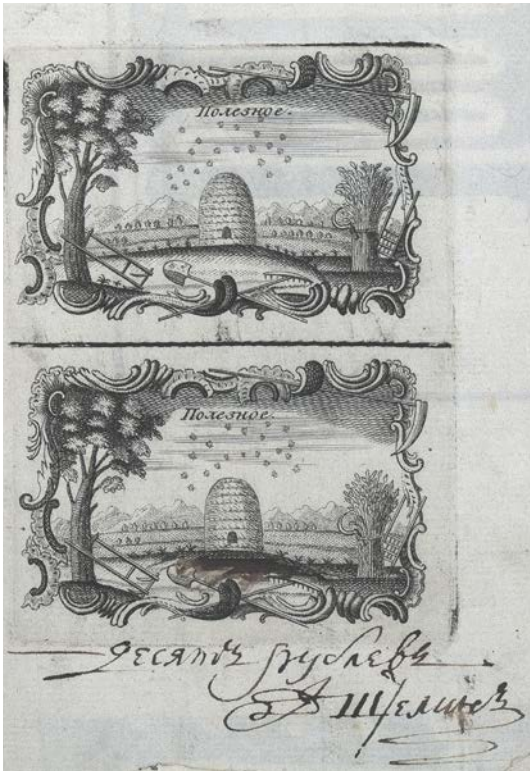
The first meetings were not based on a pre-planned general plan. Each of the members arbitrarily chose a work (composed or translated) for reading. Therefore, at the same meeting, the most different in content reports were discussed, usually written in different languages. Thus, for example, one spoke about the various qualities of the earth (Professor of Chemistry Lehmann in Russian); another about the structure of residential premises for ordinary people (Peken in German); the third — about how to purify salt (Model in German); the fourth — about Siberian acacia (Ekleben in German); the fifth (Nartov in Russian) read about the breeding of bees from Eckart and about the method of bleaching flax, approved by the Swedish Academy; the sixth (Klingstedt in Russian) reported a draft appeal to readers when publishing the first part of the “Transactions” of the Society.

Such disarray, of course, could not contribute to the achievement of the main goal of the meeting. Therefore, it was decided to think about topics in advance and draw up a preliminary plan for the meetings. And in addition, to take measures so that the members of the Society, if possible, did not miss them. The reason for this was the example of Count I.E. Chernyshev, who, after the founding of the Society, did not attend a single meeting. He was warned that in case of his absence at the next meeting, he would be excluded from the Society, but Chernyshev appeared at the next meeting and no longer neglected his duties without a valid reason.

The meeting of October 5, 1765, was devoted to the development of measures to stimulate interest in the work of the Free Economic Society and the conscientious performance of their duties by the participants. It was decided to charge a small monetary fine for each violation of the charter, and for missing a meeting without a valid reason, to collect from the violator one economic book to the Society's library.

Measures were also developed to make the meetings more “entertaining”. Now the composition proposed for discussion had to be preliminarily transferred for evaluation to one of the members of the Society, a specialist in the matter under consideration, so that he would report whether it was worth discussing the work and publishing it in the “Transactions”. Foreign compositions were subject to mandatory translation into Russian.

But most importantly, the members understood that their work would not be truly useful unless it was based on a thorough study of Russian agriculture and the conditions of Russian life. They realized that before advising any innovation, it was necessary to determine the actual shortcomings of Russian agriculture, to carefully analyze the local natural and climatic features, and the existing customs of the farmers, so that



The emblem of the Free
Economic Society

the Society's advice could be applied with maximum benefit and not contradict the experiences of local farming.

*"To formulate sound suggestions", said Vice-President Klingstedt, "regarding the better establishment of agriculture and the correction of its shortcomings, these must first be known. We cannot point out deficiencies in our agriculture and praise to our farmers the practices of foreign peoples as useful and convenient here, without first acquiring accurate knowledge of the differences in soil and climate of different provinces, the quality and quantity of local crops, and how in every place in our provinces they are accustomed to sow, reap, in short, to carry out all farming. To this day, we lack this information. The difference in climate and soil, the old customs and practices of local villagers, which are partly based on long experience and partly on their own particular institutions; even more so the character of the people, whom it is difficult to incline to any novelty without complete assurance of real and obvious benefit, is so different from what is observed in other European states in the organization of land and all other rural affairs; that the best and most successful experiments conducted there can be of very little use here, or only with the most prudent selection and with great caution... No matter how bad an opinion we may have of the art of our peasant and however little we may doubt that he mostly carries out agriculture without any reasoning, and, without thinking of any new improvement to his work, solely follows the example of his ancestors; but it seems, from his own experience, he must be knowledgeable about what crops are more suitable for him to sow on what soil; whether to dig the arable land deeply or not deeply for a better harvest, and how, taking into account the difference in climate and the high or low location of the place, he should sow earlier or later. He is better taught about these observations relating to agriculture by his own experience and the profit or loss associated with the work, than by all the experiments conducted in foreign areas and climates"*¹².

This lengthy quote clearly demonstrates the insight and reformatory foresight possessed by the founders of the Free Economic Society. They quickly understood a truth that is extremely important for the success of any innovation and improvement, a truth that reformers often forget. They were not going to blindly copy foreign, even successful, experience, but attached great importance to the study of national specifics and Russian conditions. They did not seek to destroy the old order by borrowing new ones from abroad but wanted to preserve the continuity of domestic traditions.

To have a complete picture of the state and problems of Russian agriculture in different regions and to give competent recommendations, the Society developed and sent out special questionnaires throughout the country, consisting of 65 economic questions, and called on governors and the entire population to provide answers to them¹³.

Simultaneously with collecting information about Russian agriculture, the Society decided to actively adopt advanced foreign practices. It decided to order from countries with the most prosperous agriculture models of new efficient plowing tools and machines, which would be given to noble landowners for testing. R.I. Vorontsov, in particular, promised to order such machines and tools from England.

At first, members of the Free Economic Society mainly considered highly specialized issues, primarily concerning private farms. Only Klingstedt proposed topics for discussion that were of a more general

nature, in particular, of national importance. One of them was the question of which product of Russian agriculture could best contribute to the development of foreign trade.

Soon, all participants in the Society understood that before proposing measures to improve domestic agriculture, it was necessary to define the goals and objectives that would contribute to increasing the welfare of the country as a whole.

Thus, addressing Klingstedt's question from a national, rather than just a private, benefit perspective, the Society concluded that the most promising product for foreign sales was wheat. Firstly, because it is a valuable and most consumed bread by foreigners; secondly, a forced export of wheat cannot cause hardship for the population, since it mainly consumes rye bread; thirdly, wheat is better than other grains at withstanding the high cost of delivery to ports of departure. And finally, the Society believed that exporting wheat abroad would not negatively affect the development of grain farming in the country; in contrast, for example, to France, where the forced cultivation of grapes and tobacco was at the expense of grain farming and periodically threatened the population with famine.

Based on these considerations, members of the Free Economic Society, primarily T.I. Klingstedt, proposed organizing the free export of wheat abroad. Catherine II agreed with the proposal and lifted the ban on grain exports. To encourage exports, the Society awarded a gold medal of 25 gold coins to anyone "of whatever rank, who in the upcoming year 1766 brings the largest quantity of Russian wheat in grain, for shipment overseas, to the port of St. Petersburg or Arkhangelsk, and proves that this quantity has indeed been shipped to foreign lands on Russian or foreign ships, but not less than 500 to 1000 quarters". This was the very first medal awarded by the Free Economic Society.

The incentives from the state and the Society proved fruitful, grain exports began to grow rapidly, and by the end of Catherine's reign, they amounted to 1.3 million rubles per year. This contributed to the growth of the country's welfare, but it must be said that the population did not manage to avoid the problems that the Society foresaw but did not give a thorough analysis to. The beginning of mass grain exports led to the periodic occurrence of famine in the villages, and an increase in cases of mass impoverishment of peasants. Another consequence of lifting the ban on exports was a significant increase in bread prices.

In fairness, it should be noted that the Society tried to develop measures to prevent negative consequences. Thus, R.I. Vorontsov proposed to establish reserve grain stores to ensure the people's food supply, and to award a gold medal from the Society to each landowner who first established them in his district.

"Accidental famine and the imprudence of farmers", says Vorontsov in an explanatory note to his proposal, "cannot be averted otherwise than by the good establishment and care in their villages of each landowner, or those who have governance over the peasants. The common people themselves, and of their own free will, as is already well known, do not care about their own well-being and protecting themselves from disastrous famine, and in part do not understand the means to it¹⁴.

Vorontsov proposes a specific mechanism for implementing his proposal. For this, it is necessary:

- to introduce in the villages, without touching the former peasant arable fields as much as possible, a communal plowing;
- to do the same in quitrent estates;

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Emperor of All Russia, Grand Duke of Finland, King of Poland from the House of Holstein-Gottorp-Romanov; the eldest son of Paul I, brother of Nicholas I, grandson of Catherine II. Portrait by an unknown artist, first quarter of the 19th century.

- to purchase grain in advance in areas with little land;
- to make sowings for reserve granaries until an annual supply of grain is collected, capable of providing for the entire village if necessary;
- to store the most consumed type of grain (for example, rye and oats in the Great Russian provinces);
- to build granaries soundly, in dry places, away from residential buildings to avoid fires.

Count Vorontsov had earlier established reserve granaries on his estates and fervently believed in their effectiveness, believing that if they were spread everywhere, then “at no time and nowhere would it be possible to fear not only famine, but also the high cost of bread”.

The Free Economic Society awarded a gold medal of 25 gold coins to the first person in their district who, between 1767 and 1776, built and filled a reserve granary with an annual supply of grain for the needs of the peasants. Unfortunately, practice showed that these measures, although effective, were insufficient.

Thus, gradually the Free Economic Society was setting up its work, embarking on a long path of both brilliant victories and temporary setbacks. Glorious traditions were being born, which allowed the Society to preserve and increase scientific and practical potential in the most difficult periods of Russian history.

From the first steps of its activity, the Society took care to attract new members — academics, famous scientists, educated people, knowledgeable in agronomy and other sciences, practitioners and experienced people, striving to improve agriculture and all domestic economy. In the first five years of existence, the “assembly of free economists” was replenished with 43 new participants¹⁵.

Although Catherine II cooled to her remarkable brainchild in the last years of her reign, the Society did not stop its work, developing and continuing to work for the good of the country. The Society also experienced difficult times during the reign of Emperor Paul I, an opponent of all “freedoms” and undertakings of Catherine II, who sought to put an end to any manifestations of “freethinking” in Russia.

However, subsequently, Russian sovereigns bestowed the highest patronage on the Free Economic Society. This is confirmed by the imperial rescripts granted to the Society as a sign of favor and confirmation of its rights and “advantages” (privileges). Here are some of them (marking the accession to the throne of Alexander I, Nicholas I, Alexander II).

MOST HIGH RESCRIPT OF EMPEROR ALEXANDER I, APRIL 13, 1801
Gentlemen Members of the Free Economic Society!

“All useful establishments relating to the good of My faithful subjects will always be the subject of My special attention, and therefore the Free Economic Society can be assured of My patronage. I recognize its labors, both in their intention and in their consequences, as worthy of respect; and in order to open the way for their influence on the common good, I have given the state treasurer an order to release five thousand rubles annually for their dissemination and all necessary expenses for this purpose. As for the change of medals, it seems to Me that their present form with the image of the first Foundress of this Society, the Great Catherine, is the most appropriate and most consistent with the feelings of this estate, approved and endorsed by Her; and therefore I recognize it as fair to preserve it in the memory of posterity and in honor of the institution itself.”



Emperor Nicholas I, the third son of Emperor Paul I and Maria Feodorovna, brother of Emperor Alexander I, father of Emperor Alexander II. Grandson of Catherine II. Portrait by the artist E.I. Botman, 1856

However, I remain always benevolent to you”.
Alexander

MOST HIGH RESCRIPT OF EMPEROR NICHOLAS I, JANUARY 28, 1826
Gentlemen Members of the Free Economic Society!

“In My unwavering desire to promote all those institutions that can contribute to the benefits of My beloved loyal subjects, I am pleased to assure your Society of the ever-present readiness of My patronage to it. The very successes of your labors, known to the world for many years in a so advantageous light, should be the guarantors of this. In order to increase the means of action of your Society, I have now given My order to the Minister of Finance to release ten thousand rubles annually to it for necessary expenses. As for the medals of the Society, they must remain the same as they are now, in memory of the High Foundress of this useful institution”.

“I remain unfailingly benevolent to you”
Nicholas.

MOST HIGH RESCRIPT OF EMPEROR ALEXANDER II, MARCH 14, 1855

Gentlemen Members of the Imperial Free Economic Society!

“In My constant readiness to patronize all institutions that aim to improve various sectors of the national economy, I am pleased to express to you the approval that the Free Economic Society has earned with its long-term and useful labors.

Confirming all the rights and privileges granted to the Society by My most august predecessors, and allowing it to issue, as before, medals established by the High Foundress Catherine II, I remain in the full hope that the Society will continue to act for the benefit of Russia, dear to Us, and I will not leave its successes without attention”.

“I remain unfailingly benevolent to you”
Alexander.

The Most High Rescripts were also repeatedly granted to the Society as recognition of its merits in various fields of activity.

Moreover, some members of the imperial family took an active part in the work of the Society, were among its members and presidents. Thus, in 1841–1859, the president of the Society was Prince Peter Georgievich Oldenburgsky, who later remained its honorary member¹⁶.

Honorary member of the Free Economic Society in 1860 was Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich the Elder, who became president in 1862 and took an active part in the activities of the Society dedicated to improving Russian agriculture.

Among the members of the imperial family were also Duke Maximilian of Leuchtenberg¹⁷ (from 1843 to 1852), Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, who established the awarding of a gold medal on behalf of the Society “for the best writing for popular reading on agriculture, or individual branches of agricultural industry”, and others.

Alexander II, Emperor of All Russia from 1855 from the Romanov Dynasty, eldest son of Nicholas I, one of the organizers and a central figure in large-scale liberal reforms — the so-called "Great Reforms"



Thus, the Free Economic Society is the first in Russia (and one of the oldest in the world) public organization that emerged at the dawn of the Russian Enlightenment. The purpose of its creation was to actively promote the improvement of the efficiency of domestic agriculture and all sectors of economic life. Broad scientific and research activities, combined with the development of the best Russian and foreign practical experience, were called upon to serve Free Economic Society of Russia.

The founders of the Free Economic Society were truly outstanding people of their time.

Fifteen individuals “distinguished by nobility of birth, royal confidence, experience in agriculture, or learning” united to work for the good of the Fatherland.

The fascinating fates and brilliant, yet so different, biographies of these individuals make the very fact of such a union almost unbelievable. 260 years ago, a common idea and their mutual desire “to form from themselves and others, stirred by the same intention, an estate that would strive to disseminate among the people useful and necessary information for agriculture and household management” led to the emergence of the first public organization in Russia. The founders recognized the demand for the endeavor they had started, its social purpose. Each of them made their own special contribution to the formation, development, and success of the Society.





Founders of the Free Economic Society

(from left to right)

POLMAN Wilhelm Romanovich — Actual Chamberlain and Jägermeister.

PEKEN Christian — Collegiate Council, Learned Secretary, and Member of the Medical Collegium.

FALCK Johann Peter — Professor of Botany at the Apothecary Garden, Director of the Botanical Garden of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.

TAUBERT Ivan Ivanovich — Chief Librarian to Empress Catherine II, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Actual State Council, Advisor to the Chancellery of the Academy of Sciences.

TEPLOV Grigori Nikolaevich — Actual State Council, Senator, Statesman and Writer, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

MODEL Johann Georg — Chemist, Court Apothecary of the Imperial St. Petersburg Main Pharmacy, Court Council, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Member of the Medical Collegium.

ORLOV Grigori Grigorievich — Count, Chamberlain of the Court, General Feldzeugmeister, General-in-Chief, Adjutant General to Empress Catherine II, Prince of the Roman Empire.

OLSUFYEV Adam Vasilievich — State Secretary to Empress Catherine II, Senator, Minister of the Empress's Cabinet, Member of the State Collegium of Foreign Affairs, Privy Council, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

KLINGSTEDT Timofey Ivanovich — Vice-President of the Justice Collegium of Livonian, Estonian, and Finnish Affairs, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

VORONTSOV Roman Illarionovich — Count, Actual Chamberlain, Actual Privy Council, Senator, Governor-General of the Vladimir, Penza, and Tambov Governorates.

NARTOV Andrei Andreievich — Actual State Council, Member of the Berg Collegium and the Mint, Director of the Mining School, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Colonel of Artillery.

CHERKASOV Alexander Ivanovich — Baron, Actual Privy Council, President of the Medical Collegium.

EKLEBEN — Court Gardener.

CHERNYSHEV Ivan Grigoryevich — Count, General Field Marshal, Ober-Procurator of the Senate, Extraordinary Ambassador to England, President of the Admiralty Collegium, Actual Chamberlain.

LEHMANN, Johann Georg — Professor at St. Petersburg University, Full Member of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences and the Royal Prussian Academy of Mining, Professor of Chemistry.

THE PORTRAIT COLLECTION OF PRESIDENTS OF THE FREE ECONOMIC SOCIETY OF RUSSIA*

* All portraits shown in this section are from the archives
of the Free Economic Society of Russia



Olsufyev Adam Vasilyevich (1721–1784)

Secretary of States to the Empress Catherine II, Senator, Minister of the Imperial Cabinet, Member of the State Collegium of Foreign Affairs, Privy Councillor, Full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences

*President of Free Economic Society
15.06.1765–01.01.1766
01.01.1769–30.04.1769
01.01.1773–30.04.1773*

Adam Vasilyevich Olsufyev, the son of Vasily Dmitriyevich Olsufyev, a Steward of the Royal Household, was born on January 16, 1721 and was christened by Peter the Great, who himself chose the baby's name. During his studying in Nobility school in 1732–1739, Olsufyev displayed particular talents for foreign languages. That was why in 1739 in Lieutenant's rank he was appointed officer for foreign correspondence under Field-Marshal Muennich. After the end of the Turkish war, he was appointed secretary to the Embassy in Copenhagen, and later went over to the Collegium of Foreign Affairs as Master of Ceremonies.

Wedlock with Maria Vasilievna Saltykova guaranteed him a spectacular career in the Empress Elizabeth's reign: he was appointed Steward of the Cabinet in the rank of Privy Councillor and was awarded the order of St. Alexander Nevsky. He preserved the high status under Peter III.

As soon as Catherine II succeeded to the throne, he was appointed her Secretary of State and in 1763 — Senator. He remained Cabinet Steward and hold position of the closest and confident assistant to the Empress up to the end of his days.

Contemporary accounts mention his outstanding gifts and subtlety. One of the best educated people of his time, he was elected a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and honorary member of the Academy of Arts. With a brilliant knowledge and translating command of foreign languages, he was on many occasion representing his country at foreign Courts. Expert in law and history, he wrote instructions to provincial governors on Catherine's order. All awards and other Royal mercies reached their destination through his hands. He really needed in all his activity «a lion's strength and the wisdom of a serpent», as Catherine the Great often wished him jocularly.

On June 15, 1765, Olsufyev was elected First President of Free Economic Society and according to the Charter, he held that position till January 1, 1766.

Election of Olsufyev as First president of the Imperial Free Economic Society was remarkable for the activity of VEO. Although the President worked for only one third part of the year, during those first months were put bases of functioning for the Society, which assured its activity for 150 years.

On behalf of the general meeting of the founders Adam Vasilyevich presented to the Empress the plan and Charter of VEO and personally asked Catherine II her highest favour to the Society, as it should be governed by its own obligations and orders, and bear the name of Free Economic Society. Catherine II complied with that application and wrote the following: «We praise the plans and the Charter, in which you make reciprocal pledges, and hereby most graciously approve the name you have chosen for yourself, Free Economic Society. Rest assured that we will accept this society under our special patronage as for your request concerning printing, we permit you to use Our Imperial Stamp in all cases involving your understanding, and as a sign of our personal benevolence to your undertaking, We permit you to add your motto and place it inside the stamp: Bee bringing honey to the beehive, with the word «USEFUL».

Adam Vasilyevich, particularly and energetically supported discipline in VEO. As a result, on October 5, 1765 General Meeting adopted simple and efficient measures: for Charter's violation — to pay penalties, and for absence at the Meeting without justified reason each who was absent brought one book on economics to the library of the Society.



During presidency of Olsufyev, who was a talented organizer and administrator, first confusion in the activity of VEO gave place to the strict order and clear procedures. At the first meetings, each member offered and read any articles, he wrote or translated and the reports were all different. One member (professor Leman) spoke about earth in Russian, another (Peken) spoke about construction of houses for simple people in German, the third (Modell) told how to purify sole in German, the fourth (Ekleben) spoke in German about Siberia acacia, the fifth (Nartov) read in Russian about bees breeding from Ekart and flax whitening, approved by the Academy of Sweden, the sixth (Klingshtet) reported in Russian a draft of the petition to the readers as the first part of «Transactions» was published. Such disorder couldn't be conducive to the main aim of the meeting. President A. V. Olsufyev took the floor:

«Dear Sirs, members of Economic Society! Each of us would like to see activity in the society more oriented to the thought out plan. I think it might be reasonable before reading an article at the General meeting to give it for previous expertise to the person among our members, prominent in the concerned subject, who might summarize, whether an article is worth reading at the meeting and useful for publication in the «Transactions».

Such arguments were admitted. And what was more, the meeting made another step forward; it was decided to translate into Russian all articles in foreign languages before the meetings, and only after translation to read them in Russian in order all members of the Society could understand them.

The Meeting also agreed, that reports should contain concrete examples and facts about agriculture and Russian life otherwise they would be useless and tiresome.

Adam Vasilyevich supported proposal, that before promoting any recommendation, a member of the Society had to study existing in the country agro-technical methods and bases of the farmers convictions and traditions.

He said: «We can not show defects in our agriculture and praise foreign practice before having precise information about difference in land and climate in different provinces. The difference in climate and land, old traditions and methods of our farmers and even more, disposition of the people who hardly would accept any novelties without being sure in its usefulness are absolutely other than in the European countries. That is why foreign experience should be applied with discretion».

Olsufyev proposed to attract more new members. His persistence was supported by his colleagues and the number of members was increased: in 1765 — 4 new members were added to 15 founders, in 1766 — 8, and in 1770 — 54 persons worked in the Society.

Position of the closest and confident aide to the Empress, his subtlety and ability to find way in the Court intrigues were demanded many times by the Imperial Free Economic Society. He was elected President of VEO two more times: from January 1 to April 30, 1769 and from January 1 to April 30, 1773.

Both presidential terms were marked by the first successes of Free Economic Society in practical deeds. Looking through the minutes of the general meetings and «Transactions of VEO» there was an evident exchange of ideas between the participants. They wanted to do everything quickly: to develop economy by the European style, to use new agricultural devices, to cultivate new, unknown in Russia plants. One of such priorities was cultivation of potatoes. It was explained very

simply, as the Empress Catherine II liked that «earth apple», as potatoes was called at that time.

In 1765 some time before creation of VEO, Catherine II asked society to introduce that new plant to the Russian farmers. Initiative and persistence of the Society gave rise to those researches. There were sent to the different regions of Russia to the governors the seeds with detailed instructions of the method of cultivation. It was indicated that the seeds were free of charge for the nobility and town citizens.

One of the enthusiasts of that new deed, a governor from Novgorod Ya.E. Sivers, who was elected then a Full member of the Society wrote that two samples were planted in Novgorod, and two samples were planted in the villages. The harvest in the city was unexpectedly high — 86 tubers. The earth was sandy and good for the vegetables planting. But in the villages the harvest was not so good, because the tubers were planted too late.

There were the same reports from other places. That experience permitted to elaborate more precise recommendations and potatoes began its way in the country.

It was reported that «the earth apples» grew in the North: Onezhsky area, along the White Sea, where cucumbers and cabbage grew very seldom.

At the end of 60-ies-beginning of 70-ies, during which Adam Vasilyevich was President of VEO, important field of economic growth in Russia was considered by the Society bee breeding. It was not occasionally that the motto of the Empress and then of the VEO was «Bee, bringing honey from flowers». There were published several original and translated articles about bee breeding. Catherine II was interested in the novelties in that sphere. In particular, she gave to the library of the Society two books of the pastor Shirakh on that subject, sent two farmers to him for studying. Olsufyev took an active part in the realization of that project.

The interest to the bee breeding in the capital gave rise to that deed in the whole country. But after the death of the Empress such publications were stopped. New articles about bee breeding appeared only in the XIX century, but they were not of primary importance.

In 1773, when A.V. Olsufyev was elected the President of VEO for the third time, he proposed to introduce into practice contests. In particular, he proposed to announce a contest on the invention of the harvester machine and the plough for the south steppe provinces. According to the documents that idea was not supported widely in the country. In several years that task was announced once more and the results were evident, but Adam Vasilyevich didn't see them.

A.V. Olsufyev died on June 27, 1784 and was buried in the Laura of St. Alexander Nevsky.



Orlov Grigory Grigoryevich (1734–1783)

Count, Chamberlain, Feldzeugmeister-General, General-en-Chef, Adjutant to Empress Catherine II, Duke of the Roman Empire

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1766–31.08.1766*

Grigory Grigoryevich Orlov, a son of Novgorod Vice-Governor Grigory Ivanovich Orlov, was born on October 6, 1734. He spent his early years with his parents. In 1749 he was taken to St.-Petersburg and placed in the Cadet Corps, where he showed talents for foreign languages, and in a short time he learned French and German.

In the rank of Lieutenant he took part in the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) and was wounded in action. In 1759 he was transported to artillery, as an adjutant to the Count Shuvalov. Unusually tall and strong, Orlov had attractive looks, a cheerful character and an inclination toward daring and risky adventures. He was accepted at the «young» Court and soon became a favourite with Grand Princess Ekaterina Alexeyevna. He was one of the plotters of the palace revolution. After Catherine II ascended the throne, Orlov was made chamberlain and then Adjutant-General and the title of Count was conferred upon his entire dynasty. In the period between 1763 and 1769, Orlov was President of the Expatriate Guardianship office and from 1765 also Feldzeugmeister-General of the Russian army.

Characterizing her favourite, Catherine II wrote: «Count Grigory Orlov has an eagle insight, I have never met a person, who became proficient in any field, where he worked and even about which he was told».

Count G.G. Orlov was one of the 15 founders of Free Economic Society and regarding society with good will, he took responsibility and became a link between VEO and the Empress. That stimulated his efficient relations with Catherine II.

After the term of A.V. Olsufyev as President of VEO was over, Count G.G. Orlov, although he was busy in the State affairs, nevertheless he complied the request of his colleagues and was elected the second President of the Imperial economic society for two terms four months each: from January 1 till August 31, 1766.

Justifying confidence of the Empress, Count Orlov demonstrated his value in practice and took new obligations in VEO. His name is truly related to the development by the Society of the questions for the abolition of serfdom, development of contests in order to solve concrete tasks. As awards were proposed premiums and gold medals. One of the first was a contest: «Would it be useful to grand property to peasants?»

It was clear, that the task was connected with the plans to improve life of the peasants, which were matured by Catherine II during first years of her reign. The Empress lost interest to that idea in some time. Society kept that spark of «peoples' freedom». It was developed, enriched by new details, was taken as a base for the reform in 1861, which put to the end serfdom in Russia, which lasted for many centuries.

In 1771 during a plague epidemic, Orlov was sent to Moscow and using sensible and calm measures as well as his personal example of courage he restored order.

Grigory Grigoryevich Orlov died on April 13, 1783 and was buried at the village of Otrada outside Moscow.





Modell Johann George (1711–1775)

*Chemist, chief pharmacist
of St.-Petersburg Imperial
main pharmacy, Count Councillor,
Full member of the Russian Academy
of Sciences, Medical Collegium's member*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1766–31.12.1766*

Modell Johann George was born in Neustadt (Rottenburg), in 1711, Bavaria (South Germany). He was invited to Russia as many other foreign experts to develop pharmacies. For many years Modell occupied an official post of Chief pharmacist in St.-Petersburg Imperial main pharmacy, as no one could be equal to him in professionalism, that excluded any competition with him.

In 1737 he became professor of chemistry and pharmacology at hospital school No. 2, established in Kronstadt in 1733. The school prepared specialists in medicine.

In 1749 he defended thesis on natural borax. From 1756 he was a Full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He was one of the founders of Free Economic Society. From September 1 to December 31, 1766 he was President of the Imperial Free Economic Society.

When J. Modell headed the society, he supported the idea of T.L. Kling-shtet about studying priorities of economic development of the Russian farming. In particular, it was proposed to solve the question: «Which of our land products corresponds more to the common profit and the Russian commerce?» Society came to the conclusion, that from the state point of view the most profitable product to export into Europe was the wheat. Thus, it was adopted a gold medal having value of 25 ten-rouble banknotes, the first in the history of VEO to encourage the exporters of wheat. Any farmer of any rank and position might receive it, if he sold abroad not less than 500 quarters of wheat.

In 1769 Modell published his thesis on physical and chemical purity of the water in Neva river. He used a microscope for preliminary work and supported the idea of M.W. Lomonosov to use microscopes for chemical analysis and he developed that idea in spite of opposition of some scientists. Academicians-chemists of that time were not in charge of solution of scientific problems in chemistry, their task was to bring maximum practical benefit. Model by his scientific researches deviated from that rule.

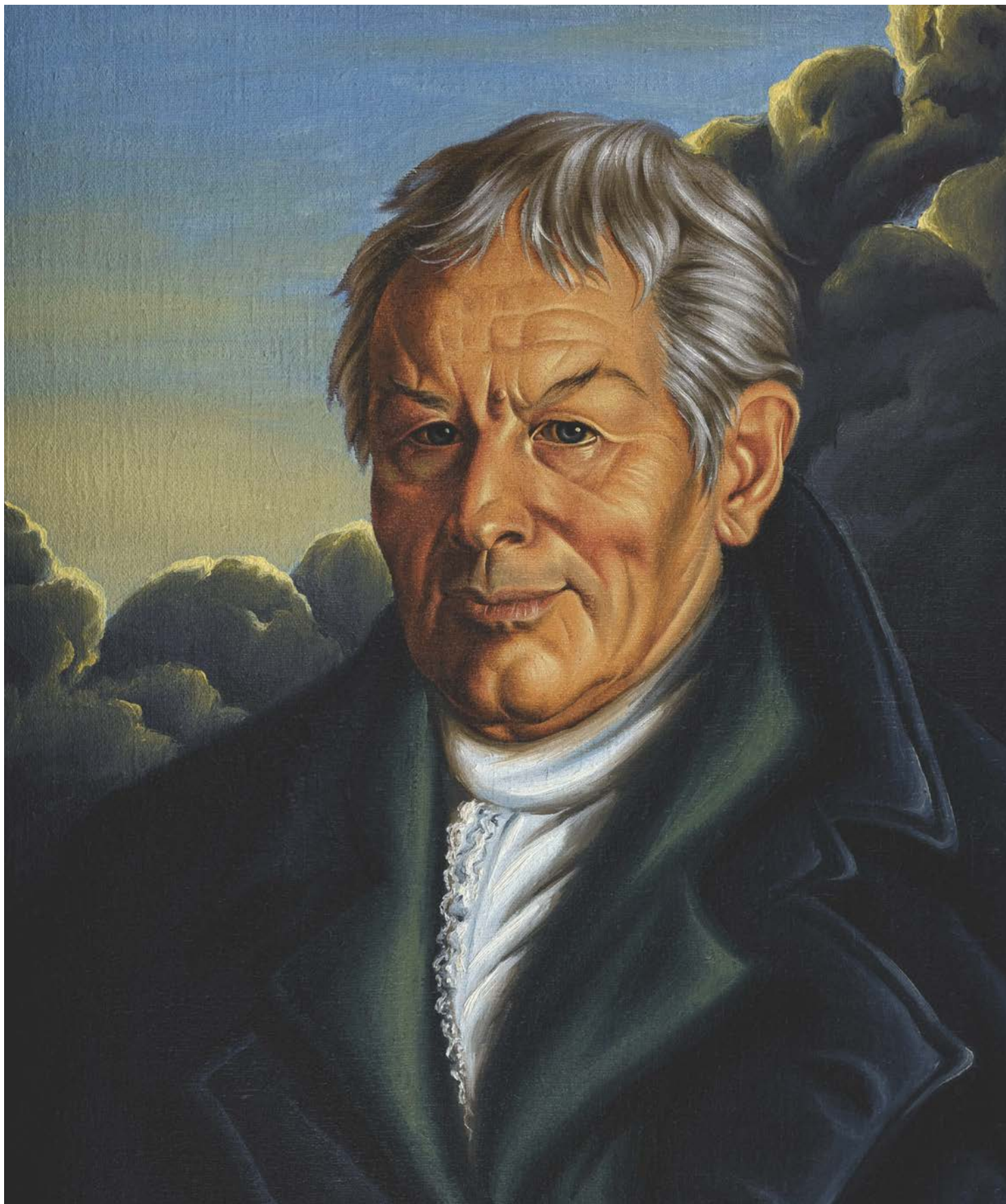
Modell was active in compilation and publication of a systematic catalogue of all known in Russia and Asia mineral, salinated, sulphurous and other springs.

He was an author of 9 books on analytical chemistry, printed in Russia in German and French. Among them his scientific works about very popular in the XVIII century «drops of Bestuzhev». Some of his researches were devoted to the analysis of mineral waters of the north-west of Russia. He also studied properties of salammoniac and its application in Siberia.

In «Transactions of VEO» there were articles of the academician Modell on distilleries, devoted to physical and chemical properties of wine and cereals. He also cooperated with journals «Monthly digest», «Vestnik of S-Petersburg» and «Sammlung Russischer Geschichte».

In the Russian state library there are two books of Modell «Chymische Nebenstunden», published in St.-Petersburg in 1769: one book with autograph of I.G. Modell, the second — with a note of the owner «A c from the author».





Orlov Vladimir Grigoryevich (1743–1831)

*Count, Lieutenant-General,
Director of the Russian Academy
of Sciences*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1767–30.04.1767
01.01.1770–30.04.1770*

Vladimir Grigoryevich Orlov was born in 1743, brother of Grigori Orlov, was the youngest son of Grigori Ivanovich Orlov, governor of Novgorod. Empress Catherine II bestowed the title of Count to all the Orlov brothers in 1762.

At the age of 19, Vladimir went to Leipzig on his brothers' advice, and spent three years at the university as an extremely diligent student with the greatest interest in natural sciences and astronomy. Promoted to Gentleman of the Bedchamber upon return to Russia, Count Orlov was appointed Director of the Academy of Sciences at the age of 24 with a Royal decree of October 6, 1766, in which the Empress emphasized his «scientific erudition and scholarly interests».

As Academy Director, Vladimir Orlov was maintaining close contacts with scholars and writers. He arranged numerous research expeditions - in particular, that of Academician Railas — and was doing much for young Russians studying abroad. Though active in team efforts to compile an extensive dictionary of the Russian language, his insistence was not strong enough to make the Academy write its minutes in Russian.

1767, accompanied Catherine the Great in her journey along the Volga, and left travel notes of it.

In January 1 — April 30, 1767, and January 1 — April 30, 1770, President of the Imperial Free Economic Society.

When the Count Orlov headed Society, he supported development of scientific researches and practical trials in the farming. In 1769 in the «Transactions of VEO» was published an essay «Invitation to some house builders to make trials in the arable farming». The aim of that appeal was to attract the land owners to make trials in the arable farming in the different climatic zones. It was recommended to describe each land layer, the dates of the trial works and the weather during planting and harvesting, to measure and to weight collected grains and straw.

Agricultural trials during presidency of V.G. Orlov gave start to the scientific researches in other spheres. While directing its members and correspondents to the wider researches in planting, VEO started creation of its own farms, in order to make trials in different climatic and natural conditions by planting of unknown sorts of plants and using of new types of fertilizers.

In June 1771, went abroad for medical treatment. Visited Germany, France and England everywhere to make the acquaintance of foremost scholars: Returned to St. Petersburg by autumn 1773.

On his application, retired in the rank of Lieutenant-General on a Royal decree of December 5, 1774.

Since 1775, lived in Otrada, his country estate near Moscow.





Oleshev Alexei Vasilyevich (1724–1788)

*Landlord from Vologda, Marshal
of nobility, talented interpreter and writer,
Full Privy Councillor*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1767–31.08.1767*

Alexei Vasilyevich Oleshev was born on September 25, 1724 in his native village Yermolovo in Vologda province. His farther Vasily Savvich lost his arm during the war and in March 1722 he left military service.

His son Alexei didn't have good friends and relatives among nobility, but he managed to build a good career. At the military service Oleshev was from 1745 as an ensign of Sibirsky infantry, and in 1758 from premier-major became under-colonel, and in 1762 — colonel, in 1764 — a brigade leader. After dismissal from military service he was a member of the Main Office of control over customs' duties. He ended his service in the rank of the Full Privy Councillor.

Then he lived as an «educated landowner». Nobility of Vologda chose him twice a Marshal of nobility.

His life in the native village was connected with intensive work. As a result of his efforts Yermolovo was decorated with a regular garden and lakes, which were unique in the neighborhood.

In 1766 he became a member of VEO and got an opportunity to share results of his experiments with the readers of «Transactions of VEO». From May to August 1767 was President of VEO.

His publications on economic questions in «Transactions of VEO» were not only on special economic subjects, but had publicistic character and touched upon economic ethics: relationships between peasants and landlords. In 1767 Alexei Vasilyevich Oleshev established a gold medal equal to 200 Rbls for the article on the subject «How harmful was to marry young fellows on aged girls».

For Oleshev farming was an art, which should be taught. Oleshev considered agriculture a basement for prosperity of the Motherland. His personal experience was reflected in the article «A letter of a landowner from Vologodskaya province, a brigade leader Oleshev, to the VEO». He also wrote articles about development of handicraft industries, an article «Russian writers of XVIII century».

All those materials were characterized not only by the rich content and publicist features, but also by the good literature language. That was not occasionally: Oleshev was well educated, during his youth he visited France and Germany, he was a highly educated man. He was well oriented in the modern west European literature, he was the first, who translated into Russian E. Young.

He was also interested in «moral philosophy», he translated and published articles on morality by Shpalding, P. Dumoulen with his own remarks.

A.V. Oleshev married the sister of Generalissimo A.V. Suvorov — Marya Wassilievna in 1752. Their son Vassily made a brilliant career at the Court — he was a chamberlain of her Majesty.

Oleshev died on June 7, 1788 far away from Vologda and was buried in Petersburg in Alexander-Nevskaia Lavra. On his marble sarcophagus there is an epitaph by W.G. Ruban. «A warrior, a judge, philosopher, an economist». It is difficult to determine the dominated talent of that person.





Cherkasov Alexander Ivanovich (1728–1788)

*Baron, Privy Councillor,
President of the Medical College*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1767–31.12.1768*

Alexander Ivanovich Cherkasov was born in 1728 to Baron Ivan Antonovich Cherkasov, cabinet secretary of Empress Elisabeth. Alexander was first educated at home and then sent to Britain together with his brother in 1742, where he completed his education by listening to lectures in Cambridge. Upon his return to Russia, Baron Cherkasov joined the Preobrazhensky Regiment of Lifeguards, as was the custom at that time. He was put on the regiment's lists back in 1747. He was promoted from sergeant to warrant officer in that regiment in 1751. In June 1752 Cherkasov went abroad again, possibly in order to bring back his brother Ivan.

After that he spent ten years doing military service and was demobilized as a guards captain for health reasons in 1761.

Being an educated man who had lived abroad for a long time, he was instructed to draft the concept of the Medical College in 1762, which he did. The draft was approved on November 12, 1763 and Cherkasov was promoted to Chamberlain and appointed president of the Medical College with the permission not to do duty service there. He was also given a free hand in picking the staff of the new establishment.

Cherkasov assumed his new responsibilities and immediately initiated the reform of medicine in Russia, seeking above all to train Russian doctors. At that time medicine in Russia was the domain of foreigners, mostly Germans, who, protecting their own interests, hindered the development of medical science in Russia. Cherkasov's predecessors frequently pointed to damage done by that monopoly, but could do nothing about it. Cherkasov fought tooth and nail, above all against the strong opposition of German doctors and the fact that Russian young men were not educated enough for studying medicine.

It was Cherkasov's plan to raise the status of hospital schools of general medical education, which he wanted to graduate doctors and thus free Russia from the domination of foreign doctors. On June 9, 1764 the empress signed a decree «on our medical college», which stipulated that hospital schools be created and that its graduates be allowed to hold doctorate examinations in the Medical College. The first such diploma, issued following an examination held in Russia, was granted to Gustav Maximovich Oreus on August 2, 1768. It was apparently the only diploma issued under Cherkasov at the Medical College. He failed to suppress the German influence, which lasted for another hundred years, mostly in different government medical establishments.

In 1764, Baron Cherkasov not only reformed the hospital schools, but also established the first medical staff at the Smolny Monastery.

English doctor Dimsdale, invited to Russia with Cherkasov's mediation in 1768, vaccinated the empress and Grand Duke Paul against smallpox and thus launched the process of small-pox vaccination in Russia.

Cherkasov was a co-founder of the Imperial Free Economic Society and its president from September 1, 1767 to December 31, 1768.

He suggested a Gold Medal of 35 gold pieces for the best project about the Smolensk Province. His portrait was placed in the hall where the economic society held its sessions (as a founder of the society).

Alexander Cherkasov settled in the village upon his retirement on March 28, 1778 and died there on April 25, 1788.





Teplov Grigory Nikolayevich (1720–1770)

*Full Privy Councillor, Senator,
statesman and writer, Full member
of the Russian Academy of Sciences*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1768–30.04.1768*

Grigory Nikolayevich Teplov was born on November 20, 1720 and was educated by Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich of Novgorod. At first he studied at the seminary established by Feofan and was later sent to continue his education in Germany. He worked as a translator at the Academy of Sciences and was an associate of its natural history department. Duke A.G. Razumovsky chose Teplov to be the mentor of his brother Kirill, who was sent to study abroad in 1743.

When Duke Razumovsky was appointed president of the Academy of Sciences, he gave Teplov the post of assessor at the academic secretariat. In 1747 Teplov was made a member of the Academic Assembly. In 1750, when Duke Kirill Grigoryevich Razumovsky was made hetman (Cossack chief), Teplov went with him to the Ukraine and took an active part in Ukrainian affairs.

When Peter III became the Russian Tsar, he suspected Teplov of intrigues and ordered him to be arrested and interrogated. But Teplov was soon released and promoted to Councillor of State «for his famous diligence in the service» of the country, yet ordered «to be in retirement».

Teplov was an active member of the collusion against Peter III and compiled the first manifesto of Catherine II.

Catherine appointed him to «do service at the order of Her Royal Highness».

Undoubtedly, one of the deeds, which depended on the Empress, became creation of Free Economic Society. Grigory Nikolaevich was not only among 15 noble and scientific persons, who created that society, but together with A.A. Nartov and I.I. Taubert elaborated projects of all constituent documents. He was President of the Imperial Free Economic Society from January 1 to April 30, 1768.

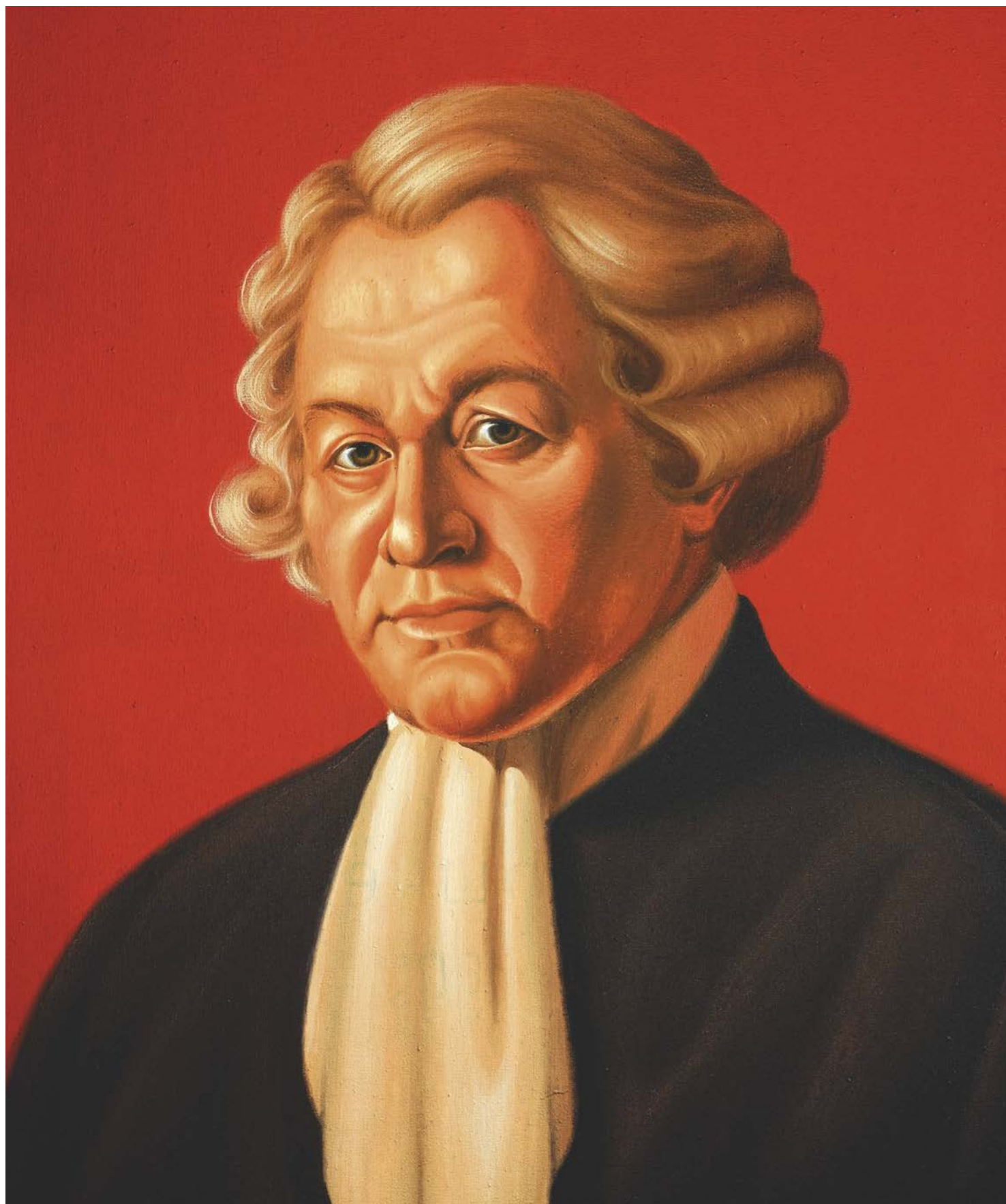
G.N. Teplov supported proposal to collect statistics, which may characterize economic situation of separate provinces and climatic zones of the country, to study Russian farmers and peasants traditions. He, as the President thought, that such information could permit to find in its own country and abroad agro-technical ways which would be most effective in the particular area. Teplov proposed to accept new members with a special ceremony. All that raised authority of VEO.

Grigory Nikolaevich Teplov successfully carried out other demands of Catherine II: he accompanied Catherine II when she accepted appeals, and was frequently chosen to sit on various commissions. In 1766, he contributed to the signing of a treaty with Britain, and in 1767 was appointed member of a commission on commerce and a representative of the land-marking expedition. He was also appointed honorary guardian that year and made Senator in 1768.

He had brilliant and encyclopedic talents in botany and geography, translated satiric works by Kantemir into Latin and Latin odes into Russian, did research into moral philosophy, encouraged «the planting of foreign tobaccos», and enchanted the court with his violin and piano performances.

Grigory Teplov died in 1770 and was buried in the Alexander Nevsky Laura in St.-Petersburg.





Stroganov Alexander Sergeyevich (1733–1811)

Count, Senator, member of the commission for elaboration of a new draft Code, President of the Academy of Fine Arts, member of the School Board and the State Council

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1768–31.08.1768*

Count Alexander Stroganov, a son of Baron, Lieutenant General Sergey Stroganov, was born on January 3, 1733. At the age of 19, he was sent by his father abroad to study. He spent two years in Geneva, attending lectures by well-known professors and then traveled about Italy, familiarizing himself in detail with its art treasures. It was there that he began collecting classical painting.

On settling in Paris, Stroganov for two years studied chemistry, physics and metallurgy, visiting factories and plants. In 1757, he returned to Russia.

In 1743, he received the title of Gentleman of Her Majesty's Bedchamber. He was a permanent conversation partner of Empress Elizabeth's, Peter I's daughter. In 1761, he was sent to the Austrian Court and there the title of Count was bestowed upon him. In 1766, he had the deputies come over to his place, who had been elected to a commission for elaboration of a new draft Code. As a member of that commission, he pushed for the organization of schools for peasants.

Catherine II appointed him as a Senator, Paul I as President of the Academy of Fine Arts and Director of the Public Library, Alexander I as a member of the School Board and the State Council. He took an active part in charity campaigns of Empress Maria Fyodorovna.

From May 1 through August 31, 1768, he was President of the Free Economic Society.

During presidency of A.S. Stroganov Society had to solve a rather complicated problem of publishing in the Russian language the work of a member of De Jone's Academy Bearde del Abej: «What makes property of the farmer: his land, on which he works, or his mobile property and what is his right to possess the both from point of view of the public profit?». That question was proposed by the Empress Catherine II. High quality of that work was out of any doubts and the author was given a premium -100 often roubles banknotes and a gold medal. But the content put the jury at a loss. As supporters of the absolute monarchy and as large land owners, many of VEO members could not support the thesis of the French author, that property could not be without freedoms. However, society took a just decision: «The work must be published». It appeared in the «Transactions» in 1768. Taking into account that according to the Charter, the articles to that edition were approved by the President, it couldn't be presupposed, that opinion of A.S. Stroganov was affirmative.

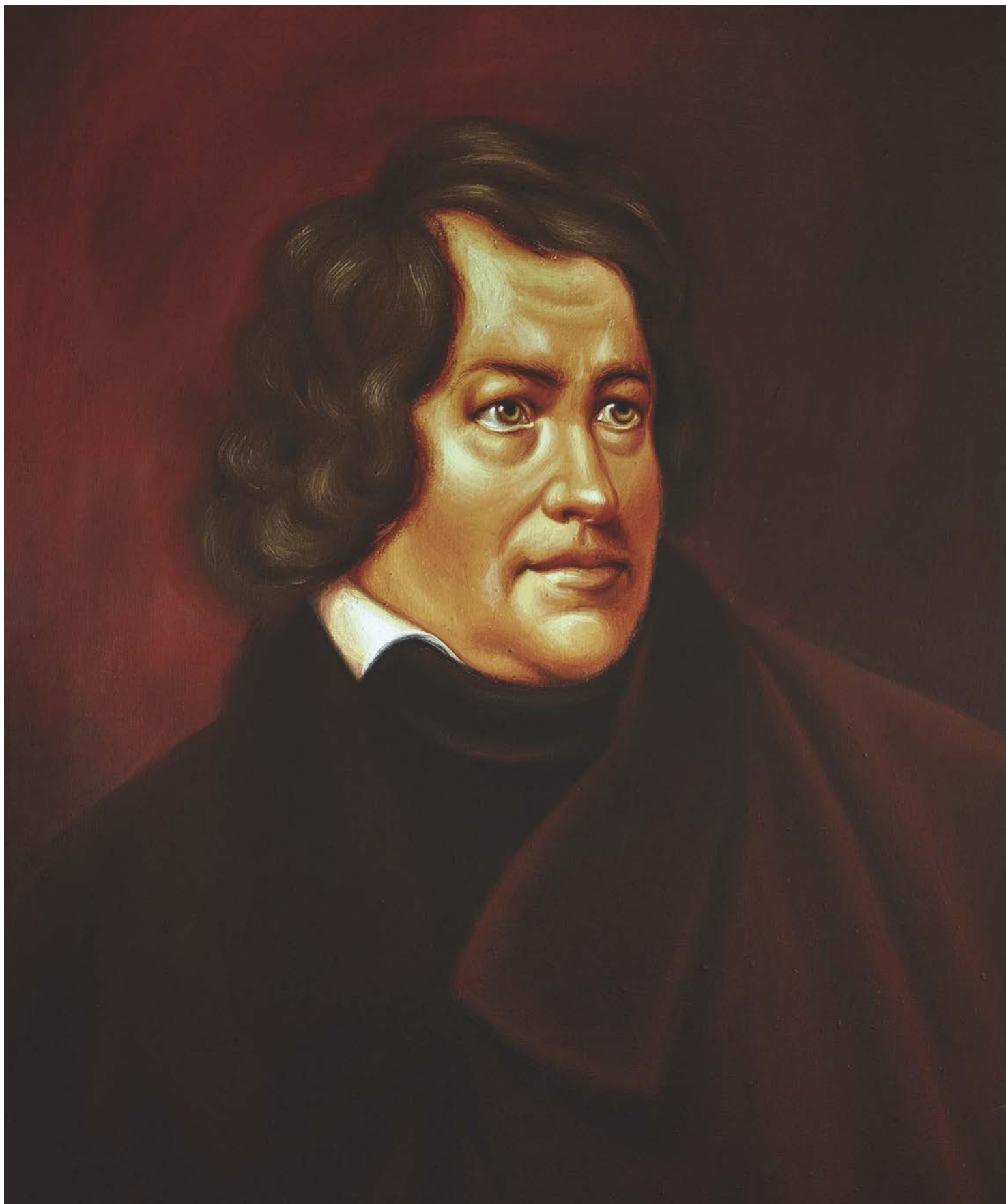
From 1784 up to his death, he was the Petersburg Province Marshal of Nobility. From 1810, he was a member of the State Council.

Stroganov was a patron of the arts in the full sense of the term. He patronized Russian talents both in art and literature. Derzhavin, Bortnyansky, Bogdanovich, and Krylov enjoyed his support. He had fine collections of pictures, gravures, coins, etc. His library was considered one of the best in those days.

Contemporaries loved him for lavish parties and hospitality. Cheerful and friendly, he had a sense of humor and was good at keeping interesting conversations going; he was always noble in his deeds.

A.S. Stroganov died on September 27, 1811, and was buried at the Lazarus Cemetery of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in St.-Petersburg.





Melissino Ivan Ivanovich (1718–1795)

*Statesman, Director of Moscow University,
Attorney-General of the Holy Synod*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1768–31.12.1768*

Ivan Ivanovich Melissino came from a noble Greek family, whose forefathers moved to the island Crete in the XII century. His farther — Ivan Afanasyevich went to Russia during Peter I, in 1740–1745 was Vice-president of the Commerce Collegium.

Melissino was born in Riga, and studied in Petersburg in the army cadet's corps (1732–1740). After its graduation served as ensign to the civil service.

In 1746 he served in Revel administration of the General Governor as court councillor. In 1757 he was appointed director of Moscow University in the rank of councillor of the office. He took an active part in organization of the studying process, religious education of students, their health and mode of life. In 1757 and in winter 1759/60 he accompanied to Petersburg his best pupils to be introduced to I.I. Shuvalov.

In 1763 Melissino was appointed to Synod as prosecutor-in chief in the rank of States councillor. His assistant was G.A. Potemkin, who at that time only started his brilliant career.

On September 6, 1766 Ivan Ivanovich Melissino became a member of VEO. He was elected President in 1768 from September to December.

From 1771 till the end of his life Melissino was curator in Moscow university, where he founded a boarding — school.

Melissino was a highly educated person, knew several languages, had correspondence abroad, was interested in literature, history, theater— he even took an attempt to organize a theater in Moscow.

Melissino initiated organization at Moscow University of a literature society — Free Russian Assembly (1771) and as its initiator he was elected its President. There were known specialists in literature and public leaders in the Society — E.R. Dashkova, A.A. Barsov, N.I. Novikov, A.P. Sumarokov, V.G. Ruban. In its editions were published materials on Russian history, original and translated articles. That edition published the speech of Melissino at the opening ceremony of the Assembly, devoted to the necessity to improve the Russian language.

There was published by a separate booklet his speech in Latin in 1771 when he was appointed curator of the University

In 1778–82 Melissino was abroad, when he came back, there was organized a ceremonial meeting in the University.

In 1783 Melissino was elected a member of the Russian Academy of sciences, headed by E.R. Dashkova, took an active part in the main deed of the Academy — preparation of the famous «Dictionary of the Russian Academy». Melissino selected vocabulary from the letters of Nesterov and he enlisted the services of the teachers and students from the University. In 1790 he founded «Political journal», which was published in Hamburg.

He was buried in the village Konstantinovo, in Bronnitsy, Moscow region.

There were several verses, devoted to his death — an illustration of real popularity and authority among the students of Moscow University.





Sievers Yakov Yefimovich (Jacob-Johann) (1731–1808)

Count, Senator, Governor of Novgorod, Governor General of the Tver and Pskov provinces, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Poland, and Full Privy Councillor

*President of Free Economic Society
1768*

Jakob-Johann (Russified as Yakov Yefimovich) Sievers was a son of Joahim-Johann Sievers, a Livonian landowner and manager of the estates of Baron Tiesenhausen. He was born in Wesenberg on September 19, 1731 and received primary education in the home of his father. Sievers learned to write beautifully in his father's home and said proudly later that he owed some of his welfare to his beautiful handwriting, which three Russian Emperors read with pleasure.

When he was 12, he was brought to St. Petersburg by his uncle, Karl Sievers, who placed him under the supervision of Noske, the steward of the imperial household. It was a dramatic change from tranquil rural life to the brilliant doings of the court. Thanks to his beautiful handwriting, Yakov Sievers was dispatched as a writer to the Foreign Ministry in 1747, where he was entrusted with the decoding of reports.

The Empress issued a decree in December 1747, appointing Yakov Sievers to the Prussian Embassy in Vienna. The decree was unexpectedly cancelled in February 1748 and Sievers was dispatched instead to the Russian embassy in Copenhagen, where Baron Korf was the ambassador. Sievers spent about ten months there and was subsequently moved to the Russian embassy in London, where he served under the supervision of Count Chernyshev, a friend of his uncle.

Yakov spent seven years in London, barely surviving on a modest salary of 200 roubles. Encouraged by his uncle and Count Chernyshev, Yakov Sievers diligently studied the English, Italian and French languages and different sciences in an attempt to improve his clearly insufficient home education. He left London in 1755 and settled in his father's estate in Bauenhof, waiting for a new appointment, which his influential uncle was trying to procure for him.

On January 2, 1756, Yakov Sievers was sent to serve in the army with the rank of major. Thanks to his uncle's connections at court, Count P. L. Shuvalov soon appointed him to the post of division cavalry master. Sievers took part in the Seven Years' War and was promoted to lieutenant-colonel of the Nevsky Regiment for courage at the battle of Gross Egersdorf. In September 1757, Yakov Sievers became full colonel and took part in the Zorndorf Battle.

In 1759–60, he was secretary of the Prussian-Russian commission on the exchange of prisoners.

He was appointed the governor of Novgorod in 1764 and did much for that province, giving his attention to each and every sphere of life there, including agriculture, the production of salt, peat and coal, the marking of land, the management of government-owned peasants, road-building and water reports, the construction of public buildings and schools, and the recruiting of privates. He paid special attention to the situation of serfs and did his best to protect them from the arbitrariness of their owners.

When the Tver and Pskov provinces were established in 1776, Yakov Sievers was appointed governor general of the Novgorod, Tver and Pskov provinces.

In 1789 Sievers was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Poland, where he energetically participated in the so-called second division of Poland.

In 1796, Paul I appointed Sievers Senator, ordered him to «manage water communications» a year later, and made him a count in 1798.

Yakov Yefimovich Sievers died in 1808.





Taubert Ivan Ivanovich (1717–1771)

*Chief librarian of Empress Catherine II,
full member of the Russian Academy
of Sciences, councillor of the Academy's
secretariat*

*President of Free Economic Society
1768*

Ivan Ivanovich Taubert, a councillor of state, librarian and board member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, was born in the German family on August 31, 1717.

He entered the school at the Academy of Sciences in 1726 and started working as a translator in 1735. In his line of duty, he had access to the correspondence of the academy's professors.

In 1758, the academy's president instructed Taubert to supervise the printing shop, the type foundry, the matrix and the mechanical laboratories, the binding and the book-selling shop, and gave him full control of the academy printing factory on June 9, 1759.

Taubert held near and dear the prestige of the academy and its scientific staff and tried to recruit the services of the best European scientists. Mikhail Lomonosov was his bitterest enemy.

In 1761, Taubert appealed to the academy president for permission to publish a collection of Russian manuscripts under the title «The Libraries of Russian History».

He worked actively on various academy commissions, supervising all its actions to establish new schools (the Razumovsky Institute and a primary school at the academy's general school), and energetically contributed to the compilation of statistical charts, scientific processing of the latest data about the population of Russia, and several other projects.

In 1763, Taubert supervised the compilation of «the schemes of Russian output for 1) Greater Russia, 2) Minor Russia [Ukraine] with all its trans-Dnieper regions and the Polish and Turkish borders, 3) Siberia, or the Asian part of Russia, and 4) Livonia, Estland and Finland.

In March 1764, Taubert and Lomonosov were instructed to draft the new regulations of the academy. They worked separately and eventually the Academy approved Lomonosov's draft without even considering Taubert's.

In 1766 when Duke Vladimir Grigoryevich Orlov was appointed president of the Academy, Taubert lost all influence on academic life.

In 1765 i.l. Taubert became one of the 15 founders of Free economic Society together with G.N. Teplov and A.A. Nartov took part in the elaboration of the plan and Charter for patriotic society, which then called Imperial Free Economic society.

There is little information about Taubert's last years. In 1765–69, he wrote «Writings on Cattle Plague». He also wrote «The Kamchatka History» (not published) and translated Bayer's book «On Asia», which was published in St. Petersburg in 1758 and reprinted in 1768 and 1782. It was under his supervision that a certain group started «working to compile a Full Russian Dictionary» and collected enough materials for the first three letters of the Russian alphabet, but the project was terminated.

Ivan Andreyevich Taubert died in 1771.





Vorontsov Roman Illarionovich (1707–1783)

Count, Lieutenant-General and Senator during Elizabeth's reign, General-in-Chief during Peter III, Full Chamberlain, Full Privy Councillor, Governor of Vladimirskaya, Penzenskaya and Tambovskaya provinces, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences

*President of Free Economic Society
1769*

Vorontsov Roman Illarionovich came from the oldest noble family many representatives of which were on the highest state and diplomatic posts in Russia, prominent statesman.

He was born on July 17, 1707 in the family of a landowner in Vladimirskaya province Illarion Gavrilovich Vorontsov, who became widower very early.

R.I. Vorontsov was a representative of the court nobility and aristocracy, convinced supporter of noble monopoly on land property and serves, as well as development of entrepreneurship. He was the most important manufacturer and owned a trading company on the Caspian Sea, and sold abroad fish and sole, he also owned distillery in Siberia. He promoted his views when worked as Chairman of the Commission of the new Code (1760–1763).

During Catherine II Vorontsov R. I. became governor of Vladimirskaya, Penzenskaya and Tambovskaya provinces.

He was one of 15 persons who were distinguished by nobility, their association with the throne and had talents in agriculture and science, who founded Free Economic society on June 15, 1765. The same day he was proposed to become the President of VEO, but Vorontsov exceeded himself because of insufficient knowledge of foreign languages, as he was convinced, that the President needed to negotiate with foreign members, to read letters from them.

After the first meeting Society met in his house till January 17, 1767. Then he gave 1000 roubles to buy roofing iron for the new building of VEO.

Roman Illarionovich became President of VEO for a short period in 1769.

In the transactions of VEO Vorontsov published his articles: «About reserves of bread», «About methods of correction of housing construction in villages» He was an initiator of grain supplies to guarantee food security of the Russian people.

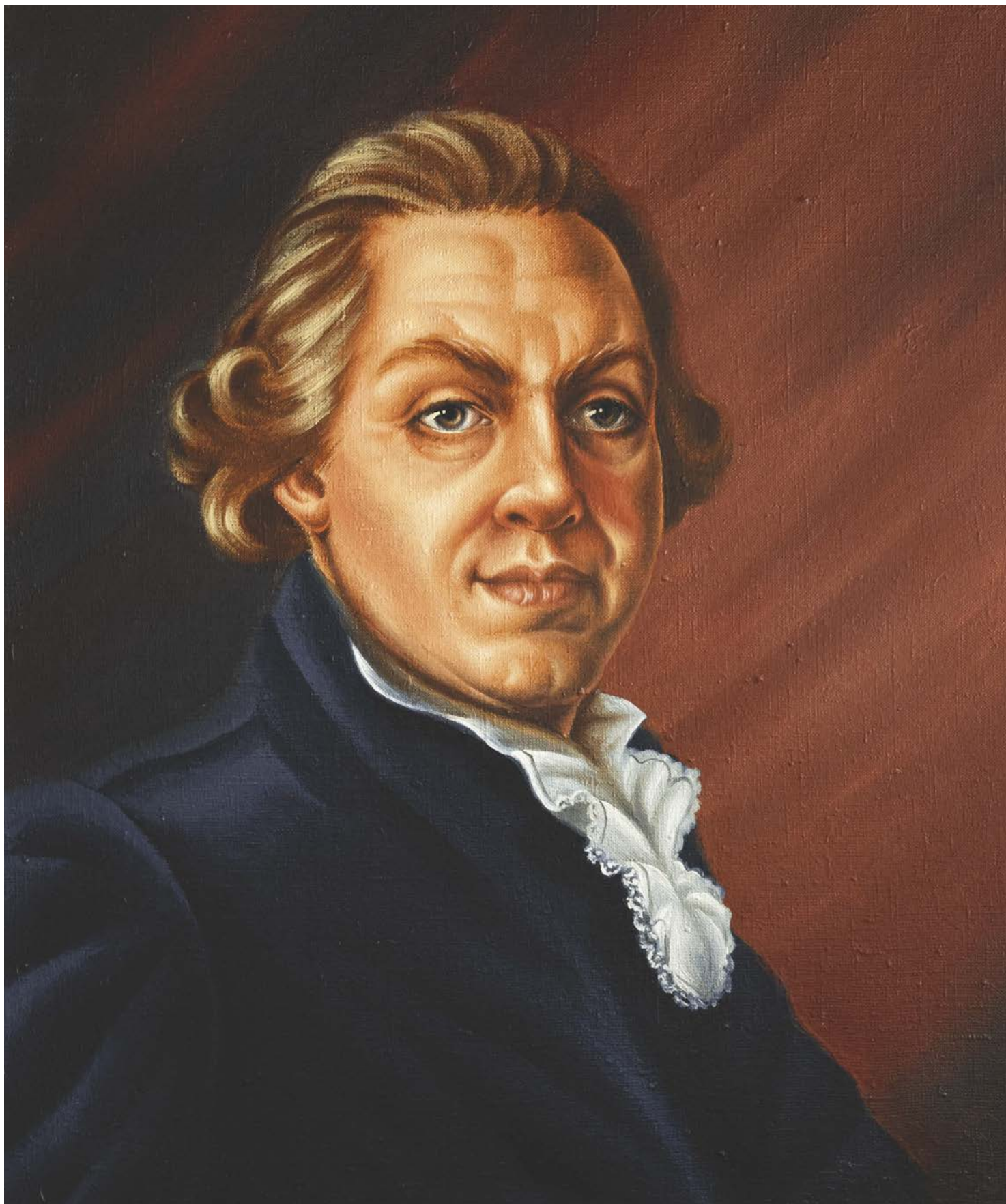
He proposed to establish society gold medals, awarded to such landowners who the first laid in an annual stock of grain in his district. Vorontsov began to create annual stocks in his villages much earlier.

Besides, R. I. Vorontsov was engaged in the questions of flax cultivation, he cared about creation of the register of grasses in Siberia, about development of the river navigation in Tambovskaya province. His poultry farms in Siberia, Astrakhan and Kizlyar delivered poultry to the Tzar court.

R.I. Vorontsov gave start to the Museum of Free Economic Society. He ordered from England new models of agricultural machines and devices for the Museum.

R.I. Vorontsov died on November 30, 1783 and was buried at the cemetery in one of the cathedrals in the town of Vladimir on Klyazma river.





Chernyshev Pyotr Grigoryevich (1712–1773)

*Diplomat, Privy Councillor, Chamberlain,
Senator, Ambassador to Denmark,
Prussia, Britain and France*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1769–31.08.1769*

Count Pyotr Grigoryevich Chernyshev was born in St.-Petersburg on March 24, 1712 and was the elder son of Peter the Great's valet, Grigory Petrovich Chernyshev, who then became General in Chief, Senator and Count.

Owing to the place his parent held at the court, Pyotr Chernyshev was simply doomed to make a brilliant career. He was brought up since his birth by Peter the Great himself, as well as by Count Gavriil Ivanovich Golovkin and Tsarinas Anna Ioannovna and Yekaterina Ioannovna. In 1715 he was registered as a private of the Preobrazhensky Regiment of Lifeguards and in 1722, at the tender age often, allowed to enter the service of Duke Schleswig-Holstein. He first served as a page and then as a page of the duke's chamber and eventually became lieutenant-captain in the Holstein service.

On May 29, 1727 Chernyshev returned to Russia, where he was appointed adjutant to his father and granted the rank of Lieutenant on December 12 of the same year.

He entered the diplomatic service when 16 years of age and later became a famous diplomat. He spent 18 months abroad and returned to Russia during the reign of Anna Ioannovna. A member of the Russian party, Chernyshev was not especially trusted by the German government of Biron. During the reign of Anna Leopoldovna, he was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary at the Dutch-Norwegian Court in 1741 and was subsequently dispatched to Berlin.

Chernyshev's relations with the Prussian government dramatically deteriorated in early 1746 after an open clash with one of its ministers, Chernyshev was sent as Ambassador to London. He quickly gained the confidence of King George II and helped to sign treaties that ended the Seven Years' War.

He was promoted to Lieutenant-General in 1754 and recalled from London in March 1755. He was appointed Russia's Ambassador to Paris in July 1760, after Ambassador Bestuzhev-Ryumin died. He was promoted to Privy Councillor on August 16 of that year and appointed Senator on September 16.

Pyotr Chernyshev returned to Russia in 1762 and ended his diplomatic career. He settled in St. Petersburg in July 1763 and as a Senator attended sessions of the ruling Senate.

Pyotr Grigoryevich successfully combined his state service and the public activity. As the President of VEO, the Count Chernyshev used his foreign relations in getting information about novelties in agricultural machinery and methods in Europe. He supported initiative of R.I. Vorontsov about buying of ploughes from England and Germany. Along with that Society took into account local experience. In the «Transactions of VEO» with support of P.G. Chernyshev appeared articles of Baron Wolf «Instruction to the steward, how to organize the work in the villages when the land owner is absent», a letter of the Livonian land owner Wangergame «About useful application of different wooden ploughes?» and recommendations on potatoes and trees cultivation, bees breeding, fertilizers use.

He died in St.-Petersburg on August 17, 1773 and was buried in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery.





Glebov Alexander Ivanovich (1722–1790)

General-in-Chief, Procurator-General during the reigns of Peter III and Catherine II, Governor General of Belgorodskaya and Smolenskaya provinces

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1769–31.12.1769
01.01.1771–30.04.1771*

Born on August 26, 1722, Alexander Glebov joined the Butyrsky Infantry Regiment as Sergeant at the age of 15. Took part in the Turkish campaign under Field-Marshal Muennich, 1737–1739 — in particular, in the storm of Ochakov and the Battle of Stavucani.

Retired in Captain's rank, 1749.

Appointed Head Secretary of the Senate land-surveying expedition and Counsellor of the Central Land-Surveying Office, 1754. Was a member of the Code of Laws drafting commission.

Glebov mainly owed his breathtaking career to the intercession of powerful dignitary Count Ravel Shuvalov.

He retained the office of Procurator-General for 18 months after Catherine II ascended the throne as the Empress valued his brilliance. He and Count Nikita Panin took over the files and cases formerly in the Secret Office jurisdiction on an Imperial order of December 10, 1763. Catherine was soon sorry of her choice as judicial bungles and graft among the officialdom were rampant as before, and she appointed another Procurator-General.

Still, she thought he: could do much for Russia. He was twice elected President of the Free Imperial Economic Society in the periods: September 1 — December 31, 1769, and January 1 to April 30, 1771. The merits of VEO during presidency of A.I. Glebov were developments in zoology and veterinary. In particular, in 1769 by the proposal of Alexander Ivanovich, the chief librarian of the Empress I.I. Taubert wrote a work «An article about loss of cattle» and then Society proposed a contest task «To enumerate the means against loss of cattle and methods of treatment of infected cattle». Many scientists and practical researches responded to that appeal. One wrote about methods of treatment of sheep and cows against water illness, others about preliminary treatment of the cattle. The special attention was paid to the elimination of small pox, which was the most severe illness among the cattle.

The problem of keeping the cattle was important to such an extent, that the Empress Catherine II was occupying by it. The Empress gave an order, in particular, to study efficiency of vaccinations. The results of that work were published in the «Transactions of VEO» in 1768–1771. Among them: «Discussions about vaccinations of small pox», «About method of sheep vaccination of small pox», «Short instruction on what to do in case of infection among the cattle, how to use vaccination» and some others. He received even bigger thanks after his presidency.

Glebov was promoted to General-in-Chief, 1773, and appointed Governor-General of the Belgorod and Smolensk provinces. Once on that post, he focused attention on the establishment of district law courts and related issues.

Contemporary accounts emphasized public sympathy he had won with modesty and democratic attitudes.

Glebov settled in Vinogradovka, his rural property outside Moscow, and was occasionally appearing in the city, where he owned a house.

Alexander Glebov died On June 2, 1790.





Pohlmann Wilhelm Romanovich (1727–1795)

Full Chamberlain and Master of the Hunt, Lieutenant-General a deputy in the Commission on New Code Draft from Estland nobility

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1770–31.08.1770*

Wilhelm-Rheigold Romanovich von Pohlmann, was of the oldest Westphalian noble families. Bom, 1727. Chamberlain in the reign of Emperor Peter III. Awarded the Order of St. Ann, 1st class, June 9, 1762.

Promoted to Full Chamberlain, 1765. Founding member among other 15 of the Imperial Free Economic Society since September 21, 1765. Society president since May 1770.

When he became President of VEO, VR. Pohlmann played an important role in the distribution of potatoes. Which was called in the first publications as «tartofel, tartufel, earth apples and potatosams». Only later potatoes got the present name.

To introduce this new agricultural product into the Russian land farming, VEO sent to the regions the seeds of that unknown plant with typed instructions about the methods of its cultivation and use. With the same aim by recommendation of Wilhelm Romanovich in the «Transactions of VEO» in 1770–1771 were published notes about potatoes or earth apples, about making of flour out of potatoes, about making of cereals from earth apples and other. The problem of potatoes cultivation in Russia was a key topic of many meetings of the members of the Society. Special activity in propaganda of that product was organized by the Governor of Novgorod Ya. ESivers, who made a lot of experiments with potatoes in his region. It appeared that the tubers, which were known in 1765 only to some land owners and cultivated in the kitchen gardens became available to all regions of the country, thanks to the initiative of VEO.

In 1767, elected deputy of the nobility of the Gahr kreis (district), Estland gubernia, to the Commission for the Drafting of a New Code of Laws. Bibikov, Marshal of the commission, nominated him to the session of May 21, 1768, for membership of an ad hoc commission for mining, forestry and trade. Promoted to Master of the Hunt as Lieutenant-General, January 1, 1768. Retired, January 29, 1778.

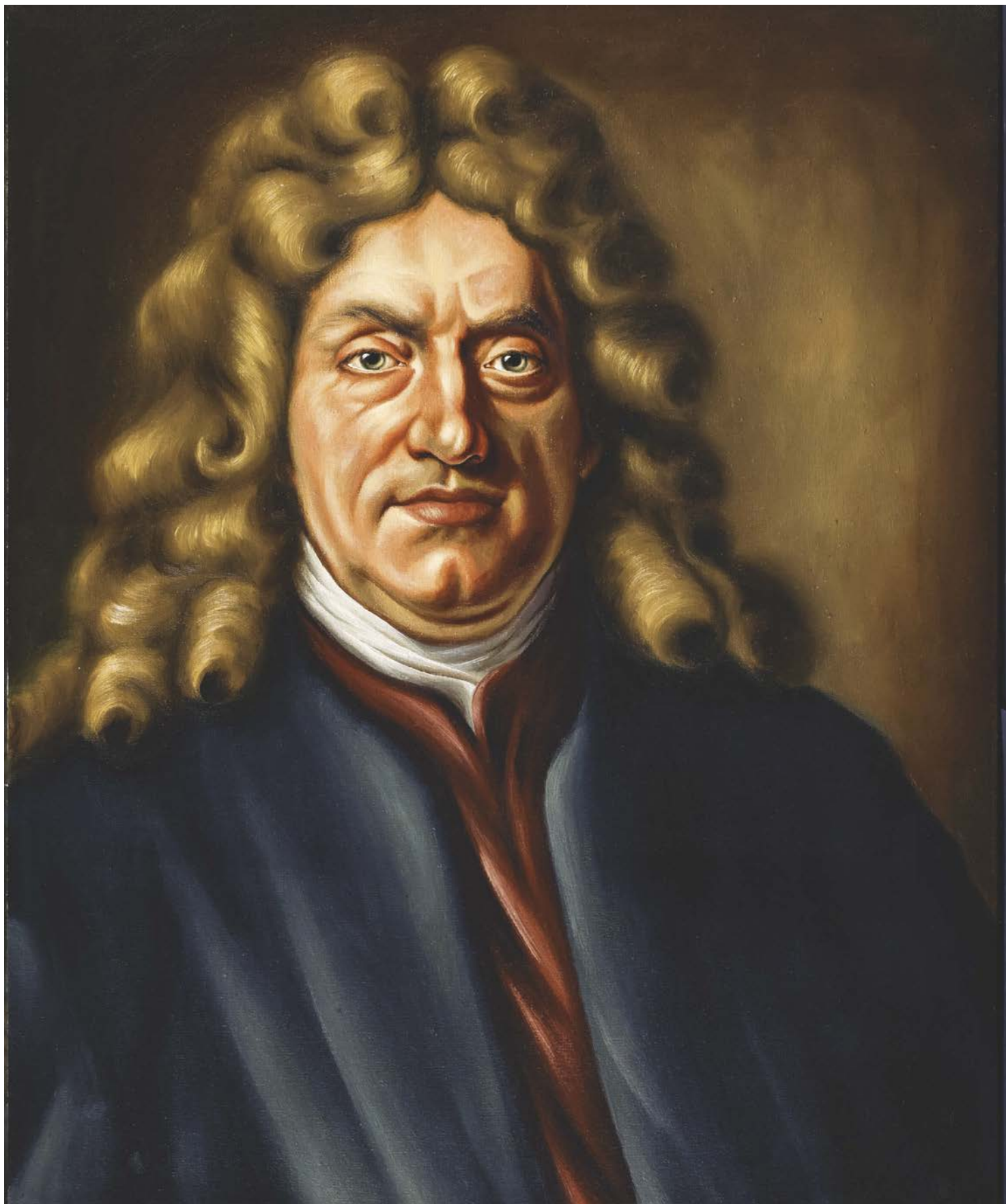
In 1786, summoned to St.-Petersburg from one of his country seats with a Royal decree as the Empress left in his charge Princess Augusta of Wurttemberg, consort of Prince Frederick of Wurttemberg, elder brother of Empress Maria Theodorovna. Previously at court, Princess Augusta had Revel appointed for her winter residence, and the Lode Castle in Estland for summer for the time of her divorce proceedings. Pohlmann was to follow the Princess to her new residence and never leave her side.

A Royal decree of December 22, 1786, removed the Lode castle and estate from the jurisdiction of the Board of Local Offices into Pohlmann's management. Princess Augusta died a sudden death, September 16, 1788. As Pohlmann was concealing the details of her demise, a rumour started that the Princess had died a violent death Masterminded by him or through his negligence.

As can be concluded from several extant letters of Catherine II to Pohlmann, the Empress considered him a man of the utmost circumspection and prudence.

Wilhelm Pohlmann died in 1795.





Epinus Fyodor Ivanovich (Franz Ulrich Theodore) (1724–1802)

*Mathematician, astronomer, physicist,
professor of the Russian Academy
of Sciences*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1770–31.12.1770*

Fyodor Epinus (Franz-Ulrikh-Teodor) was born in 1724. Upon receipt of a doctoral degree in medicine from Rostock University, he became a Privatdocent on the faculty. From 1755 to 1757, he was a professor of astronomy at the Berlin Observatory.

In 1757, Franz-Ulrikh was invited to the St.-Petersburg, where he became Fyodor Ivanovich and in the Academy of Sciences he took the position of physics professor, which he held up to 1798. Epinus' scientific and literary activity in Russia began with contribution to academic journals of popular articles dwelling on comets, planets and their moons, various celestial phenomena, problems of sea navigation, etc. He then switched over to monographs, which he would place in bulletins of the Academy of Sciences. Epinus elaborated the theory of electric induction for magnetism and electricity.

Professor of physics was also famous for regularly delivered speeches at Academy sessions.

At one of such sessions in 1763, Catherine II had an opportunity to meet Epinus. Two years later, in 1765, the Empress appointed him as a tutor for her 11 years old son, the Grand Prince Pavel Petrovich. Epinus then had to reduce his academic activity to a minimum, with Catherine II assigning him tasks of national importance.

From September 1 to December 31, 1770, Epinus was President of the Imperial Free Economic Society.

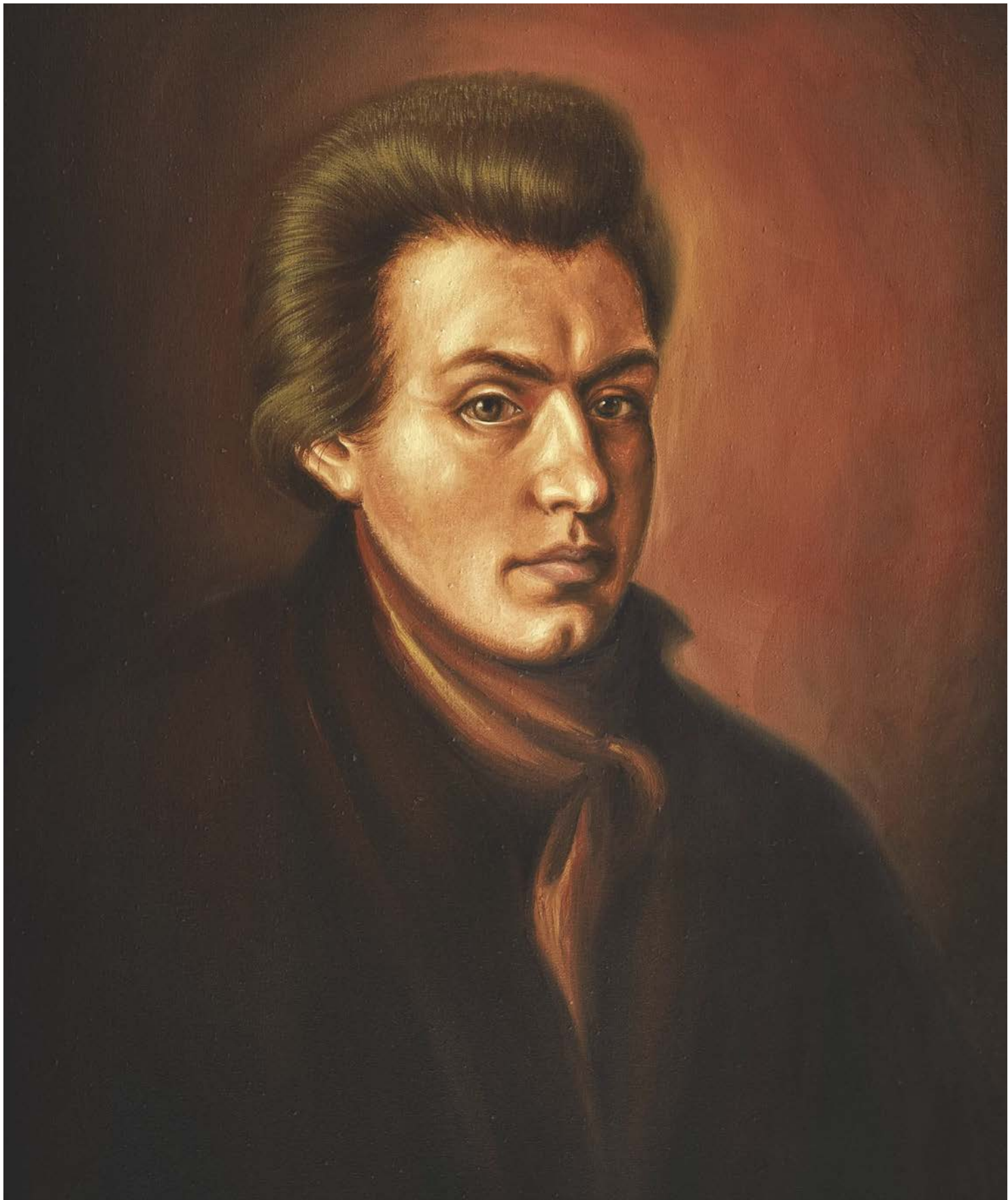
As President of VEO F.I. Epinus proved to be not only a remarkable mathematician and physicist, but organizer of scientific works in arable land and housing construction. He followed the way, put by the first presidents, and he supported the initiative of the Count R.L. Vorontsov about organization in the villages stocks of bread for the poor years, a proposal of T.I. Klingshtet about increasing of the wheat production and its export, about trials with potatoes in the different regions of Russia. President Epinus was an active supporter of application in Russia the western methods of managing in the estates. With that aim was published in the «Transactions of VEO «Order for the country Stuart», written by the captain Bolotov, and the works of the baron von Woolf, a Livonian land owner Wangergame, economic answers from Eizel province and other.

During his presidency was celebrated the fifth anniversary of Free Economic Society on October 30, 1770.

In 1782, Epinus wrote a note on the organization in Russia of elementary and secondary school. He recommended that Russia should borrow the Austrian school system. His draft program was approved, and in September 1782, an ad hoc commission was formed to administer its implementation, with him as the leader.

Fyodor Ivanovich Epinus died in 1802.





Kruze Karl Fyodorovich (1727–1799)

*Doctor of Medicine, Chief doctor
of the Guards, full member of the Russian
Academy of sciences*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1771–31.12.1771
01.10.1778–01.09.1779*

Kruze Karl Fridrikh came from Holstein in 1727. He received a doctor degree in medicine in Leiden «De causis acidi in primis viis».

Then he came to Russia by Contract for three years and was appointed doctor-in-chief to the Admiralty general hospital, as well as professor of the medical college in the hospital. He married a daughter of the famous doctor in Petersburg, first physician — ordinary German Burgava-Kau. He got a big medical practice.

In 1753 Kruze became doctor-in-chief in the army Guards. From July 18, 1761 became physician-in ordinary with the title of Full States Councillor. He cared about Empress Elizaveta Petrovna during her last illness. After her death he was dismissed by the Emperor Peter Fedorovich, but during Catherine II reign was given the same position.

From 1756 he was a Full member of the Russian Academy of sciences. The library and written proceedings which belonged to Kruze and Burgava according to the request of his daughter were first analyzed by the Medical Board and then were given to the library of Medical-Surgical Academy after his death.

From March 3, 1770 he was a member of VEO. Twice he was elected as President — in May-December 1771 and in October 1778 — September 1779. When Karl Fedorovich became a President of VEO, he insisted in development of creative links with his colleagues in Russia and abroad. With that aim VEO applied for assistance to the governors in Russia and to the agricultural and economic societies abroad. The contacts became stronger with the Russian Academy of sciences, the full members of which besides Kruze, were the founders A.V. Olsufyev, I.G. Modell, G.N. Teplov, and a member of VEO the Count V.G. Orlov was director of the Academy of Sciences. In particular, members of VEO gave methodical recommendations on organizations of scientific expeditions, wrote articles about arable farming and housing construction in Russia for many academic publications and encyclopaedia.

He was a known doctor and asked corresponding members from provinces to send to the Society information about life of local people and about diseases in those places, which home made medicines were used. He was also interested in the question: «How well the people live: how many families are there and how long people live?»

At his initiative Free Economic Society established a gold medal worth of 35 gold pieces for the winner of a contest with envisaged «verbal description of an industrious peasant of the Russian Empire, who painstakingly did his chores in all seasons, and lived a life of integrity and prosperity.»

In 1779 Karl Fedorovich Kruze initiated the list of the first 30 volumes of Transactions of VEO and the title to the 31st volume «Continuation of the Transactions of Free economic Society». He proposed to inform the readers that it would be published when there would be enough materials. From 1779 to 1794 were published 19 volumes.





Trubetskoy Pyotr Nikitich (1724–1791)

*Prince, Full Privy Councillor, Senator,
Honorary member of the Imperial
Academy of Fine Arts*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1772–30.04.1772
01.05.1778–30.10.1778*

The Prince P.N. Trubetskoy was born in 1724 and belonged to the fifteenth generation of the famous dynasty, which for six hundred years showed its dignity and endurance in the Russian history.

He began his service in Preobrazhensky regiment, one of the best military formations in Russia, to serve there was a big honour and promised a really brilliant future career. From 1758 he was serving at the court from 1761 — a chamberlain and Chief procurator in the Senate From 1764 he was the Privy Councillor, Senator; from 1773 — he was Full Privy Councillor.

His activity was tightly connected with administrative, pedagogics and philanthropic deeds of I.I. Betzkoy, a prominent statesman at the time of Catherine II. In 1764 he was appointed an assistant of I. Betzkoy in the Design Office and was responsible for reconstruction works in Petersburg and Moscow in the classicism style, and had control over great constructions. That year P.N. Trubetskoy was appointed a member of the Council of Smolny.

He was a deputy in the Commission on the New Code, had great influence over the court and was one of the respected Senators He had high appreciation by Catherine II.

He promoted arts development and was elected honorary member of the Imperial Academy of Arts.

He entered VEO in 1770 and for three times was the member of its committee (in 1771, 1773 and 1779) and twice he was elected the President (1772 and 1778).

In the 70-ies of the 18th century, when VEO was headed by the Prince Trubetskoy, Society assisted actively to cultivate in Russia useful plants According to the publications in the «Transactions of VEO», special attention was paid to the cultivation of potatoes, of the best sorts of wheat and rye, to the search of new kinds of technical crops. In particular special attention was paid to the research of nettle properties and production of textile, to the cultivation of tobacco and the hop. Bee breeding was in the center of attention as well.

According to remembering of his contemporaries he composed poems and especially songs, he made translations, which were praised for correct and nice language. He gave to I.I. Golikov for publications in the «Deeds of Peter the Great» more than 800 documents.

P.N. Trubetskoy was a friend of one of the creators of the Russian historic science M.M. Sherbatov — an apologist of the noble honour and a firm patriot of the state service. There is not much information about him in historical genealogy, he was always in the shadow of I.I. Betzkoy. But however, even small information about him is an evidence that he real representative of his dynasty, whose generations manage: respect the power and never cringed before it.





Pekken Christian (1731–1779)

*Doctor of medicine, Collegiate Councillor,
Medical Collegium's academic secretary
and member, author of the book
«Home medicine»*

*President of Free Economic Society
1772*

Christian Peken (Pekken) was born in Hungary in the town of Rizenau. He studied mathematics and medicine in Wittenberg and Halle. In 1751 he acquired a doctoral degree in medicine. Then he came back to his native country, and in 1755 he went to Russia, to Petersburg, where he was appointed a doctor to the hospital. From 1763 — a member of the Medical Collegium.

Christian Pekken was one of 15 founders of Free Economic Society. In 1765 he participated in composition of the plan and Charter for VEO.

He had a creative nature and combined his medical practice with scientific researches. He elaborated questions of health and hygiene, published in «Transactions of VEO» his «Instructions for those who came to S-Petersburg, how to keep their health» and «About construction of housing settlements for ordinary people».

Pekken published the first Russian medical manual in order to help to solve medical problems of the ordinary people and especially to help to the people, who live in the far away provinces, where it was difficult to find a doctor. However, the book was out of use for four years, till Catherine gave an order to the medical Collegium to write a small and instructive book for the people, who lived in the far away provinces.

The book of Pekken «Home medicine» corresponded to their task and was published in 1765.

The author devoted the book to the members of Free Economic Society, carrying about agriculture and house-keeping. He, in particular, appreciated a possibility to be published in «Transactions of VEO».

The book was published in 2400 copies. Part of copies was sent to provinces.

All edition was quickly sold out and in 1766 the Medical Collegium republished the book in 6000 copies. Part of the edition was sent to Astrakhan, Orenburg, Tobolsk and other provinces and the book was sold together with a medicine chest, with a list of medicines, enumerated in the part «Home pharmacy». The book was published again in 1786 with some additions, part of which was prepared by the son of the author, who was by that time a known doctor.

The last edition was in 1796 with remarkable corrections and additions by the son of Pekken. At least same practical application had another work of Pekken «Advice to the country people how to protect themselves against small-pox», which was published in «Transactions of VEO» in 1766. 1200 copies were made for free-of-charge distribution.

With direct participation of Pekken, Collegium composed the first Russian pharmacopy in 1778 in Russian and Latin.

During epidemic of black death in 1770 in Moscow, Pekken was sent to Smolensk to control and to improve quarantines. He spent there more than one year.

In May 1779, Christian Pekken died.





Falk Johann Peter (1727–1773)

Doctor of medicine, Professor of botany at the Apothecary Gardens, Director of the Botanical Gardens in the Academy of Sciences

*President of Free Economic Society
1772*

FALK Johann Peter was born in Sweden in 1727 in the family of a preacher.

He completed a course of study at the University of Uppsala to receive a doctoral degree in medicine. For some time he worked as home teacher in the family of the famous naturalist Linnaeus, who played an important role in his life. Falk studied botany.

In 1762 he managed to publish his disputable composition «Planta Alstromeria» — description of the plant gender. Which got its name to commemorate known Swedish scientist Von Alstremer. However, he didn't find possibilities to cover expenses on receiving another doctoral degree. And he went to the island Hotland with expedition of Linnaeus. Idea to visit Arabia was not realized.

The second Motherland for Falk was Russia. Thanks to a reference from Linnaeus, he was admitted to St. Petersburg Academy of sciences to the post of responsible over cabinet of natural history and later to the post of the Director of the botanical gardens. Under his governance, the garden was filled with exotic plants. He also gave lectures on botanic and medicine.

He was one of the 15 founders of VEO who began elaboration of the plan of VEO in 1765. He published in the «Transactions of VEO» an article «About local trees and bushes to be planted in the garden», translated by A.A. Nartov.

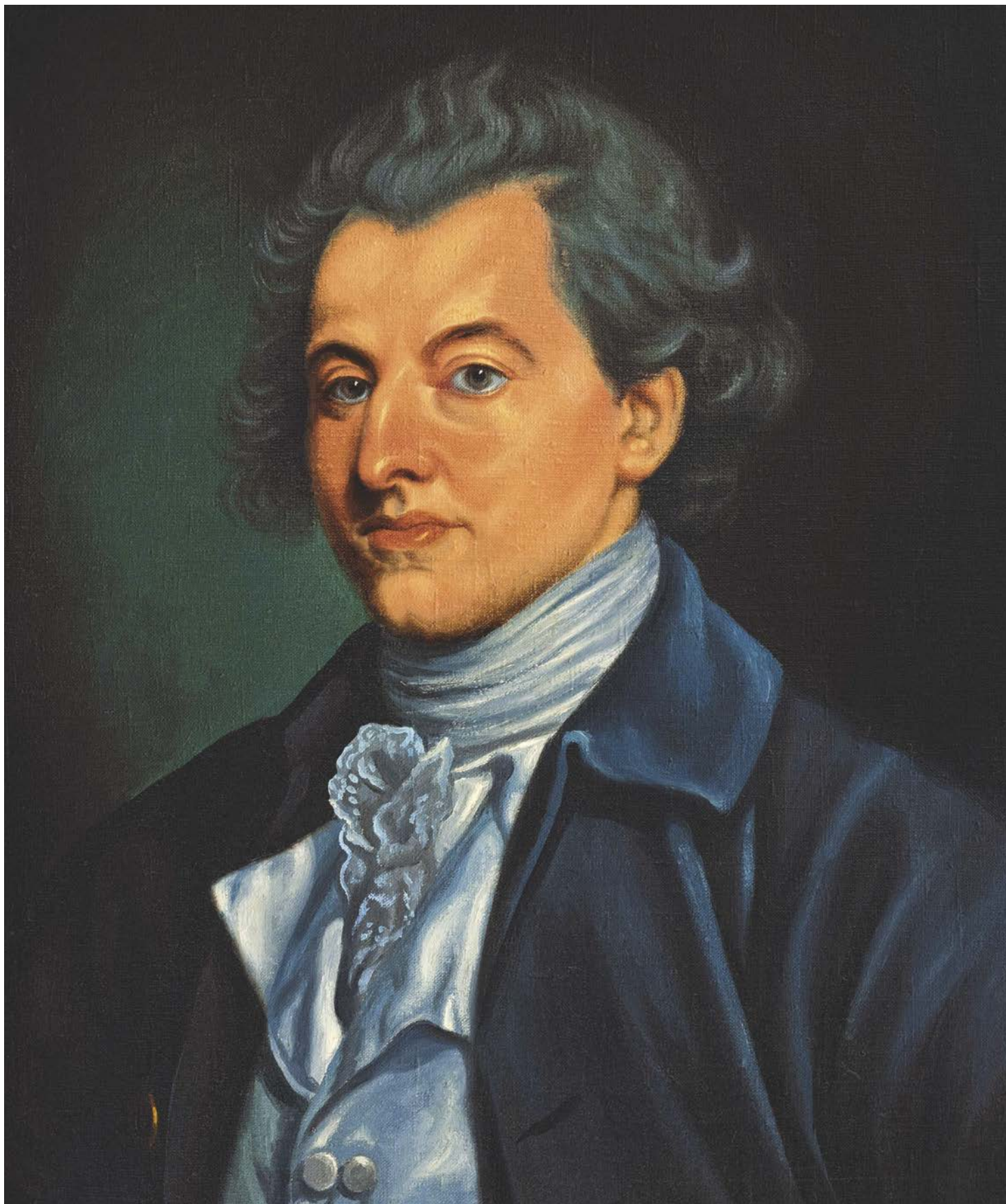
After 1765, when Catherine II and her heir were vaccinated against small pox, VEO started struggle against a really disaster — epidemic of small pox. Doctor Falk headed that action. Under his reduction in the «Transactions of VEO» were published articles by the Russian and foreign authors, devoted to the preliminary struggle with that disease.

Falk was a participant in the famous academic expedition in the Eastern Russia with I.G. Georgy. Falk headed expedition to Orenburg (1768–1773). He left Petersburg in 1768 and via the rivers Oka, Sura, Volga passed Moscow and came to Tsaritsin. Then he went to Astrakhan, passed Kalmyk-skaya steppe and came to Uralsk, then to Orenburg. From Orenburg he went to Kyrgyzskaya steppe. Then he went to Siberia via Tobolsk and Yshtym to Omsk, Barnaul, by the river Ob he went to Tomsk and back to Irtysh, Tobolsk, Tumen, Turu, Ekaterinburg, Kazan.

During many years of traveling Falk collected a lot of materials, mostly on the flora of the Urals steppe and the lifestyle of the Kirghiz.

Valuable scientific material left behind by Falk was brought together by colleagues Georgi and Laxman and printed at the Academy's publishing house in the German language along with illustrations and maps. Among those there is «The Complete Scientific Expeditions into Russia by professor Krasheninnikov, Lepyokhin and Falk», published in 1818.





Shuvalov Andrei Petrovich (1744–1789)

*Count, Chamberlain, Senator,
Director of Russia's credit banks,
member of the Commission for
Housing Construction in Moscow
and St.-Petersburg, writer*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1772–31.8.1772*

Andrei Shuvalov was born on June 23, 1744, the son of Field Marshal, Count Pyotr Shuvalov. He was raised at the court of Elizabeth (Peter I's daughter). He received fine schooling at home, which he later enriched on his trips abroad. Of his early French-language poems, particularly noteworthy is an ode to the death of Lomonosov (whom he admired) and «Epitre a M. de Voltaire».

In 1748, Shuvalov was enrolled as sergeant major in the Household Cavalry, to be eventually promoted to the rank of lieutenant. In 1757, he was granted the title of Gentleman of the Chamber of Her Majesty, and made a trip to Paris as part of a diplomatic mission. In 1758, he was elected an honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts, made Chamberlain of the House in 1761, and put on the Commerce Commission in 1763.

Catherine the Great noticed the young courtier, the author of sophisticated French verses and made him a member of her intimate club. He would style-edit her French-language letters, assist her in writing her «Antidote», supervise the publication of Russian translations of the best in foreign literature, and pursue research into the history of Russia.

In 1767, he accompanied the Empress on a trip; that same year he was made responsible for the Commission's daily reports on the elaboration of a new draft Code. From 1768 through 1783, Shuvalov sat on a translator commission, which published works by Voltaire, Montesquieu, the Encyclopedists, Friedrich II, etc. Later, Catherine made him chair of a commission «for making notes on early history, predominantly that of Russia,» and he was able to compile a «chronological excerpt from Russian history,» which stops at the year 1171, and to get it published in 1787.

President of the Imperial Free Economic Society from May 1 through August 31, 1772.

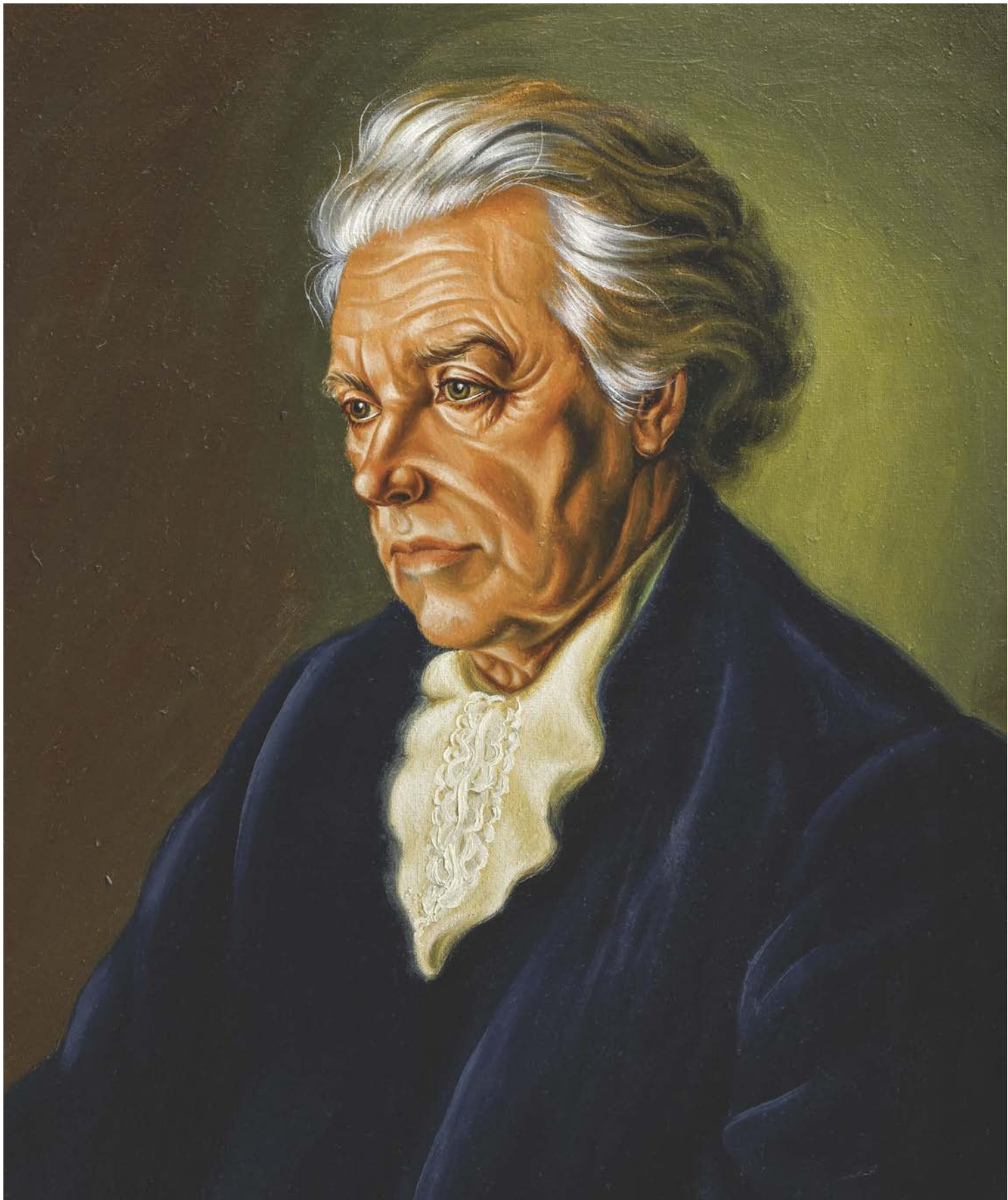
During those years VEO developed its activity in many scientific fields. Among them was cultivation of useful plants, development of the pedigree cattle, support of the inventors of agricultural devices, search of new fertilizers and paints. When he headed Society as President, Andrey Petrovich found time for other works in the different spheres of science.

After escorting Catherine II to southern Russia in 1787, he was made a member of her council. As director of Russia's credit banks, he wrote a note that prompted the merger of all those banks into one. He was a senator and a member of the Commission for Construction in St.-Petersburg and Moscow. He also ran St.-Petersburg's wallpaper manufactory.

Shuvalov died on April 24, 1789, and was buried in St. Lazarus Church in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery.

Contemporaries of Shuvalov's describe him as an intelligent man, with a remarkably quick reaction and an excellent memory. He was a connoisseur of the fine arts, and would patronize artists, Russian and foreign alike.





Chernyshev Ivan Grigoryevich (1726–1797)

Count, Navy Field-Marshal, President of the Admiralty Collegium, Honorary member of the Russian Academy of sciences, Ambassador to England, Full Chamberlain

*President of Free Economic Society
01.10.1772–31.12.1772*

Ivan Grigoryevich Chernyshev — a younger brother of the prominent statesmen of the XVIII century — Z.G. Chernyshev and P.G. Chernyshev. He studied in the cadet corps.

In 1741–1745 was in Copenhagen and Berlin in the Russian Embassy, in 1745–1749 served in Semenovskiy regiment. He made his career owing to the place his parents held at the court and enjoyed the favour of all Emperors and Empresses for whom he served. From 1755 he was a Chamberlain, in 1769 was appointed Attorney General of the Senate and General Director of the Senate Commission on commerce. In 1761 he represented Russia's interests at the Augsburg Congress. The day of coronation of Catherine II he received a rank of Lieutenant-General. He was a trusted man of Catherine II and was close with her heir.

In 1763 he was recommended by N.I. Panin to the Admiralty Collegium and Chernyshev became its member the following year — a commander of the galley float. In 1768–1770 he was an extraordinary and plenipotentiary Ambassador in Great Britain.

In 1769 he had a rank of Navy General and was appointed Vice-President of Admiralty Collegium (President was Pavel), in 1796 as Field-Marshal he became its President. As Senator he received the highest awards of the country. In 1776 he was elected a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

According to remembering of his contemporaries, I.G. Chernyshev was not a navy specialist, but during his Presidency the Admiralty was well organized and a lot of good things were done. His active and talented assistants were given possibilities to manage the work. The war against Sweden demanded on his part intensive work, directed towards construction, armament and procurement of the Russian Navy.

I.G. Chernyshev participated in elaboration of some of the state projects and realized many different tasks, put on him by Elizaveta and Catherine II. When he lived abroad there was correspondence between him and Catherine II.

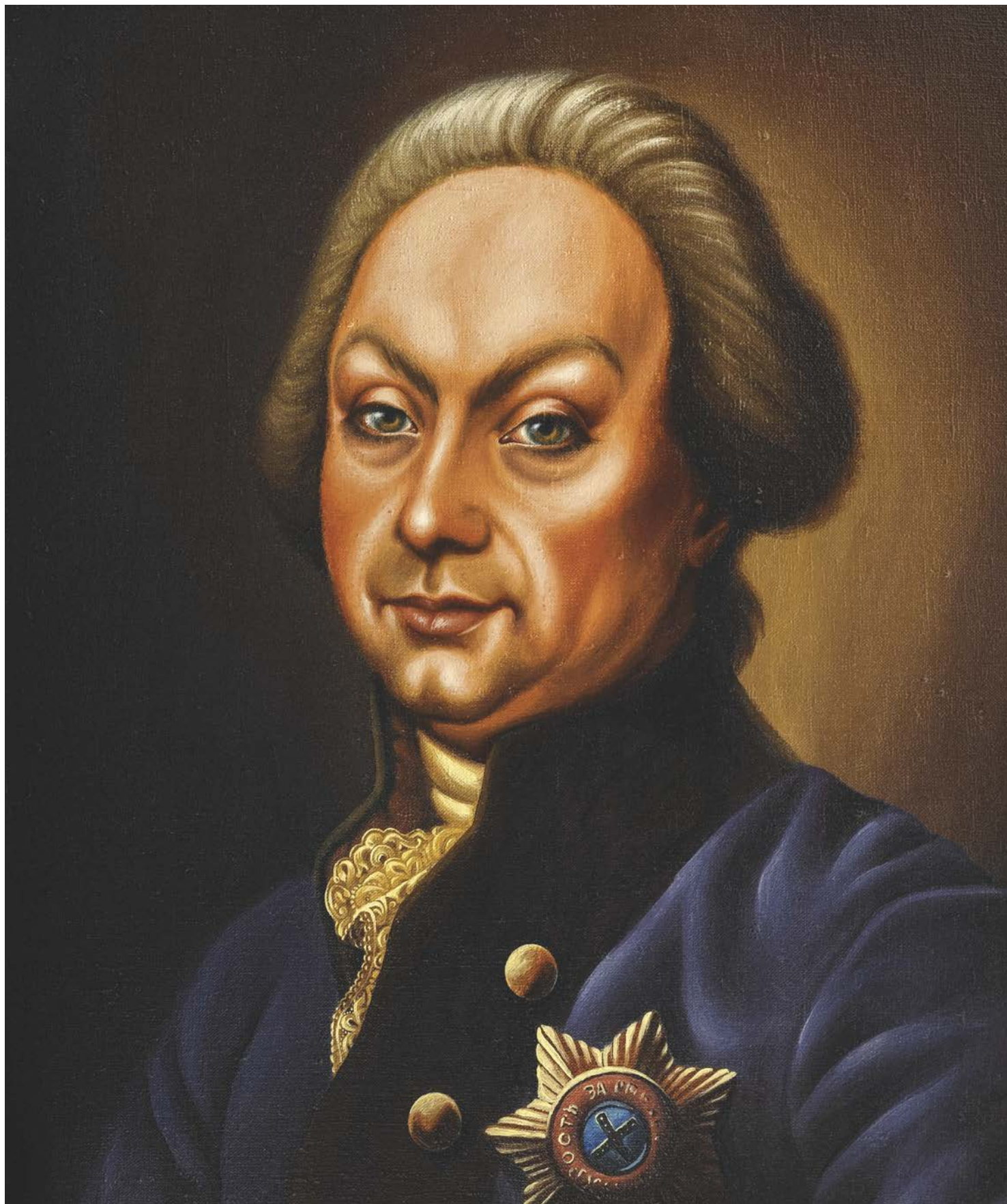
As M.M. Cherbatov said, I.G. Chernyshev was an expeditious person, and had all personal qualities as a courtier.

I.G. introduced a lot of foreign novelties and the mode into Russia. He was characterized as a man of the world in the best sense of that notion, a well-educated person. He read very much, met remarkable people, lived in that society, was a good interlocutor and a kind, honest man, devoted to the private life and politics, hospitable and amiable with all.

I.G. Chernyshev entered VEO in 1765 and was among 15 constitutors of VEO. He gave 1000 roubles for the construction of the building of VEO and 50 gold pieces for the contest task: «How to introduce all over in Russia summer plants from Siberia in order to produce blue paints from them».

He was President of Imperial Free Economic Society from October 1 to December 31, 1772.





Melgunov Alexei Petrovich (1722–1788)

*Full Privy Councillor, Senator,
Governor of Novorossia,
Governor-General of Yaroslavl and
Vologda, President of the Kammer
Collegium*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1773–31.08.1773*

Alexei Melgunov was born on February 9, 1722, in the family of Full Councillor of State Pyotr Naumovich Melgunov, Vice-Governor of St. Petersburg. Educated at the nobility cadet school of the landed troops. After graduation, was Royal page at Elizabeth's court and later took up a military career.

In 1756, he was appointed aide to Grand Duke Peter Theodorovich (future Emperor Peter III) in Brigadier-General's rank. Later commanded the Ingermanland Infantry Regiment and headed the cadet school. Peter III promoted him to Major-General, December 28, 1761, and Lieutenant-General, February 1762. Melgunov was appointed member of the Imperial Extraordinary Council the same year.

Though the coup of June 28 made him leave court, Catherine II soon called Melgunov to resume his career, and appointed him Governor-General of the Novorossia gubernia, 1764, and a year later, Senator of Moscow and President of the Kammer Collegium.

May 1 — August 31, 1773, Melgunov presided in the Imperial Free Economic Society. 1

In his activity as President of VEO Alexei Petrovich used with success his experience of the governor, knowledge of demands and possibilities of the citizens of the South regions of Russia. In particular under his support was organized exchanged of seeds between the regions, were continued experiments on cultivation of wheat and rye in the south regions of Russia, as well as grapes, tobacco and the hop. In 1773 by the initiative of the President Melgunov were published original works: «About fertility of the winter crops» by Senator S.F. Ushakov, and another article «Method of cultivation of the necessary and more profitable sort of bread in the Russian Empire», «Description of the Mallaya Russia tobacco cultivation», «Trial with silkworms cultivation in small quantities» etc.

Melgunov considered wine making also very important. That was clear from his articles, published in 1773 on that subject: «Instruction how to make wine by the profitable way», «About alcohol from flowers of pussywillow», «Economic views about hop production» and other. Alexei Petrovich paid attention to the trials with bee breeding, which interested the Empress very much. That subject was described in several articles, among them «Talk between the father and the son about the bees», «The simplest methods of bee keeping and breeding».

Was appointed Governor-General of Yaroslavl, 1777, in the rank of Full Privy Councillor, and governor of Yaroslavl and Vologda since 1780. He established an orphanage and a higher school for commoners in Yaroslavl, and patroned Freemasons, who started a lodge in the city.

An enthusiast of science, Melgunov was expert on German literature. He was editing and publishing a literary journal, «The Monthly Writings, or The Solitary Provincial» on the pattern of Kozitsky's «Hotch-Potch», in 1786–1787.

A society man and lover of sumptuous festivities, he often met with noblemen, merchants and officials in Yaroslavl, and entertained St Petersburg aristocrats in Mishino, his estate. Gavriil Derzhavin extolled one of the Mishino galas in a 1776 ode.

Alexei Melgunov died on July 2, 1788, and was buried in the Tolga Convent.





Soimonov Mikhail Fyodorovich (1730–1804)

*Senator, Founder and First Chief
Commander of the Mining Corp, President
of Berg-Collegium's, Main director
of Mining and Monetary Affairs*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1773–31.12.1773*

The Soimonovs were from an old noble family dating back to the first half of the 16th century. Afanasy Andreyevich Soimonov, a forefather of Mikhail, was a butler and army chief in Serpukhov and Tsvil'sk, but the family's greatest men were Fyodor Ivanovich and his son Mikhail.

Fyodor Soimonov stood up against the omnipotent favourite, Biron, for which he was sentenced to death in July 1740. The sentence was alleviated and he was sent to do hard labour in permanent exile in Siberia. When Yelizaveta Petrovna was enthroned, she paroled Fyodor Soimonov, who chose to remain in Siberia, though, where his son Mikhail was born in 1730.

In 1753, Siberian governor Myatlev invited Fyodor Soimonov, then 71 years old, to head an expedition to study the Amur. His son Mikhail also took part in that expedition, traveling with his father and his men on three large boats along the Shilka up to its confluence with the Argunya.

Mikhail Soimonov delivered the materials about that expedition to the Senate.

Little is known about the details of Mikhail's career, yet he rose as high as the Senate.

He supervised the Berg College (ministry), which deteriorated under Biron. An educated man, Soimonov saw the need to train specialists in all spheres of life. He drafted a report on the establishment of the Mining Corps (school), where children from noble families were brought up and educated. Soimonov personally elaborated a draft on the establishment of the school and its tuition programs, as well as purchased houses and supervised their restructuring for the needs of the school.

In 1773, the Empress ordered that Soimonov be appointed Chief Commander of the Mining School, the post that Mikhail Soimonov held to 1776. In 1776 he went abroad for health reasons and continued his education there.

The Berg College was restored under Paul I and Soimonov was again appointed its president and granted the title of «Chief Director of Mining and Minting». Soimonov retired from the Berg College in 1801 and resumed his guidance of the Mining School.

It was thanks to the efforts of Mikhail Soimonov that the iron works, called the Lugansky Works, was built in the Ekaterinoslav Province. Soimonov initiated and participated in the organization of several research expeditions on government money, which discovered several valuable deposits. Soimonov drafted a program of reforming the management of the mining business.

An active member of the Imperial Free Economic Society, Soimonov was its president from September 1 to December 31, 1773.

His contribution to the development of the Russian mining industry and science was invaluable and gladly recognized by both his compatriots and successors.

Mikhail Fyodorovich Soimonov died in 1804.





Sievers Karl Yefimovich (1710–1774)

*Count of the Holy Roman Empire,
Duke of Sweden, Lieutenant-General
of the Russian Army, Full Chamberlain,
Holder of the orders of St. Alexander
Nevsky, White Eagle, St. Anna, Chief
Marshal of the Court*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1774–30.04.1774*

He came from an old noble family. He was an older son of the Swedish captain Iohim Iohann Sievers. According to other news, Karl Sievers was a son of the servant of the Duke Biron from Kurlyandia. In Russia he served under the court of Elizaveta Petrovna, as responsible for the coffee and chocolate.

Sievers was characterized as an honest clever person, who made an impressive career in the court under the Empress Elizaveta Petrovna. He was a Lieutenant-General and Gof-Marshal, Chief Marshal and full Chamberlain under the court of Catherine II. In 1745 Swedish King Frederick I made him a baron and in 1760 was conferred a title of the count by the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire» Fransis I.

Then he became General-Lieutenant. He was the holder of the orders of St. Alexander Nevsky, White Eagle, St. Anna.

Sievers entered Free Economic Society on October 20, 1770. He was a member of Board of VEO during September–December 1773 and the President during January–April 1774. At that period, the members of VEO gathered in his house.

VEO had already almost ten years experience and history. During the first years the meetings were held without exact agenda and gradually such situation was changed by fixed time-limits. The meeting came to the conclusion, that reports would not be interesting and useful without concrete examples and facts from the experience of the Russian land farming and conditions of the Russian style of life. Before recommending any method or an article for publication in the «Transactions of VEO», it was decided to study better existing constrains and methods of economics, to think over local conditions and traditions. That was the only way to apply advises in the practice.

In 1774 when K.E. Sievers was elected President of VEO, society had already obtained first results of such course. Knowledge about the Russian economy was enriched by the answers from the regions to 65 questions. The first compositions on the proposed subject were received from Wolff of Ingermanlandia, Oleshev from Vologda region and Bolotov from Kashira region. All three answers were published in the «Transactions of VEO».

Thanks to the initiative of the Count Sievers and of other members of VEO the readers of that edition got acquainted with other successes of the society. In particular in 1774 were published compositions on the subject: «Causes of soil fertility», «About efficiency of wetting the seeds of the spring crops before the sowing», «About efficiency of smoking rye before sowing», «About processing of the Russian wool», «Description of some devices, used to facilitate the harvesting», «About small pox vaccination». Even that list of the works reflects different interests of the Society.

Sievers married a sister of K.F. Kruze, also a member of VEO, had three sons and a daughter. He left to his heirs rich inheritance. His younger son, Major-General Yakov Karlovich was killed during the storming of Ruschuk and his other son, Lieutenant-General Yegor Karlovich was director of the Engineering school.

To thank him for his good deeds, the known writer M.D. Chulkov devoted to K.E. Sievers his first edition of the famous book «Mocker or Slovenskie tails».

He died on September 19, 1774.





Ushakov Stepan Fyodorovich (1705–?)

*Senator, Governor-General
of St.-Petersburg, Privy Councillor,
writer and translator*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1774–31.08.1774
01.01.1777–31.08.1777*

There is not much information about Stepan Fyodorovich Ushakov, we know that he was a prominent person during Catherine II reign. He was born in 1705 and started his career in the army, but soon he changed it to the civil service. He was Senator and States Councillor and was Governor-General during Catherine II reign.

According to his own remembering he had special striving for arable farming, as he considered it the most useful. At first he studied literature how to increase yields of wheat and tried to give advices to the land owners and to the peasants in St-Petersburg region, which he often visited as the governor.

In 1772–73 he realized trials in the seeds preparation, which increased the yields. He described those experiments in the article «Test with yields of winter crops» and Annex to the article «About sowing of winter crops».

He introduced his publications by the address to the Empress Catherine II. For those publications he was decorated with a gold medal of 350 roubles. At that period he published an article «About the turf roof» In 1777 he proposed the task: how to keep wet hay and grass in case of bad weather using salt or some other cheap and efficient method.»

In 1771 Sumarokov published «A letter to Stepan Fyodorovich Ushakov, Governor of St.-Petersburg. For the presentation of the Count Alexei Grigoryevich Razumovsky. That some kind of elegy demonstrated good relations between S.F. Ushakov and A.A. Sumarokov and A.G. Razumovsky.

Ushakov tried to give real profit to Russia and had respect and friends among the best people of his time. There were poems, devoted to Ushakov by A.A. Sumarokov and V.G. Ruban.

He was the President of VEO from May till August, 1774 and from January till August, 1777.

His agricultural experience and that of the governor promoted S.F. Ushakov as the President of VEO to pay special attention to the propaganda and dissemination in Russia of scientific knowledge and practical agro-technical approaches.

Even quick view over the protocols of the meetings of VEO at those years shows rapid pulsation of ideas proposed by its participants. They wanted to realize everything quickly — to develop economy according to European standards, to use new plough devices, to cultivate new unknown plants in Russia. Priority was given to the seed growing, which was rightly considered by the members of VEO the most important factor of increasing of productivity in agriculture. Along with the cereals and kitchen garden plants, were studied technical crops — hemp-field, tobacco, and the trees — blue pine-tree, larch, walnut.

Full members and corresponding members of VEO, activists of the Society from provinces took part in that work. They sent to the capital the plants and asked to give conclusion on their application or to send them for the trials into other regions.





Osterwald Timofei Ivanovich (1729–1790)

*Privy Councillor, Senator,
tutor to Emperor Paul I*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.10.1774–31.12.1774*

Osterwald, Timofei Ivanovich (Dietrich Osterwald) was a Courtier to Catherine II. He was one of the 67 noblemen to attend Her Imperial Majesty's receptions in honour of His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Prussia during his sojourn in St.-Petersburg.

He was born in 1729 and educated at the nobility cadet school of the landed troops, where he was enrolled in 1741. Even as cadet, his performing gifts brought him to the limelight at Empress Elizabeth's court when he and his schoolmates Beketov, Melissino, Razumovsky and Svis-tunov took part in amateur productions, where he stood out among the cast.

Promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, on February 12, 1760, and appointed tutor to Grand Duke Paul to retain the post till the crown prince's marriage. Osterwald taught Paul history, geography and the Russian and German languages. He presented the disciplines «in a way dry-as-dust-to tell nothing but names and figures to his Royal pupil», say eyewitness accounts. Despite a good mark for Russian in his cadet school graduation certificate, the tutor spoke broken Russian. «I could not withstand from making corrections as I was listening to words direly mispronounced and an accent that jarred on the Russian ear», reminisced S.A. Poroshin, Paul's other tutor, who pointed out the pupil's dislike for Osterwald.

Thanks to his immaculate honesty, Osterwald did not lose the excellent situation he had at Catherine the Great's court after Paul succeeded to the crown.

Timofei Ivanovich Osterwald was elected President of the Imperial Free Economic Society for the last quarter in 1774.

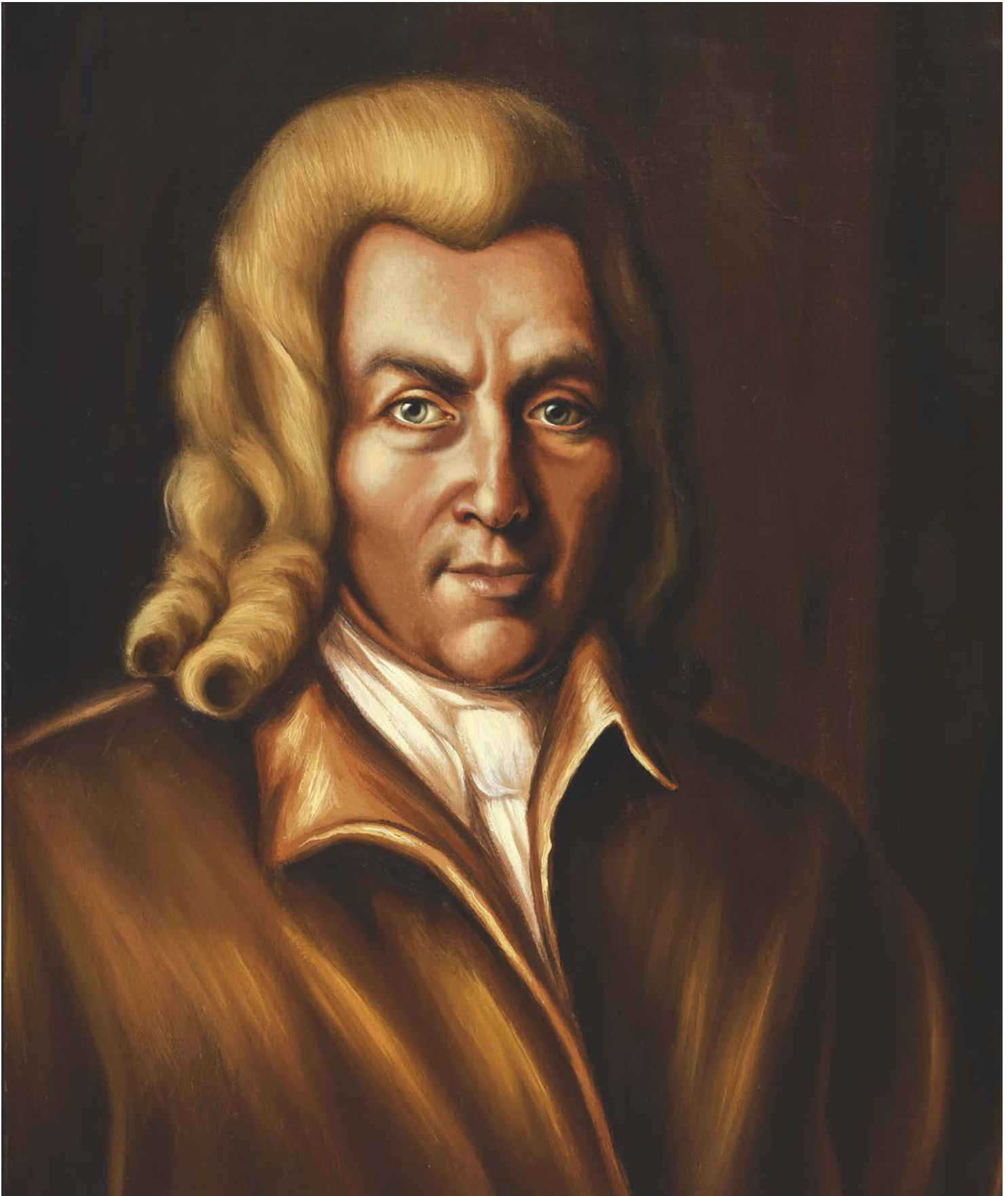
In the middle of the 70-ies of the 18th century with 10 years of activity, VEO was orientated to the whole specter of problems, related to the economics and economy in the whole, first of all to the practical educational aims. Looking through Bibliographic reference book of «Transactions of VEO», we may encounter translations of the best works of foreign authors, original articles and answers to the contest tasks, written by the members and corresponding members of the Society. Among publications in 1774 were the following, approved by the President Osterwald: «About the reason of poor yields in Livonia», «About harmful outputs of using alcohol», «Description of some devices, which facilitate harvesting», «About processing of the Russian wool», and other.

First «Transactions of VEO» were published in 2400 copies and were distributed free of charge. In the period when T. I. Osterwald was the President of VEO there were attempts to find reliable book sellers, who might sell the books. Depending on quality and the form of paper the books were sold by 30, 45 and 60 kopecks.

When Timofei Ivanovich retired from the post of the President of VEO, he continued to work in the committees and branches of VEO.

Osterwald died in 1790, a Senator and Privy Councillor.





Svistunov Pyotr Semyonovich (1732–1808)

General-en-Chef, Senator, Governor of Kurskaya province, Chief Director of the State Assignment bank, poet and translator

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1775–30.04.1775*

The Svistunov dynasty is a very old one. It comes from the Golden Horde, which the family's ancestor left for Poland only to emigrate to Russia, with Poland cast into anarchy. In Russia, his descendants embraced Orthodoxy.

Son of Navy Lieutenant Semyon S. Svistunov, P.S. Svistunov was born in 1732. He entered the Serpukhov cadet corps at the same time as famous playwright Alexander Sumarokov. In 1750, together with other students, he staged Sumarokov's tragedy «Khorev» in which he played the role of Osnelda. Empress Elizabeth granted lavish costumes especially for that production; a story has survived of how she personally dressed Osnelda-Svistunov up for the premiere. Svistunov was in the cast together with such future celebrities as I. Melissino and N. Beketov, as well as with a friend of his, Timofei Osterwald, to become President of the Free Economic Society in 1774.

It must have been because of this show that actors, later brought to St. Petersburg and placed in the cadet corps, found themselves under Svistunov, already an officer by that time.

Svistunov translated into Russia Jean-Baptiste Moliere's comedies «Amphitryon» and «Le Bourgeois Gentlehomme» (4 parts).

Parallel with his literary activities, he continued his civil service: in 1771 he was appointed to the State Military Board and in 1774, put on the commission for settling claims with the Prussian Chamber.

In 1775, he was appointed as Belgorod Governor; from January 1 to April 30, 1775, he held the presidency of the Free Economic Society, and in 1779 he was the ruler of the Kursk district.

While holding this latter post, Svistunov showed concern for Kursk's well-being, and would even personally inspect the city's sanitary state. On the other hand, he was very much interested in his family's genealogy and collected all related information, hoping to process it someday.

In 1763, he was dismissed on his own request, but after Paul I ascended the throne in 1796, Svistunov was promoted to general and appointed to the State Military Board. On the day of Paul's coronation, he was awarded an Alexander Nevsky Order.

In 1797, Svistunov was appointed a Senator, and from 1799 to 1802 he was Director of the National Credit Bank. Parallel to that, he sat on a school founding commission; by a September 7, 1803 decree, he was also put on a committee for studying ministerial reports.

In 1858, one of Svistunov's manuscripts was reportedly held by the Paris National (Imperial at the time) Library.

Svistunov died in 1808.





Volkov Alexander Andreyevich (1736–1788)

Full Councillor of State, Imperial Porcelain Works Director, dramatist and translator

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1775–31.08.1775*

Alexander Volkov was born in the the old noble family in its country estate of Anisimlevo, Yaroslavl uyezd, in 1736. He received an excellent education. Thanks to his father, Semyonovsky Regiment officer, was enrolled in it, in 1745, and promoted from Corporal to Captain within the next seven years. Sent as messenger to Warsaw, Vienna and Paris, 1761. Appointed to Catherine II's coronation commission the next year.

Retired in Colonel's rank, in May 1765, to enter civil service initially with the Heraldry Office and later the Government Road-Building Office, whose personnel elected him to join the commission drafting a new Code of Laws, 1767.

Councillor of State and Imperial Porcelain Works Director since 1773. President of the Free Imperial Economic Society, May 1 to August 31, 1775.

Was prominent on a society jury of inventors' contests for best machines and mechanized tools. As an example in 1773 was a contest on reaping machine for steppe provinces and on the best plough device. The following years there were contests on the invention of the oil-press, milling machines and even a cart for the village. The society had a mechanic workshop of its own, and was also importing farm machinery and tools to sell at reasonable prices. The best designers were entitled to medals and grants to purchase their own inventions after they were launched into mass production.

It was permitted to participate in the contest to foreign devices. Machines and devices after the tests were installed in the center of the city and in other public places with indication of the received premiums and awards.

For the winners of the contests were given: the first premium as a big gold medal to commemorate A.K. Meyer; the second premium — a small gold medal of VEO; the third premium — a big silver medal; the fourth premium — a small silver medal; the fifth premium — a bronze medal and certificates of gratitude.

Those rewards were given only for the really useful and simple devices, and available by the price. According to equal results of the contest in comparison with foreign machines, the victory was given to local manufacturers.

Promoted to Full Councillor of State, 1779. Retired, 1783. Spent his last years in St.-Petersburg.

He had friends in the theatre circles in the 1750–60s, and was encouraged to translate West European plays for Russian companies Among his translations were plays by Moliere, Rousseau, Dancourt and Le Grand. Many of his efforts were staged and appeared in print in his lifetime.

His own one-act comedies had great success in the court theatre starting with 1764. Prominent among his plays were «Ill-Starred Obstinacy» (published in St-Petersburg, 1769) and «Parental Love» (published in Moscow, 1788).

Traveled abroad. 1767–1768.

Alexander Volkov died in 1788.





Klingstedt Timofei Ivanovich (1710–1786)

*Vice-President of the Justitz-Collegium
of Livonian, Estland and Finnish Affairs,
Full member of the Russian Academy
of sciences*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1775–31.12.1775
01.09.1779–08.1780*

Klingstedt T.I. was born in 1710 in Pomerania, the son of burgomaster of the town Barta. He came to Russia in 1740 and got position of over-auditor in Arkhangelsk in the office of governor, then he went to Petersburg.

During the war for seven years he was in charge for the office work in Keningsberg and on December 8, 1763 was appointed to the commission on commerce of the Russian State under the Empress Catherine II. In 1764–71 as Councillor of the State he had position of the Vice-President of the Justitz-Collegium of Livonia, Estland and Finnish Affairs.

In 1764 by the order of Catherine II was put into the lists of the noble people of Livonia, and in a year, in 1765 — of Estland. He was a deputy in the commission of the new code. He participated in the translation into German the famous «ORDER» of Catherine II.

He was among the founders and the most active members of VEO. His article «Introduction about the start, existence and the deeds of the Economic society» was editorial in the transactions of VEO. On June 15, 1765 he was nominated a treasurer of the Society. He was the President of VEO in September-December, 1775 and from September 1779 till August 1780.

He was working upon the questions of farming and commerce. In particular, he proposed to give premium to those, who in 1776 gave more Russian wheat for export. That proposal was adopted by the society.

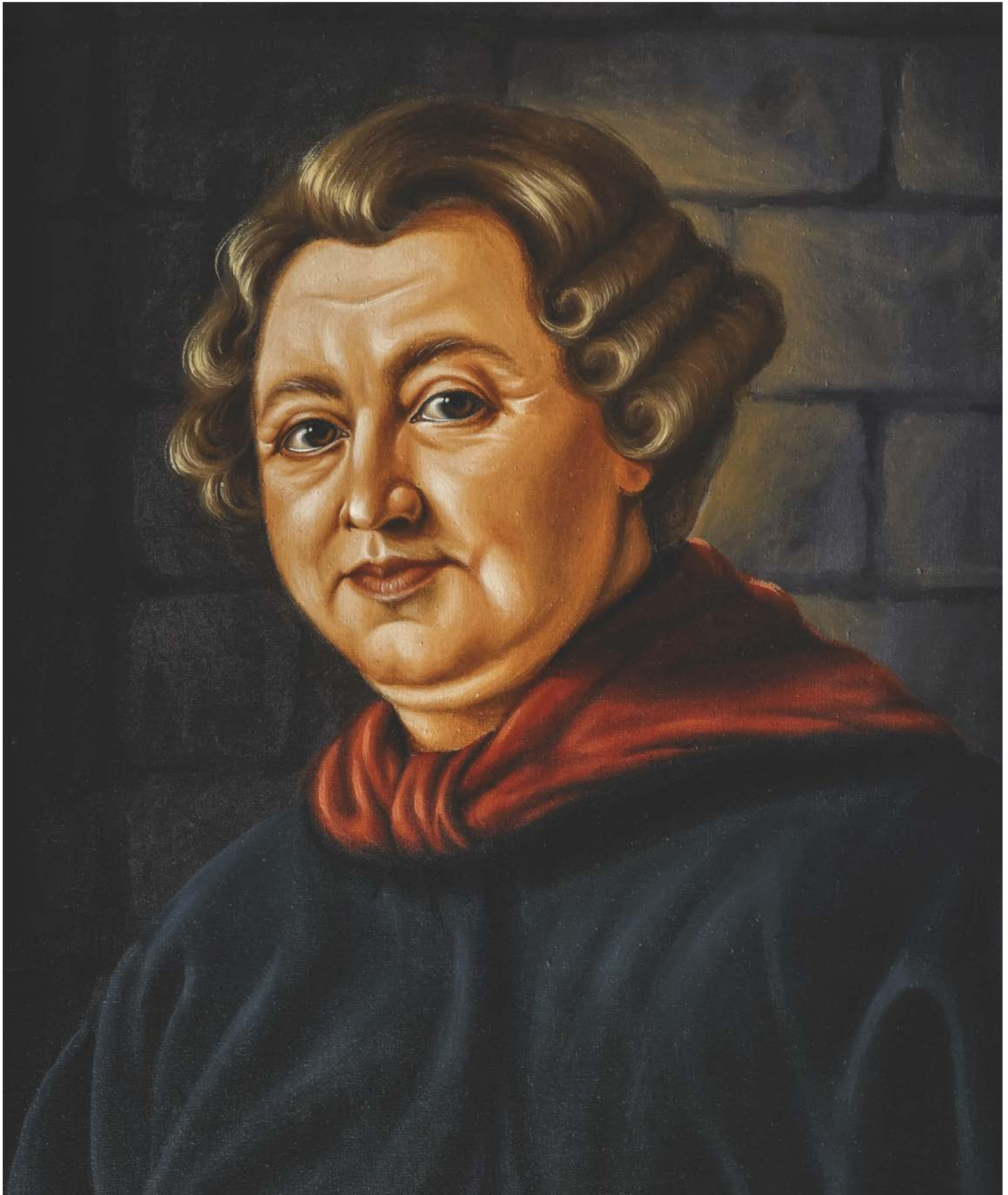
At the end of 1776 in order to stimulate flax cultivation by the initiative of Roman Illarionovich Vorontsov, it was decided to buy flax seeds in Pskov with 100 Rbls and to send to all who wishes to seed it. Klingstedt was asked to write an instruction and a short notice how to seed flax, also in Livonia («About the benefits from flax cultivation in Russia and how to do it», which was published in «Transactions of VEO» and sent together with the seeds to the farmers. He published several serious articles on common questions: «Description of necessity of getting better knowledge about farming and economy, how they are achieved in the Russian state and some questions, related to them».

He was the author of «Economic questions, related to agriculture in different provinces. This publication was sent along Russia and all Governors and citizens were asked to give answers.

He paid special attention to social and moral questions in organization of farming. He gave a program of some kind of trainings in Livonia, Landowners were proposed to send young educated people for training to the landowners in Livonia, who in tern would receive some money for the pupils. Only this way at the opinion of Klingstedt provided skilled national personnel, who knew specifics of domestic agriculture.

Another article «Explanation of the question how to stimulate farmers and to reduce laziness of major of them?» had realistic proposals on financial motivation of assiduous serves.





Shtelin Yakov Yakovlevic (1709–1785)

Prominent member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, professor, President of the Academy of Fine Arts

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1776–30.04.1776*

He was born in Meiningen in Shvabya (South Germany), where he studied first in Lyceum and from 1728 in the gymnasia in Tsittau; he studied classic languages and emblematics. The same year he took lessons in the private Academy of drawing and painting in Dresden (the capital of Saxony). In 1735 he graduated from Leipzig university. He studied with equal interest natural and humanitarian sciences: mathematics, chemistry, experimental physics, history, numezmatics, history of literature. He was also gifted in music, took part in the concerts of the students' orchestra «Collegium muzicum» under I.S. Bach. He knew well the family of I.S. Bach.

In the court of Anna Ioannovna Ya. Shtelin realized himself as the court poet and organizer of the celebrations. He kept that status in the Russian Imperial court for forty years till 1778 (Catherine II period).

His court career was successful: in 1742–1745 he was a tutor of the heir of the throne Grand Duke Peter Fedorovich. Then he was a court councillor and served as the chief of the library of Peter III.

His academic career was also successful. Shtelin gave lectures on history, literature, the language in the Academy of sciences and academic gymnasia, in 1735–1737. From 1738 to 1757 Shtelin (professor of eloquence) headed at first Engraver's chamber, and then Art department of the Academy of sciences — a school of the local engraving. In 1747 that department was transformed into Academy of Fine Arts. Ya. Shtelin was appointed a manager and he made a lot to develop in it the arts of drawing and engraving, he invited professors from abroad, he himself chose talented pupils and especially he cared about the art of drawing. Thanks to his efforts engraving in the Academy advanced very much: were engraved the plan of Petersburg in 9 pages, sights of Petersburg, Tsar village and Oranienbaum. Portraits of the Empress and the Great Duke Peter Fedorovich and illustrations of all illuminations and fireworks on different occasions.

In the Russian academic publishing activity Ya. Shtelin takes an important place; he made drawings for the first Atlas of the Russian Empire (1745).

He initiated in 1768 in the Academy publication of thematic calendars: historic, geographic, economic etc.

As a bibliographer Shtelin prepared the first printed catalogue of the books in the Library of the Academy of sciences in the Russian language. He is also famous as a specialist in the history of art, the author of the first in Russia book on music «Music and ballet in Russia in the XVIII century (in German) and «Notes about fine arts in Russia». One of the most interesting and famous of his works was «Jokes about Peter the Great», published the year of Shtelin death.

He was a member of Free Economic Society from September 6, 1766 and the President in January–April 1776.

He was the author of some articles, published in the «Transactions of VEO» and devoted to the fishing, prognosis of coal deposits in Russia, about lightning-conductors, roofing works and other.

In 1770 together with A.I. Glebov he was an initiator of the contest on the task; «What kind of bread is more profitable for Russia?»





Rzhevsky Alexei Andreyevich (1737–1804)

Privy Councillor, Chamberlain, President of the Medical Collegium, Full member of the Russian Academy of sciences, specialist in literature

*President of Free Economic Society
01.05.1776–31.08.1776*

Alexei Andreyevich Rzevsky was born on February 19, 1737 in the old noble family. His forefather was a duke of the town of Rzhev.

A.A. Rzhevsky began his career in 1749. From 1767 he was s deputy in the commission on composition of the New Code for town Vorotynsk in Moscow region, and was proposed by Marshal A.I. Bibikov to work in the private commission «About police». In 1768 he served as advisor of the Administration of banks.

In September 1771 A.A. Rzhevsky became a member of Free Economic Society. From May 1 to August, 31 1776 he was the President of VEO. From May 1771 till October 1773, Rzhevsky was Vice-Director of the Academy of sciences. In 1772 during the absence of the Count V.G. Orlov, Rzhevsky was acting for director. In June 1775 he was appointed President of the Medical Collegium.

In 1783 Rzhevsky was given a post of Senator and a rank of a Privy Councillor. On September 22, 1785 he was decorated with a ribbon Annenskaya. He was also a holder of the order of St. Alexandre Nevsky.

In the 80-ies he had an honourable position of a judge of conscience in St.-Petersburg. He played an important role in the solution of a dispute on heritage between the poet Dmitriev and Vsevolzhsky. Under Pavel I reign was dismissed from his post.

A.A. Rzhevsky was a rather known writer of XVIII century. His many poems glorified time of Peter III, Catherine II and at the end of his life Alexander I. He also wrote fables, riddles, fairy-tales, epigrams, sonnets, idylls, stances and madrigals in «Monthly Writings», «Busy bee», «Useful Entertainment» and «Free Hours». His historical play «Smerdiy and Prelesta» (The Stinker and the Beauty) was staged with great success at the court theater in Moscow.

The play was considered the best in the Russian theater, according to N.I. Novikov. He also gave positive estimation to the poems of A.A. Rzhvesky: «His poems are pure, nice, his thoughts are sharp and images are strong and free».

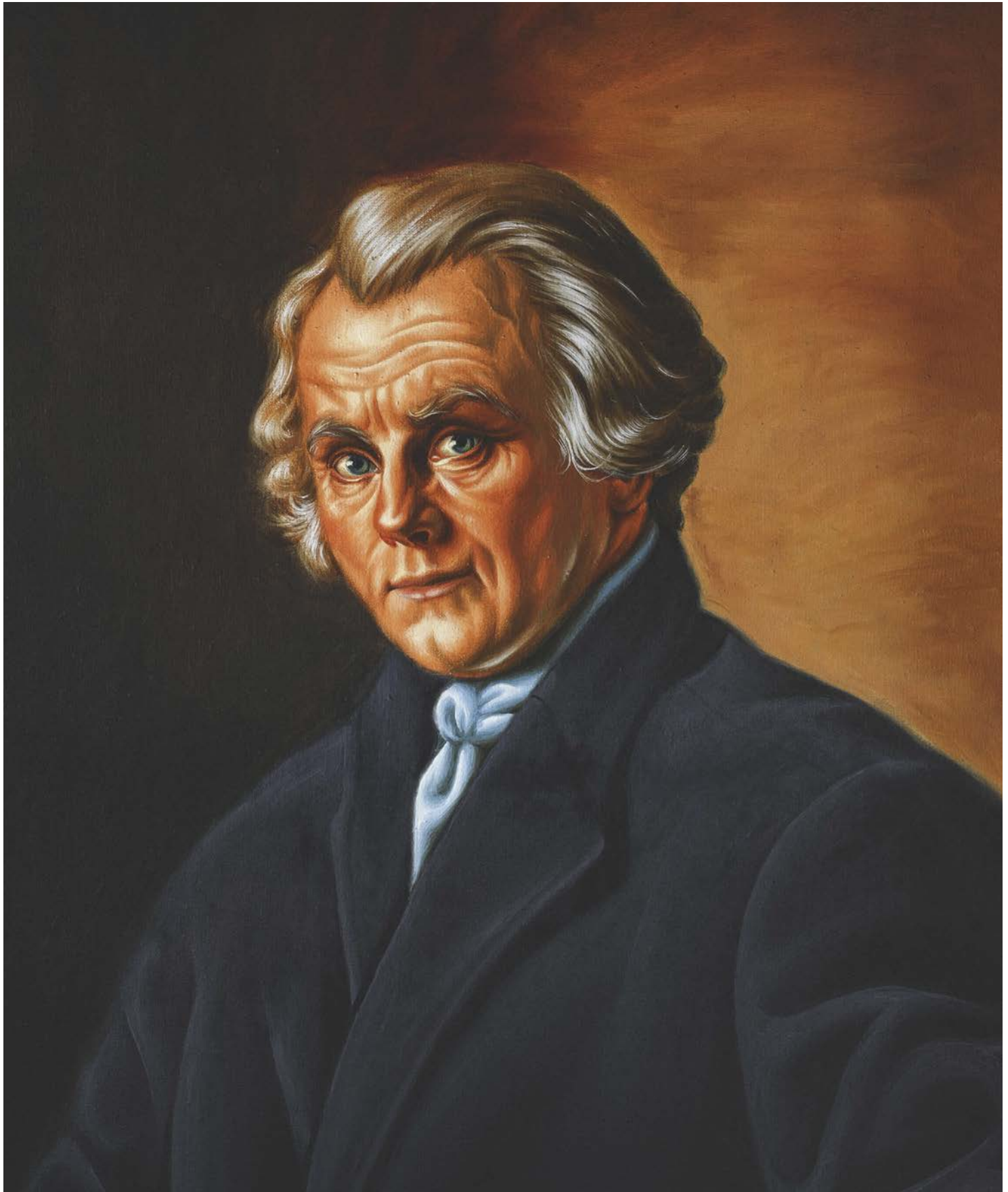
Rzhevsky was a friend of 1.1. Dmitriev and G.R. Derzhavin. Retranslated a part of the famous «Encyclopaedia» of Didro.

When the Russian Academy was formed under the Chairwoman E.R. Dashkova, Rzhevsky published his material in the Academy transactions, participated in the composition of the famous «Dictionary of the Russian Academy», where he described the letter «B».

He was married two times: his first wife was Alexander Fedorovna Kamenskaya, a sister of the Field-Marshal Kamensky. She died when she was 29 years old on April 7, 1769. His second wife, Glafira Ivanovna Alymova was among favourite students of Catherine from the first graduates from Smolny institute. Derzhavin was impressed by their touching family relationships and in 1780 he wrote the ode «Happy family».

He died in the rank of a Privy Councillor on April 23, 1804 and was buried in the Lavra of Alexander Nevsky, in the Lazarevsky cemetery.





Eiler Leonard (1707–1783)

Prominent mathematician, President of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, professor of physics and mathematics of the Russian Academy of Sciences

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1776–31.12.1776*

Leonard Eiler was born in Basel in 1707. First he was taught mathematics by his father, to study then the subject at Basel University. When an academy of sciences was founded in Russia Eiler was invited to take the position of adjunct professor in 1727. On arriving in Russia, not only did he begin to intensively carry out fruitful research, which prompted the appearance of a whole number of valuable scientific works in Academy publications, but also took an active part in the establishment at the Academy of a university and a lycee, writing algebra and geometry textbooks for them.

In 1730, Eiler was appointed a physics professor and in 1733, a higher mathematics professor; in 1740 he took charge of the Academy's Geographic Department.

In 1741, he accepted a proposal from the Prussian King to become president of the Berlin Academy of Sciences and moved to Berlin. But he never stopped loving Russia, and continued to contribute to Academy journals, carrying out various assignments for it and offering accommodation and professional advice to young Russian scientists on a visit to Germany.

In 1766, on Catherine II' invitation, Eiler returned to St.-Petersburg to spend there the rest of his life. Being the world's leading mathematician of his time, Eiler showed modesty, diligence, and friendliness toward others, which earned him people's love and respect.

Eiler's scientific legacy is vast, and embraces not only all branches of fundamental and applied mathematics, but also a whole number of subjects he pioneered or transformed: position geometry, spherical geometry, the theory of surfaces, number theory, etc. He got more than 860 of his works published.

He published more than 860 research transactions. Eiler's works made a great impact on the development of fundamental and applied mathematics in the 18th century and the early 19th century, and are still relevant today.

L. Eiler was the author of the most important works on mathematics analysis, differential geometry, theory of numbers, approximate calculations, celestial mechanics, mathematical physics, theory of ship building etc.

When he entered Free Economic Society in 1766, L. Eiler put many efforts to the dissemination of scientific knowledge through the channels of VEO. He gave public lectures, wrote articles and invited his foreign friends to cooperate with editions of the Society. In 1776 Leonard Eiler was elected President of the Imperial Free Economic Society for the last quarter of the year — from September 1 to December 31.

While holding that position, the great mathematician and physicist promoted establishing of tight creative relations with foreign scientific societies, prominent scientists and practicing researchers. Cooperation realized in different forms. It was very useful to receive from abroad works on agricultural topics and translations into Russian, then there exchange of publications with similar societies; and election to VEO of foreign scientists as corresponding members; and at last visits abroad of Russian members of the Society. Such contacts permitted VEO to regular information about achievements of agricultural farms in Europe and to follow in its activity all the novelties of the century.

Eiler died in 1783.





Zorich-Chernovich Semyon Gavrilovich (1745–1799)

*Lieutenant-General,
Imperial aide-de-camp*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.09.1777–31.12.1777
01.01.1778–30.04.1778*

Zorich-Chernovich, Semyon Gavrilovich one of Catherine the Great's favourites was born in 1745.

Of Serbian peasant family he appeared in Russia with a family of his uncle — Major Zorich, who adopted and made very much for him.

Zorich took part in the Seven Years' War, in which he fought since 1760 as Sergeant-Major of the Hussars. He was several times wounded and once taken prisoner. Promoted to Lieutenant after the war, he fought in the Polish war of 1764 and efficiently carried out several sophisticated administrative missions to be promoted to Captain. He covered himself with glory in the first Russo-Turkish War as commander of an independent vanguard detachment, and provided Russian victories in several operations. He fought the Tatars in Bessarabia, 1769, and took part in Turkish campaigns later. He was wounded and captured in one of them and spent four years in dungeon and another year in Istanbul. Once released, Zorich was sent to carry essential governmental messages to Stockholm and upon return, received St. George's Cross, 4th class, for valour in the Turkish War.

President of the Imperial Free Economic Society during 1.9–31.12.1777, 1.1–30.4.1778.

In 1777 for a military career, was promoted to Major-General and Imperial aide-de-camp. Dismissed toward the end of 1778 to settle in Shklov, an estate Catherine II gave him as gift. Established a school for children of the nobility in Shklov on his own money. Though his annual income exceeded half a million roubles, an exorbitant sum at his time, Zorich's extravagance rendered it inadequate.

After his bankruptcy in 1797, Emperor Paul I ordered his school nationalized and renamed cadet school.

Zorich was sponsor of the Izyum Regiment, the Squadron of the Royal Hussars and the Akhtyrsky Hussar Regiment, and Cornet of the Corps of the Royal Guards.

Zorich had his Shklov seat entirely managed by himself and his relations at an annual 100,000 roubles paid to the Treasury. The clan did not live in clover for long as counterfeit money was tracked down to Shklov and to one of the Zorich kin. Catherine II had the case of what she called "the Shklov surprise" under her personal supervision. Even after Zorich's official vindication, he irreparably lost his lustre in her eyes. The disappointed Empress went so far as to order to Governor-General Passeck to have the valiant soldier shadowed. The dashing Hussar unwisely chose not to quit military service and ventured to command a regiment, to whose cash he was generously indulging himself. No less unwisely, he made close friendship with all kinds of officers and soon found himself before the law court on embezzlement suspicion.

Zorich flatly refused to retire in the hope to whitewash himself. Another investigation started to find more misdemeanors. Zorich eventually passed the regiment to another commander and came back to his life of dissipation in Shklov, 1798.

Public memory cherished Zorich as a man of extraordinary martial value, brimming with kindness.

Surviving him was precious fruit of his generosity, the Shklov school, eventually transferred to Moscow to become its 1st Cadet School.

Semyon Zorich-Chernovich died in 1799.





Hildenstedt Anton Ivanovich (1745–1781)

Professor of Natural History, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a member of Berlin Society of Natural Scientists and the Erfurt Academy

*President of Free Economic Society
01.08.1780–01.04.1781*

Hildenstedt, Anton Ivanovich was born in Riga, on April 26, 1745. His father was his tutor for secondary education, and prepared the boy to enter a higher establishment. Hildenstedt studied medicine in the Berlin Medical School since 1763, and successfully defended a thesis, 1767. He was invited to Russia the next year to take part in an expedition arranged by the Russian Academy of Sciences. He later led the Orenburg-Astrakhan expedition, which studied the economic situation and agro-technical standards of particular branches of agriculture. Ample expedition materials allowed Hildenstedt to come out with a theory of the origin of black earth. He was the first-ever scholar to classify soils and the flora according to zones.

Elected Academy member and appointed Professor of Natural History, Hildenstedt received a gold medal from Catherine II.

The Imperial Free Economic Society elected him a member in 1770, and it's President from August 1, 1780 to April 1, 1781.

During presidency of A.I. Hildenshtedt there were announced several contests, and gold medals were prepared for the solution of the contests' tasks. By the initiative of the Count Z.G. Chemyshev, who gave money to encourage the winner, was proposed to demonstrate in different climatic conditions «By what means a farmer, his wife and his children might provide good living standard for the year, especially in winter without farming?» Full answer was given by the academician Georgui, who received then a gold medal of 25 ten-roubles banknote value. The same scientist received another gold medal of 40 ten-roubles banknote value for his clear and exact answer, explaining how a Russian with moderate standard of life may overcome the poverty and to live in calm and pleasure, using only Russian products.

Another task concerned cultivation of lentil, Turkish and ordinary kitchen garden beans and their export. It was promised to award a farmer with a gold medal of 25 ten-roubles banknote value, if he sold abroad in 1781 and 1782 at least 50 quarters of each crop. As the answer to that contest task was not given that task was repeated in 1784.

The Berlin Society of Natural Scientists elected him a member on October 11, 1774, and a member of the Erfurt Academy on June 5, 1779. He was appointed to lead the editorial staff of Russia's Historical and Geographic Calendar, on December 13, 1779.

He devoted much time to practical medicine apart from his scholarly pursuits, and founded a literary society and a public library in St.-Petersburg.

Anton Hildenstedt died in St. Petersburg in 1781 at the age of 36. He left unpublished a vast amount of materials brought from his expedition.





von Eck Matvei Matveyevich (1726–1789)

Full Councillor of State, Director of St.-Petersburg post-office, holder of Royal Swedish order of Nothern Star, of Vladimir order of the 3rd degree

*President of Free Economic Society
01.04.1781–01.11.1782*

Matvei Matveyevich Von Eck was born in 1726. He made a lightning career, showing talents for diligent state service at a very tender age. He began his career as a translator for different departments and was promoted to the Councillor of State already in 1746.

He was Director of St.-Petersburg post-office from 1776 to 1789. Under him the mail service was energetically developed in Russia with the number of mail growing several times over, which turn the service into one of the most promising departments in terms of revenues to the state treasury

He became a member of the Free Economic Society in March 9, 1779. He presided over the Imperial Free Society from April 1, 1781 to November 1, 1782.

During presidency of M. M. von Eck, activity in the society was developing in several directions. First of all, were improved methods and forms of collection of statistics about economic and natural climatic conditions of agriculture in different regions of Russia. With that aim were sent questionnaires with the request to the office workers and ordinary people to send answers. The members of VEO were interested, what arable earth was in the provinces, what sort of bread and other agricultural products were cultivated. What was the situation with the cattle? Authors of the questionnaires wanted to have detailed description of the peasant's life during the year, what kind of work the women were doing in winter.

Secondly, VEO collected information on devices in agriculture, encouraged engineers of new machines and the farmers; who applied those machines at their fields.

It was formed special commission of academicians, who examined the most interesting projects. In particular, specialists of VEO examined drawings and descriptions of the milling device, made by I. Mogikin, a design of water-pouring machine of the mechanists Samoylov, of the scythe by hammer smiths from Ostashkovo I. Antonov, M. Mosyaguin, I. Baranov and many other novelties.

We may suppose, that von Eck as Director of the Post office in the capital, promoted those projects.

As the President of VEO, Matvei Matveyevich Von Eck helped to apply achievements of science and practice into the village life. In particular, there were published some articles in the «Transactions of VEO», such as: «Description and drawing of the oven for vegetables drying.», «About new wind-mill», «About different kinds of land enrichment», «Experience of repairing of village houses» and some other. By the initiative of the Grand Duke General-Major S.G. Zorich it was proposed in St.-Petersburg, Moscow, Azov and Novorossyisk provinces to find an efficient method of the peat application to heat housings during the shortage of the firewood. The Grand Duke A.B. Kurakin promised a gold medal for the composition about the best economic farm in the steppe areas.

The date of his death is not established, but it can be assumed that he died in 1789, because we know that he held the post of director of the post-office until his death.





Brill Adam Ivanovich

Lieutenant-General, President of Manufacture Collegium, in 1769–1774 — Governor of Irkutskaya province, holder of St. Anna order

*President of Free Economic Society
01.11.1782–01.09.1784*

In the minutes of the Meetings of Free Economic Society at the end of 60-ies-beginning of 70-ies of the XVIII century we can read the following: «The most complete information came from Irkutskaya province», «On the demand of the Governor of Irkutskaya province were sent the seeds and other seeding material of the plants...» Such activity of the people from Siberia was explained very simply. At that time the Governor in the Eastern Siberia was Adam Ivanovich Brill, an active member of VEO from March 17, 1770.

In this position he was engaged in different spheres: organization of fairs in Irkutsk, Yakutsk, Udinsk; regulation of inter-relations with Yakutsk (deliverings of duties to Yakutsk from local citizens, collection of taxes from merchants, collection of money for overweight of letters in Irkutskaya province; issuing of passports to peasants and trade people, who went to other cities to earn money; organization of a settlement near Borzinskoye lake for salt mining.

He appointed to Irkutskaya Administration translators from the Chinese, Mongolian, Buryatski and Tungusski languages, also teaching pupils and assigned money for their work.

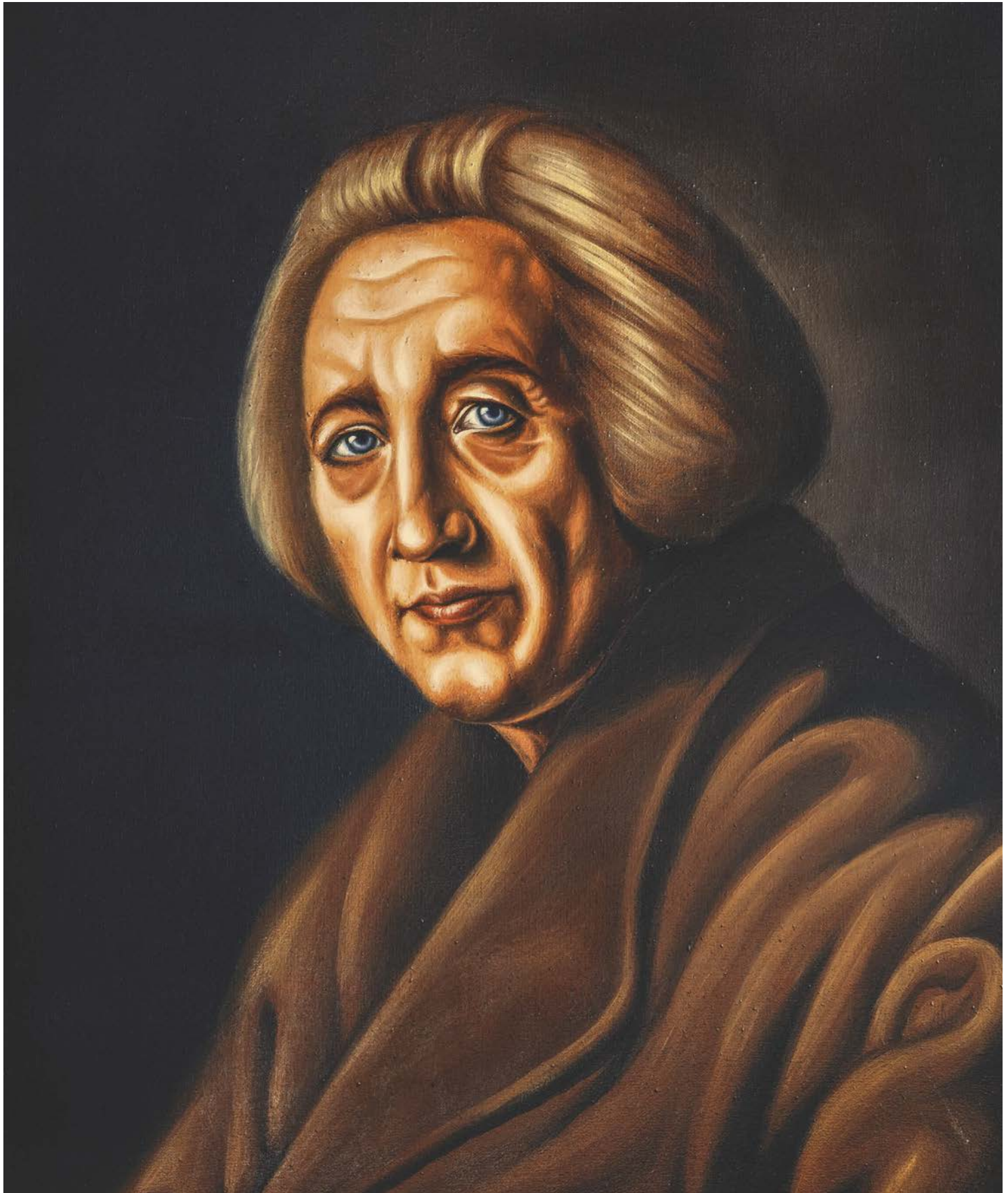
In the capital paid high tributes to the services and administrative initiatives of A.I. Brill. On January 7, 1778 he was appointed the President of Manufacture Collegium.

The manufacture Collegium was the state institution in charge of the light industry and was at the stage of its reinstitution. It was established by Peter I in 1717 to be subordinated to the Mining Collegium up to 1722, when it gained an independent status.

By the time Brill headed it, collegium competences included promotion of light industry. It was in charge of mining factories, handicrafts and industrial personal. Besides, Collegium gave authorizations and monitoring of serf purchases for employment in manufactures and authorization of government-run industrial enterprises ceded into private holding. It was also granted judicial authority over entrepreneurs and the industrial personal on all offences with the exception of political and criminal.

Brill's work in the Collegium was prolific enough and situation in the light industry became better. Eloquent statistics illustrates its progress: Russia in 1725 had about 200 manufacturers under the jurisdiction of the Mining and Manufacture Collegium, among them — 55 iron-and-steel and non-ferrous metal works and armouries, and a mere 15 fullers, 9 flax and cotton mills, 13 tanneries and a number others in the light industry. In 1767 there were 496 textile mills, and in 1799–2094 mills. Indicatively, the peak of industrial progress fell on the initial half of the 1780-s during Adam's Brill presidency.

Adam Ivanovich Brill was the first President of VEO, who was elected for two years from November 1, 1782 to September 1, 1784 in accordance with the Charter. He was an active sponsor of technical novelties and he chose for VEO a way to support modernization and motivation in agriculture.



Ostermann Ivan Andreyevich (1725–1811)

*Count, Full Privy Councillor,
Chancellor of State, Senator*

*President of Free Economic Society
01.10.1784–28.10.1788*

Ostermann, Ivan Andreyevich — Second son of Andrei Ivanovich Ostermann, known Russian diplomat. Was born on April 23, 1725. He started military service in the Guards. Promoted to Captain's rank in the Preobrazhensky Regiment of the Royal Guards, 1741.

Ivan went abroad to perfect his education in a journey in which he visited almost all European countries and studied several languages.

Appointed to the Russian Embassy in Paris in 1757, he spent two years there before receiving a promotion to Privy Councillor to relieve Count Nikita Panin as Ambassador Extraordinary to the Swedish court and Minister Plenipotentiary. In Stockholm, he was focusing his efforts on resistance to the influence of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs as its emissaries were trying to convince King Gustavus III to introduce absolute monarchy in Sweden in violation of its Constitution.

Young and ambitious, Gustavus succumbed to persuasions to assume autocratic conduct and was ready to cause a rupture between Nordic countries. Ostermann was up to his tremendous task — he warded off the brewing conflict toward the end of 1772 by winning the King's confidence and friendship so that Gustavus turned an attentive ear to the Russian diplomat's explanations of the danger of another Russo-Swedish war.

Count Ostermann often helped the King with his advice. Gustavus wrote him in a letter of December 28, 1774: «I trace to your excellent intentions the inviolable friendship and confidence between me and your [Russian] court. Rest assured of my respect for you as of the sympathy which I shall feel and display as I have done before for whatever matters that may concern you».

Recalled to St.-Petersburg in August 1774, Ostermann succeeded to Vice-Chancellor's post in April 1775.

Count Ostermann was promoted to Full Privy Councillor and Senator, in June 1781, and awarded the Order of St. Vladimir, 1 st class, a year later.

After Count Panin's death, in 1783, he was appointed Commander-in-Chef of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs [Foreign Minister]. A.A. Bezborodko and P.V. Bakunin, Jr., were appointed his assistants.

The years when he was leading the Foreign Ministry saw many essential treaties signed — suffice it to mention a Trade Treaty between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (1783), a Russo-French Treaty of Friendship and on Trade and Navigation (1786), its Russo-British analogue, an Union and Defense Treaty between the Empress of Russia and the King of England (1795), and a convention for a final division of Poland.

Ivan Ostermann was President of the Free Imperial Economic Society from October 1, 1784, to October 28, 1788.

Count Ostermann became Chancellor of State, November 9, 1796, after the enthronement of Paul I, but applied for resignation on reasons of advanced age the next year. He really felt no longer able to stand at Russia's helm. The decree on his retirement, signed on April 21, 1797, granted him the right of wearing all insignia. Count Ostermann received a silver service, his only farewell gift as he had previously received all state awards, including the Order of St. Andrew the First-Called.

Count Ostermann moved to Moscow and died there 14 years after retirement, April 18, 1811.





Anhalt Fyodor Yevstafyevich (1732–1794)

*Count, Lieutenant-General,
Adjutant General of Catherine II*

*President of Free Economic Society
28.10.1788–22.05.1794*

Fyodor Yevstafyevich Anhalt was born on May 10 (May 21 old style), 1732. His father, Prince Anhalt-Dessau and son of famous military leader Prince Leopold I, married Johanna Sofia Herre, daughter of a merchant, and hence their children did not hold the title of princes.

Count Anhalt began his service in Prussia and became an aide-de-camp to King Frederick the Great when barely twenty years of age.

He took part in all campaigns and battles of the Seven Years' War. In 1776 as Major-General and two years later accepted the post of lieutenant-general in Saxony.

In 1783, Anhalt was invited by Catherine II to Russia, where he was granted the title of Lieutenant-General. He was subsequently made Adjutant General of Her Royal Highness and appointed head of the Finnish corps of chasseurs in a division deployed in the northern provinces.

One of his contemporaries wrote that, «wishing to learn his new homeland better, Count Anhalt asked permission for traveling around Russia, which he was granted under the guise of a business trip as an inspector of troops and fortifications». He spent nearly three years traveling around Russia, including the most outlying regions, where he collected valuable information, in particular about public education, industrial development, agriculture and trade.

Anhalt returned to St. Petersburg in 1786, submitted the materials to the empress and was granted the orders of St. Alexander Nevsky and St. Andrew the First-Called. He was also appointed inspector general of the troops deployed outside St. Petersburg, in Estland (Estonia) and Finland.

On November 8 of that year, he accepted the post of director general of the Land Corps of Noble Cadets.

Education was very good in the cadet corps under Anhalt, with the best minds in Russia invited to teach there. It is interesting that the count used a unique pedagogical trick to encourage his cadets to better study their subjects. «The high wall surrounding the garden and the walls of the recreation hall», writes the corps' historiographer A.V. Viskovatov, «were covered from floor to ceiling with instructive phrases in the Russian and foreign languages, a chronicle of major discoveries and events, different emblems, and the like.» All these inscriptions were subsequently collected and issued in a book called «La Muraille Parlante», with a foreword in which the count explained the goal of the book.

The corps' garden was open for visitors on red-letter days. The empress herself frequently visited the corps. During one of such visits, Empress Catherine described the corps as «a nursery garden of great personalities».

Since October 28, 1788, when Count Anhalt became president of the Imperial Free Economic Society, he had been actively contributing to the work of society, hardly missing a single sitting. He last visited it two days before his death, on May 20, 1794. The society «erected a marble bust of the count in the hall, as a sign of respect for the spiritual characteristics of its president, immediately after his death».

Anhalt Fyodor Yevstafyevich died on May 22, 1794 and was buried at the aliens' cemetery in St.-Petersburg.





Passek Pyotr Bogdanovich (1736–1804)

General-en-chef, Senator, General-Adjutant of her Majesty, Full Chamberlain. General-Governor of Mogilevskaya and Polotskaya provinces, a holder of orders of St. Apostol Andrey, St. Alexander Nevsky and Polish orders of the White Eagle and St. Stanislav

*President of Free Economic Society
01.08.1794–1797*

He came from a noble family of Bohemia. His forefathers moved to Lithuania and from there to Smolensk Region in Russia. His father, Bogdan Ivanovich was a judge in the Mallo-Russia general court and governor of Belgorod.

P.B. Passek was born on February 18, 1736. When Peter Bogdanovich was eight years old, he became a musketer in Life Guards of Preobrazhensky regiment. Such was a tradition at that time.

In 1761, he was already ensign and was sent to Revel with a manifest, containing news about the death of the Empress Elizaveta Petrovna and accession to the throne of Peter III.

Particular role in his career was his participation in the palace revolution which put to the throne Catherine II. P.B. Passek played in it one of the major roles. His feverish and carelessness put on him suspicion in betrayal and he was arrested on June 27, 1762. His arrest was a signal to immediate actions. On June, 28 a palace coup took place and in the morning that day Passek was liberated by the new Empress herself.

At the day of coronation Peter Bogdanovich was granted the rank of the full chamberlain and in November he received a village near Moscow and 250 peasants, a premium of 4 thousand roubles and in a year — an annual pension of 1 thousand roubles.

On December 4, 1766, in response to his request, based on his illness, he was dismissed in the rank of the General-Lieutenant.

For about 12 years Peter Bogdanovich was far from service, but on July 6, 1778 he was again appointed a Governor in Moguilevski province. He occupied that post till 1781, and he was sent to the First Department of the Senate. After several months he was again appointed General-Governor in Moguilevskaya and Polotskaya provinces. That year he became Full General and received an order of Alexander Nevsky.

He was General-Governor for fourteen years. As G.I. Dobrynin remembered, Peter Bogdanovich was very friendly with a Councillor of Moguilevskaya region. V.I. Polyansky, who was a clever and a talented person, who in reality possessed all power in the province. P.B. Passek himself preferred to travel.

During that time the town of Moguilev was visited by the Empress Catherine II with the Emperor Iossif II, to commemorate that event was built a Church after the name of St. Iossif.

Passek was a member of Free Economic Society from 1793. He was elected President of VEO from August 1794 till 1797.

After the death of Catherine II, Pavel I dismissed Passek and didn't permit him to enter the both capitals. Only when Alexander I came to the throne, disgrace fell down. The new Emperor permitted Passek to come to the capital, where Passek moved immediately and spent in Petersburg his last years.

Passek died on March 22, 1804 and was buried in Alexander-Nevskaya Lavra.





Nartov Andrei Andreyevich (1737–1813)

Full Councillor of State, President of Berg-Collegium, member of the Mint, Higher Mining School Director, President of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Colonel of the Artillery

*President of Free Economic Society
01.01.1797–02.04.1813*



Andrei Nartov was born in 1737, was a son of Andrei Konstantinovich Nartov, court turner to Peter the Great, Councillor of State Andrei Nartov, Sr., was member of the Academy of Sciences.

Andrei Andreyevich Nartov received his education at the Academy of Sciences and the Cadet Corps, went to military service for a short time and retired in the rank of artillery colonel, 1764, and stood at the cradle of the Free Imperial Economic Society. In 1765 was one of 15 founders of VEO.

He, I.L. Thaubert and G.N. Teplov took part in the elaboration of the plan and Charter of the Society and he was elected a Secretary. Nartov remained society secretary for 25 years and later it's President for another 16.

He was permanent editor of the Transactions of the Free Economic Society for the promotion of knowledge among the readers of the Russian Land-Tilling and House Construction, agriculture, and other additional sciences. As Vice-president of VEO A.S. Greigue noted in 1841: « such publications helped to promote in the country a lot of valuable information, to direct attention of landowners and industrials to the capitals, which were for some time without any application».

It should be noted that Andrei Andreyevich was elected President of VEO in the period, when after the death of Catherine II were difficult-years. Pavel I was against any freedoms — he was the only Emperor who didn't confirm status of Free Economic Society. That situation was quickly supported by his court: in 1797 there were no assignation on the edition of «Transactions of VEO», there were intrigues in other spheres of activity of VEO. Under such conditions A.A. Nartov showed a real diplomatic talent and managed to keep the Society and to raise its scientific potential.

Situation changed with Alexander I in power. The Emperor gave order to give annually from the main treasury 5 thousand roubles for the edition of transactions of VEO. Later that sum was two times more.

According to A.A. Nartov request, the new Emperor ordered the governors to render any assistance to VEO in collecting economic information about the provinces and he even appointed valuable awards for the most active. The governors were not very hard to obey that order, however, the information about Russian provinces grew. There were published economic articles about some large regions: Moscovskaya, Astrakhanskaya, Cau-causis, Yaroslavskaya, Kurlyandskaya and others.

A.A. Nartov was useful in other spheres of public life. In 1767, he was on the commission, which drafted a new Code of Laws, and joined the Medal Committee in 1772, was Vice-President and later President of the Mining Collegium.

Since 1801 — President of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

He was one of the founding fathers of the Higher Mining School, late upgraded to Mining Institute.

The society rewarded him for what he had done to it by erecting his memorial bust even in his lifetime, 1811. And the Emperor awarded him with a rank of Full Councillor of State.



Sestrensevich-Bogush Stanislav (1731–1826)

Metropolitan of all Roman-Catholic Churches in Russia, Full member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, holder of the highest Russian orders, honorary member of the Russian and foreign universities and scientific societies

*President of Free Economic Society
02.04.1813–05.05.1823*

Sestrensevich-Bogush, Stanislav was born in Lithuania in 1731 in a noble family of Calvinist faith, he studied law, mathematics, physics, philosophy, languages in the protestant universities, showing high skills in science. He was in Prussian hussar regiment and in Lithuanian Guards. After his army service in 1761, he became a home teacher. At that time he became catholic and in 1763 he took holy orders and was a priest in Gomel and Bobruysk, from 1767 he was a canon in Vilno. After the link with Byelorussia, in 1773 he was appointed a Bishop of Byelorussia, and in 1784 he became an arch-bishop, in 1798 till his death he was Metropolitan of all catholic churches in Russia.

Actually he was the head of the Roman-catholic church in Russia during 53 years — 1773–1826, although due to the change in state policy was often considered by the Government too conservative, or too liberal, gave rise to unfavourable criticism to the Roman curia and had real enemies — Jesuits.

As he was a remarkable administrator and had a strong will, he step by step realized the task, put by Catherine II: establishing romancatholic church in Russia as independent and free from political influence of Rome, although respecting the highest authority of the Pope, as in Gallikanskaya church.

He was interested in history, philology, medicine, agronomy, technical disciplines, at his initiative in archbishop printing-house was published a booklet on history of the roman-catholic church in Russia for 1761–1791. He made several translations into polish (works of Catherine II as well).

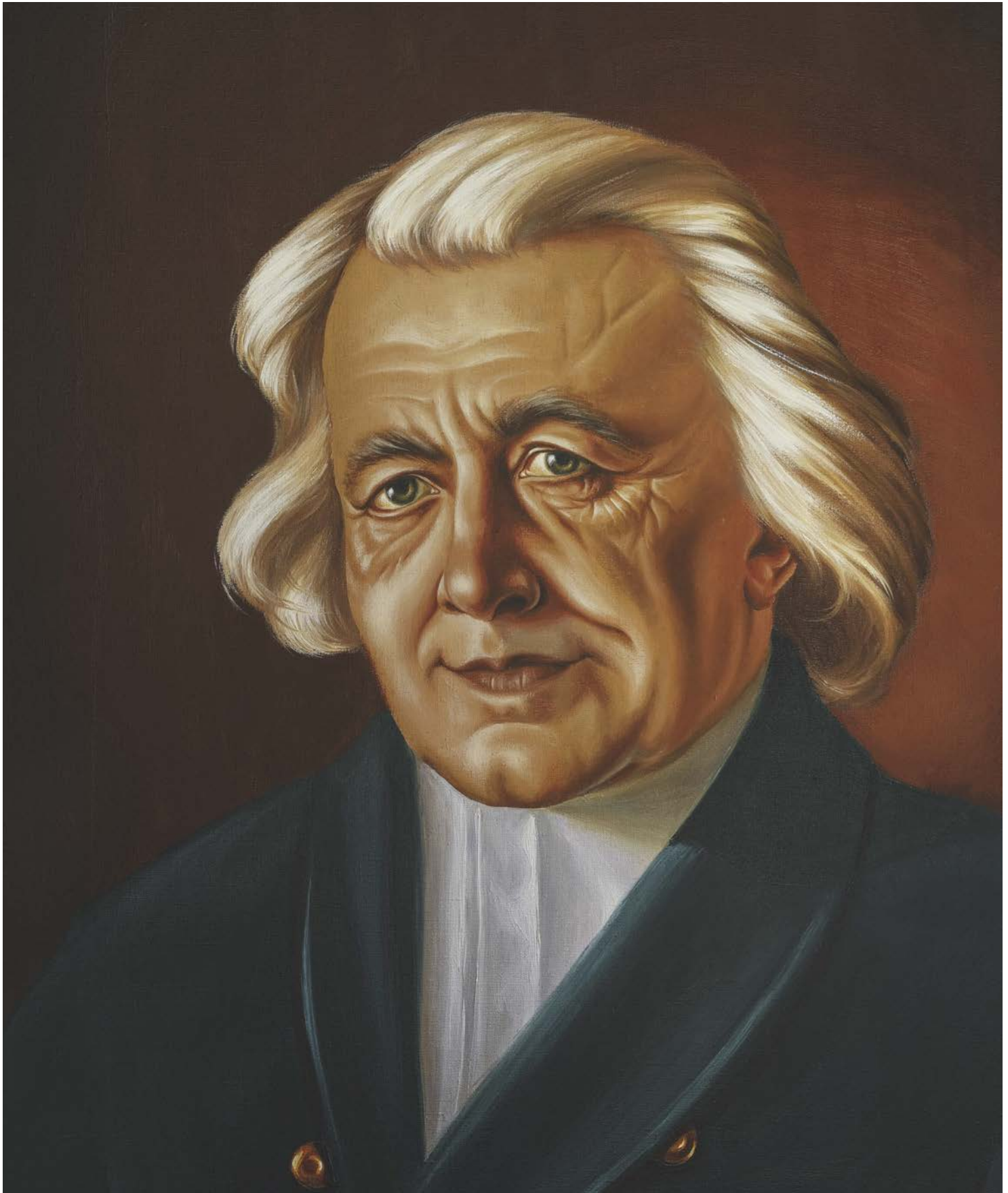
He was a member of the Russian Academy of sciences, an honorable member of several universities, a member of scientific societies, Russian and foreign. He became a member of Free Economic society in 1792, took an active part in all its events. In 1803 he was decorated with the gold medal, adopted by the Society for «his work in the society, in its Board, for useful ideas and for the trials with couch-grass to be used for the bread».

His publications in «Transactions of VEO» were devoted to the private questions of agriculture and technical improvements. He proposed to give a gold medal for the best answer to the question: «what means should be applied in order to teach a peasant and his family to do something useful in winter».

During his active presidency in 1813–1823 was accumulated a significant statutory capital. When he left that post VEO had in the state institutions 50,000 roubles.

His thankful colleagues highly praised his input into development of VEO. They installed his marble bust in the building of VEO when he retired.





Mordvinov Nikolai Semyonovich (1754–1845)

Count, Admiral, Naval Minister, Chairman of the State Council Economy department and department of Secular and Church Affairs, organizer of insurance in Russia

*President of Free Economic Society
1823–1840*

Nikolai Semyonovich Mordvinov was born on April 17 (28 according to the new calendar) 1754 in the family of Admiral S.I. Mordvinov. He was formed together with future Emperor Pavel I. From 1766 he served in the navy. In 1774 he was sent to England to study navy skills and after three years in England he became an earnest supporter of English parliament traditions and economic views.

He took part in the second war between Russia and Turkey. For his merits before Motherland was given a rank of Admiral in 1779 and was awarded by several villages with peasants. In 1802 after reformation of the structure of the state administrative organs, he was appointed the first navy Minister in Russia.

During Alexander I reign, N.S. Mordvinov showed himself as supporter of the program of economic reforms. From 1810 he was a member of the State Council. First he was responsible for the Department of the State economy and from 1801 — Department of Secular and Church Affairs. At the same time he was a member of Financial Committee and Cabinet of Ministers.

N.S. Mordvinov was a convinced supporter of destruction of the State monopoly on insurance and he managed to convince the Emperor and other powerful people to create a stock holding company. On his request, the Emperor Nikolay I signed a decree on July 27, 1827, which was the start of the insurance system in Russia. That decree established the first domestic insurance holding — Russian insurance company against fire.

The most part of organizational work was made by N.S. Mordvinov, who became its first Chairman. The first insurance certificate was assigned to the wife of the Chairman — Guenriette, who insured her own house for 120,000 roubles in banknotes.

A prominent statesman, Admiral and Navy Minister, Nikolay Semenovich was also a convinced supporter of technical novelties that appeared in the navy affairs, as well as in the Free Economic Society, which he headed for twenty years. The whole list of reforms in VEO was connected with the name of N.S. Mordvinov.

The most known was creation of his own mechanical workshop and exposition of the best examples of agricultural machines. That idea was discussed many times at the meeting, but was realized only in 1823 when Nikolay Semenovich Mordvinov headed Society. For the exposition were given from the budget of the Society 10,000 roubles and were bought new examples of agricultural machines, which were shown at the expose and some of them sold to the farmers. First days of the exposition showed that really useful and not expensive machines had big demand and v quickly sold out. Some models were demanded so much, that workshop of VEO was short of time to satisfy all demands. That was why the workshop was increased by the surface twice and engaged additional personal. The number of models increased from 14 to 150. Many machines were made upon the drawings of the farmers, but by quality they were competitive with the best European models.

Society spent on the workshop and exposition more than 33,000 roubles, more than 8,000 roubles were given by the clients and sponsors.

The following statistics shows the range of work in 1829–1830:

- 150 old machines were repaired;
- 13 new models were made;
- a catalogue of the machines in the museum was composed;
- were examined inventions and were made examples of sowing machine by the milling master Altdorf, and a device for mechanical production of bricks by the merchants Kletchev and Trussov;



— were made 16 new and repaired 22 threshing-machines by drawings of Veshnykov, ordered by the farmers and 1 machine for the museum of VEO.

Mordvinov was an enthusiast of public propaganda of agricultural and economic knowledge, development of public education in the country. As President of the Imperial Free Economic Society, Mordvinov donated 60,000 roubles in banknotes to start an Economic Society in the Tver province and to establish rural public libraries in other provinces.

N.S. Mordvinov actively supported creation in VEO the first agricultural school, that idea was proposed by a member of VEO, Countess S.V. Stroganova on April 18, 1825. The main aim was to teach young serves among orphans girls and boys from villages of the Countess, the girls were supposed to be taught needle-and-home work. In some cases the school admitted town citizens.

Society awarded S.V. Stroganova with the gold medal, as such example of the Countess might push other landowners to such activity. Nikolay Semenovich proposed Society to pay for two orphans in the school one thousand roubles per each.

The school had two faculties: theory was taught in Petersburg, and practice was organized in the estate of the Countess «Maryino» in Novgorodskaya province. The teachers from Petersburg went there during students' holidays. In 1839 by the wish of many landowners was established a faculty of veterinary, afterwards — forestry and then — a chemical laboratory. The school had 56 x 2,7 acres of arable earth, 35 x 2,7 acres of meadows, 450 x 2,7 acres of woods. There were organized a kitchen-garden and -an ordinary garden. Then was opened a workshop, where local masters made new and repaired old devices and machines.

News about successes of VEO in the pedagogical field came to the Emperor. In 1823 Nikolay I ordered to give annually to the Society 20,000 roubles in banknotes to solve two urgent tasks — to prepare teachers of agricultural disciplines and agricultural managers. In particular, from that money a sum of 10,000 roubles was spent to pay for 20 pupils at school of the Countess Stroganova.

To enter the school there were two conditions: pupils must be Russian and over 13 years old, and they must be chosen in Petersburg educational institutions with faculty of agriculture. Unfortunately, not all of the graduates became then farmers. That was why in 1837 VEO adopted new order for the school. All graduates who were taught at the expense of the Society had to:

- a) work for six years in the Society;
- b) after theoretical course from April 15 to November 1 to work in the estate «Maryino» in order to have full knowledge about agricultural work;
- c) to make notes of the lessons with own remarks and explanation which were shown to the director of the school in two weeks and demanded to the Chairman of the Section of VEO.

Such practice for half a year made first part of the studying process for the students, who were prepared to three professions:

- a) a teacher of agriculture;
- b) a manager of the estate or of some agricultural sphere;
- c) a manager of the estate of Free economic society if it appeared in the structure of VEO in order to implement new agricultural knowledge and agricultural skills.

Graduates who were prepared to work in the educational institutions and had remarkable intellectual characteristics, nice outlooks, could speak clearly and correctly and were strong enough were obliged to deepen their

theoretical knowledge in agriculture, to elaborate courses for lectures and plans or seminars, to write theoretical thesis on different subjects and to study drawings and models of agricultural machines. Besides, they had to prepare and to read four lectures on different branches of agriculture. Another group of students, potential managers in the estates, spent all winter months in the main office of the Countess Stroganova in S-Petersburg. They were acquainted with office work and rules of managing the estate. Besides, they had to be present at the lectures in the Imperial Free Economic Society and at the lectures of their comrades.

After graduation future teachers went to the institutions and schools, and potential managers proposed their services to the owners of estates or the place of work was chosen by the direction of Free Economic Society.

N.S. Mordvinov made a lot to improve plant breeding and sheepbreeding in the country south; he organized free-of-charge public lectures in the Society, he wrote himself «Instruction how to improve meadows».

As a prominent scientist-economist, Nikolay Semenovich made analysis of the commercial activity of the Society and came to the conclusion, that it contradicted to the aims and goals of VEO, he insisted to stop commercial activity even if it was made upon moral guaranties and responsibility. Society continued to give scientific knowledge and elite sorts of seeds free of charge.

President of VEO N.S. Mordvinov was the only member of the Supreme Criminal Court, who refused to sign a death sentence to the Decembrists in 1826.

N.S. Mordvinov died in 1845 and was buried in Alaxender Nevsky Laura. Free economic Society highly valued his merits and installed his marble bust in the building of VEO.



**Prince of Oldenburg
Pyotr Georgiyevich
(Constantine-Friederic-
Peter)
(1812–1881)**

*General (infantry), Senator,
Member of the State Council,
Head of the Department of civil and
ecclesiastic affairs, Head of the Office
of His Majesty Emperor, doctor of law*

*President of Free Economic Society
1840–02.05.1859*

Prince of Oldenburg P.G. was born on August 14, 1812 in Yaroslavl and was nursed at the court of the Empress Mariya Fyodorovna. On the part of his mother he was a cousin to the Emperor Alexander II, on the part of his farther a cousin to Grand Duke Nikolay Friederic-Peter, who was in power in Oldenburg for half a century.

After the second marriage of his mother, who married the King Vurtemberg, Pyotr with his brother Alexander went to Germany to Shtudgart. After the death of his mother, Pyotr stayed with his grand-farther, Grand Duke, in Oldenburg.

The young Prince got military and juridical education. He was a doctor of law. He was taught Russian history, was fluent in foreign languages, knew the Greek and the Latin.

After abolition of the yoke of Turkey after many centuries, Prince of Oldenburg was under consideration for the Greek throne. But he didn't become the King of the Hellenes: The Emperor Nikolay I in 1830 asked his nephew to come to Russia. From his birth he was assigned to the Life Guards Preobrazhensky regiment. The Prince in December 1830 was appointed a commander of the batallion. Then he was for some time a commander of Preobrazhensky regiment.

In the army he served until the rank of the General (infantry) and in 1841 went to the civil service. In 1834 he became a Senator, in 1836 — a member of the State Council, in 1842 — Head of the Department of civil and ecclesiastic affairs and Head of the Office of His Majesty Emperor. From 1860 — the Head of the office of the Empress Maria.

In 1840 Nikolay Semenovich Mordvinov, 86 years old, retired from the post of the President of Free Economic Society and he addressed his colleagues: «I see the best candidature to that post of the President as His Majesty Prince of Oldenburg. We know how much he is carrying about Society and he will have more opportunities for that activity as the President». And he addressed the Prince, saying: «We will appreciate your kindness, Your Imperial Majesty, to accept our invitation and our society».

Prince of Oldenburg accepted that proposal with kindness, and he said that the definitive decision could be taken only by the Emperor. Fortunately, Nikolay I confirmed that appointment with a remark that a public work was not to prevent the Prince from his service functions as the general (infantry), senator and a member of the State Council.

Society took into consideration that remark and put into the Charter of VEO an amendment, that when a member of the Imperial family became Society president, three other candidatures were appointed by the President to monitor ordinary affairs and one Vice-president. Different people held the post of Vice-president during the presidency of the Prince of Oldenburg, namely A.S. Greig, A.G. Kuleshev-Bezborodko, P.N. Rikord, V.V. Dolgorukov, A.M. Knyazhevich, A.I. Levshin-Schippenbach, and A.F. Middendorf.

The work of the Society during twenty years of the presidency of His Imperial Majesty P.G. Oldenburg from 1840 to 1859 was remarkable by many events. The main were different contests and expositions.

The first was proposed by the President — exposition of the cattle in St.-Petersburg in order to solve two tasks: to help the development of the breeding of the cattle and to provide the citizens of the capital with good products.

That annually accumulated experience permitted Society to organize a large-scale project — an All-Russia exposition of agricultural products in 1850. Tremendous organizational work was fruitful: practically all prov-



inces from the European part of Russia, Siberia, Caucasus and Finland participated in it, 724 institutions and individuals demonstrated 3516 samples of their products.

Organizational Committee awarded 502 persons, who received gold, silver and bronze medals for the total sum of 2340 of roubles in silver coins.

Many samples were sent directly from St.-Petersburg to the world exposition in London. There was success in London too: among 365 participants — 130 were awarded by the different premiums. It was the start of the Russian triumphs at the international expositions.

Under support of the Prince of Oldenburg VEO began research expeditions. In 1849 according to the task and program of the contest Society organized a trip for the young scientists from Petersburg university P. Semenov (who was famous then by his researches in Tyan-Shan) and N. Danilevsky (who wrote a world known book «Russia and Europe. Review of cultural and political relationships between the Slavic and the Roman-German communities») to study economic possibilities of the black earth zones of Russia. After that expedition the young scientists were taken into VEO and became Corresponding members, and their experience was used for organization of other research trips.

Another important event of that time was edition of the list of opinions about the average price on bread. The subject of that document was in the following: to give the landowners subsidies, guaranteed by the future yields, in order to create bread reserves in case of poor harvests and to support stable prices for cereals. The Prince of Oldenburg sent that proposal to the Cabinet of Ministers, which sent it to the provinces. Collected information gave a bright picture of bread trading in the country.

Under support of such powerful leader as Prince of Oldenburg, for VEO were opened new possibilities to continue experimental work, which was stopped in 1836, when was ended the term of land lease in Petrovsky island.

But science could not be developed without practice. That was clear for the new President. That was why Peter Georgievich at the first meeting proposed to rent a piece of land behind Bolshaya Okhta.

Many people wanted to rent that land. It belonged to the navy department, which didn't want to have public control. The Prince managed to solve that problem. Admiralty didn't agree to give the land into use without time-limit, and VEO received it for 50 years.

When the agreement was accomplished, more than 163 x 2.7 acres of land were given for experimental works. There was a house, 6 sheds, 2 barns, 2 small houses for the workers, a threshing barn, an ice-house. VEO received 18 horses, 26 carts, a set of agricultural devices. Unfortunately that was not enough for the good experimental plantations.

It was decided to fulfill research work at the same time with development of economic infrastructure and in several years at the firm was installed the trial station of the European style, was opened a chemical laboratory, organized a herd of milky cattle, breeding work was started.

That firm permitted Society to advance the seeding work into the new level. For that aim in 1844 VEO bought a house where was opened a shop, which was called at that time a shed. The seeding materials and the seeds of food products and decorative plants were bought in different regions of the country and abroad and were sold by average prices to the farmers.

Big help was given to the Society by the foreign correspondents who sent to their Russian colleagues new seeds for trials under Russian conditions.

But there was also negative practice in it: society didn't manage to organize commercial sales of seeds. That was why Society had to refuse to make money by scientific researches. That principle has been kept till the present days in the activity of the Free Economic Society of Russia.

However, VEO followed its Charter's task to provide agriculture farmers with the elite seeds. And they did it free of charge by small portions and they invited experienced trader from Petersburg to represent Society.

During twenty years of the presidency of the Prince of Oldenburg, VEO announced 11 contests. By quantity it was less than during the first ten years of VEO activity. However, the tasks were more complicated and requested remarkable knowledge. Such, for example, in 1859 it was proposed to solve three tasks:

to write a composition about free labour, its forms, conditions, economic and moral results;

to analyze situation in the banking sphere and to write a proposal about common and agricultural banks, about common transport and mortgage;

to prepare a clear instruction on construction of dams, mill-ponds.

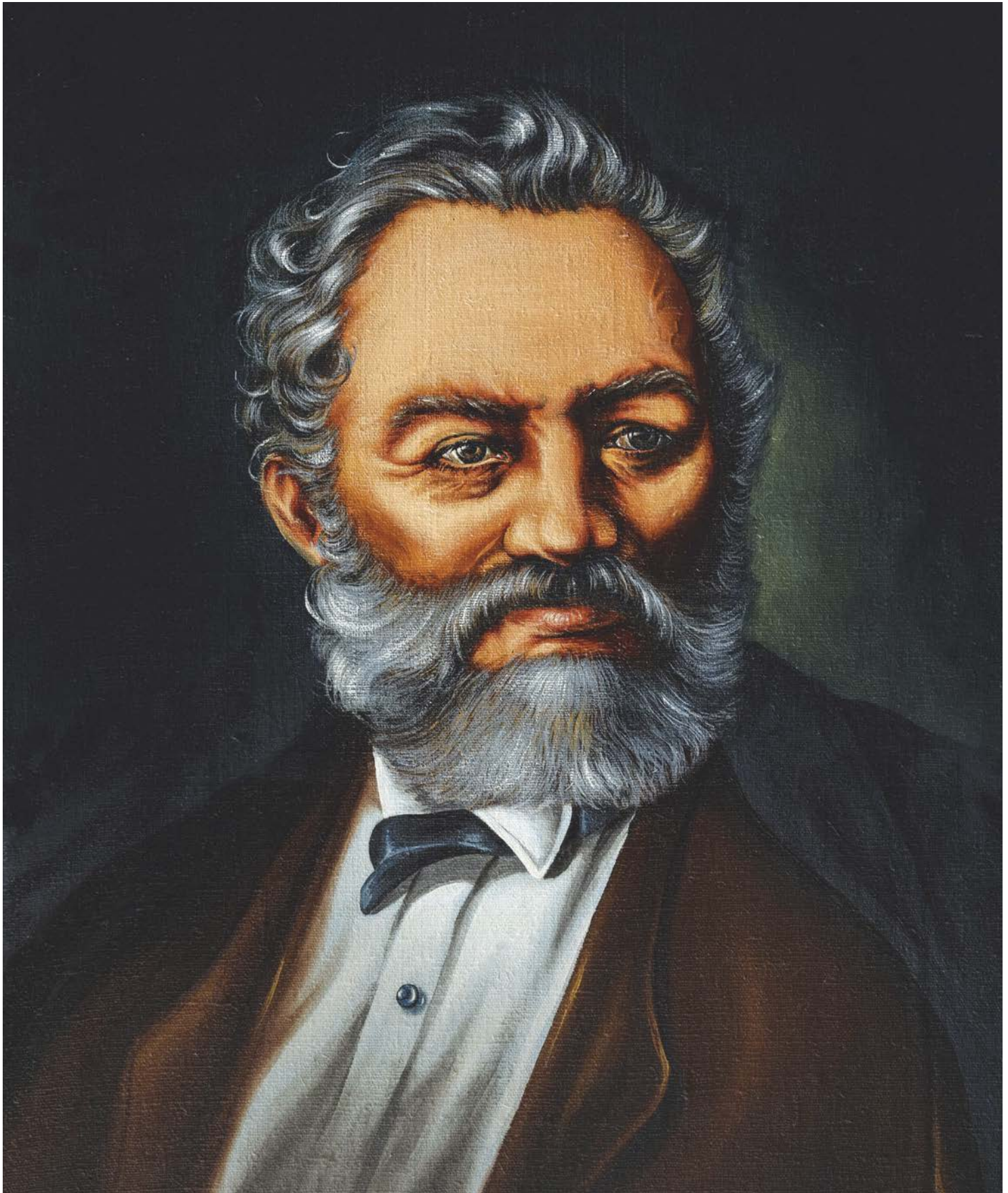
It was promised a gold medal for the solution of those tasks. Besides, authors of the first two answers were promised premiums of 500 roubles, and for the third answer — 300 roubles. It was clear that only specialists who had large knowledge and the skills of research work could receive those rewards.

In 1859 when the new charter of VEO was adopted Pyotr Georgievich changed the post of the President to the Honorary President of VEO. Only in the beginning of 1862 big state affairs made the Prince to resign that title and he remained an honorary member till the end of his life.

Emperor Nikolay I highly appreciated activity of his nephew. In 1845 he awarded the Prince of Oldenburg the title of His Imperial Majesty.

Thanks to the care of the Prince was created a college of law, also sponsored by the Prince. He gave 1 million of roubles as sponsor. Pyotr Georgievich was also famous for his charity in the field of health protection, state service and public education. In 1889 after this death in front of the building of Mariinskiy hospital at Liteiny avenue in St-Petersburg was installed a monument with a signature: «To the benefactor of Enlightenment», and in 1912 to commemorate his 100's anniversary, his name was given to the part of the bankment of Fontanka in Petersburg.

Pyotr Georgievich and his wife Teresia had 8 children — 4 sons and 4 daughters. Although the family was of the highest Russian aristocracy, they kept in the family Lutheranism. When bapitized the children were given three German names each, but out of the family they were called as in Russia by the first name and patronymic.



Middendorf Alexander Fyodorovich (1815–1894)

Famous Russian natural scientist, doctor of medicine, academician, honorary member of the Russian Academy of sciences

*President of Free Economic Society
03.04.1859–01.10.1860*

Alexander Fyodorovich Middendorf was born in the South Estonia in 1815. In 1832 he entered the medical faculty of the Derptsy (today Tartu) university, he graduated from it in 1837. After two years of work in Germany and Austria, Middendorf came back to the country land as a specialist in the field of zoology, ethnography, and anthropology. In 1840, he took part in the expedition, headed by the known scientist and traveler K.M. Berto Lap-landia.

In 1842 by recommendation of K.M. Ber the Academy of sciences asked Middendorf to organize expedition to the Northern and Eastern Siberia. During preparation for that trip Middendorf composed a map of Taimir according to the works of S.I. Cheluskin and Kh. Laptev. He used that map and gave very precise orientations to the local people who accompanied him, so as they called him «great shaman».

On November 14, 1842 A.F. Middendorf left Petersburg. There was among others with him a military land surveyor V.V. Vaganov. In the beginning of 1843 they passed the distance from Krasnoyarsk to Turukhansk. And from there by dogs were moving on the Yenisei, covered by ice, to the outfall of the river Dudinka. Then he moved to the North-West by the lake Pyassino to the Lower Boginda river.

Almost all July he was traveling in the Upper Taimira. In his boat he descended to the lake Taimir, crossed it and was at the Lower Taimira. Then he went through the canyon in the mountains of Byrranga and at the end of August 1843 he reached the bay of Kara Sea. At the Lower Taimira he found a skeleton of a mammoth. By the same way expedition returned to the lake Taimir, which had begun to be covered by ice.

On August 4, expedition reached the island of Big Shantar — the last point in the traveling. They could return. But the researcher sent all collected materials, geological and zoological, his notes and herbariums to Yakutsk in order to send them to Petersburg. He himself and Vaganov in a small self-made boat went to collect research material.

That Siberian expedition lasted for 841 days and passed 30,000 kilometers.

When he came back to St.-Petersburg, A.F. Middendorf began to work with collected materials.

During the following years Alexandre Fyodorovich was in many expeditions, in particular he traveled by the Black and Mediterranean Seas and the Atlantic Ocean to the Azores and by the Barents Sea to the New Land and Northern provinces of Russia.

In 1850 A.M. Middendorf was elected an ordinary academician, in 1855 — secretary of the Academy of Sciences.

In 1859–1860 he was President of VEO, took part in the organization of agricultural expositions. The scientist tried to change the poor milky strains of cattle in the Baltic provinces by other productive species. He headed special expedition and studied situation with the cattle in the whole in Russia. Thanks to A.D. Middendorf the Russian farmers got the first two atlases with pictures of the Russian breeds of the cattle. In 1888, A.D. Middendorf was decorated with the highest award for a zoologist in Russia — a gold medal of Ber.

The last 10 years A.D. Middendorf spent in Estonia in his estate Khelle-urma. He died at the end of January 1894.





Vasilchikov Victor Illarionovich (1820–1878)

Prince, War Ministry Office Director

*President of Free Economic Society
01.11.1860–30.09.1861*

Prince Victor Vasilchikov was born in 1820, was educated at the Corps of Pages to graduate in 1839 as Cornet of the Cavalry Regiment of the Royal Guards. The Caucasian War was on, and young officers of the Guards had to draw lots to be sent there. Prince Vasilchikov was fated to fight in the Caucasus since 1842. Aide-de-camp to General von Grabbe, commander of frontline troops, he took part in many battles.

Was with the army-in-the-field on the Hungarian campaign of 1849.

As soon as the Crimean War of 1853–56 broke out, Prince Vasilchikov was sent to the Danubian principalities as chief-of-staff of the Smaller Walachian Detachment, and later to the Crimea with the 12th Infantry Division as chief-of-staff of the Sebastopol garrison. A constant presence in the most dangerous spots, he was setting an example with his indomitable courage, and made daily rounds of defense lines.

Full of compassion for the wounded and the sick. Prince Vasilchikov was doing all he could for them. Physicians addressed him for whatever hospitals were in need of, and all their requests were fulfilled, however hard it might have seemed.

Whenever he was warned of danger, renowned Admiral Nakhimov replied: «What do you mean, sir? It's nothing if you are killed or I-but if the bullet finds Prince Vasilchikov, that will be real bad. Sebastopol won't hold on if he is gone».

Vasilchikov was the last to leave the besieged city lying in debris as the Russian Army was forced to retreat.

A marble plaque appeared in the hall of the Corps of Pages on the Emperor's order, reading: «Prince Victor Vasilchikov. Graduated, 1839. Sebastopol, 1854–1855».

Martial merits brought Vasilchikov promotion to Major-General, 1855, and he was appointed second in charge of the newly-established infantry battalions and General-Adjutant a bit later in the same year. Became chief-of-staff of the South Army, 1856, joined the commission for army improvement, and headed a team which investigated South and Crimean army supplies rampantly pilfered.

Director of the War Ministry Office since 1857. April 1858, Deputy War Minister; May, chief War Ministry manager.

November 1, 1860 — September 30, 1861, President of the Free Imperial Economic Society.

Dismissed from office for health reasons, 1860. Retired, 1867, to settle on his estate in the Lebedyan area, Tambov province, and wholly devoted himself to farming, on which he soon became top-notch expert. The forestry commission was repeatedly addressing him for advice to protect forests from barbaric cutting.

Vasilchikov's several works appeared in print, in particular, «Would you be so kind?», «Just a Few Words on Wage Labour» and «An Essay on Why Russia Suffered Defeat after Defeat on the Danube and in the Crimea, 1853–55» (Russian Archive, 1891).

Victor Vasilchikov died in 1878.





Kovalevsky Yevgraf Petrovich (1790–1866/1867)

Prominent statesman, a member of State Council, Director of Department of mining and salt-mines, Minister of public education. Honorable member of many institutions and scientific societies: Russian Academy of sciences, Geographic society, and many other

*President of Free Economic Society
05.10.1861–01.12.1865*

He came from nobility of Kharkov in 1790. He graduated from mining cadets corps in 1810 with gold and silver medals. Then he was engaged in practical work at Luganski foundry and in 1813 he became mine-surveyor. In 1816 he went to Petersburg to the Department of mining and salt-mines as an official for special tasks at the same department, he carried out a major study of the geological structure of Donbass and predicted rock-salt deposits in the area of the town of Bakhmud (now Artemovsk). He participated in different revision commissions at the Urals factories and investigated strikes at the factories.

Beginning from 20-ies of the 19th century was the chief of design bureau and manager of the mint sector at the Department of mining and salt-mines; inspector of classes in the mining corps, a member of the committee on mining factories, a member of the committee on the edition of the «Mining journal» and revision of different mining projects, which were in the Department, a member of the commission for the building of Alexandrovski foundry in Petersburg. In May 1825 and in April 1837 he was appointed Director of the Department of mining and salt-mines.

He compiled and published «Geological review of Donetsk Mountain Ridge» in 1829.

When he served a commander of the mining corps, he organized ideal order and was thanked officially by the Emperor Nikolay I.

In May 1830 he was appointed Governor of Tomsk and the chief of Kolyvanovo-Voskresensk Altay mining factories. He regulated relationships between the peasants and administration, organized taxes to the treasury, took care of new deposits.

In January 1843 he was granted a title of Privy Councillor and he was entrusted to be present at the Senate.

He also was Administrator in Moscow educational area and was convinced that University needs more autonomy in its internal life. In 1858–1861 he was the first Minister of public education. That appointment corresponded to the reforms of the epoch. Kovalevsky began elaboration of the new censorship status, assisted to the development of Petersburg University on the base of internal autonomy and students' corporations. However, disturbances among students led Administration to keep detailed control in its hands. The project of Kovalevsky was rejected and he left his post.

During the last year of his life was a member of the State Council from the Department of the State economy, a member of the main council of the women educational institutions.

A Full member of VEO from 1844. From October 5, 1861 till December 1, 1865 was the President of VEO. During those years he set up literacy and political economic committees.





Grand Duke Nicolas Nikolayevich, Sr. (1831–1891)

Grand Duke, Third Son of the Emperor Nicholas I, State Council member, Field-Marshal-General, Engineers and Cavalry Inspector-General, Commander-in-Chief of the Danube army in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78

*Honorary President of Imperial Free Economic Society
1862–1891*



Grand Duke Nicolas, Sr. was born in 1831, was the third son of the Emperor Nicholas I.

He received his first officer's rank in 1846. Took part in the Battle of the Inkermann Heights (Crimean War) on October 24, 1854, and was awarded the Order of St. George, 4th class.

Appointed State Council member, March 28, 1855.

Did much to update the Russian Armed Forces, with an emphasis on the Engineers and Cavalry as Inspector-General of both.

During Russian and Turkish war (Eastern war) in 1877–1878 the Grand Duke Nicolas N.Sr. was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Danube Army, which acted in the European theatre of the war.

By the time of war announcement on April 24, 1877 there were not confirmed international war regulations, elaborated in 1874 and the first and the second conventions of the Hague entered into force only in 1899 and 1907. However, the senate decree ordered Russian army to keep strictly international principles of war. That was why the Grand Duke, when he became Commander-in-Chief of the Danube army, made a decree according to which all army divisions must fight bravely in accordance with strict terms. «I am sure- he wrote in his order — that each of you — a General and a soldier will fulfill its duties and won't disgrace the name of the Russian soldier». The Grand Duke asked to keep peace with the citizens, without dependence on the faith and property. He prohibited to take anything without indemnity. Tyranny was prohibited. «From that part even/ one must strictly observe an order and discipline; this is our force, guarantee of success and a matter of honour of our name», — it was written in the order

During the years of the Russian-Turkish war in 1877–1878 the Grand Duke Nicholas N.Sr. showed himself as a Commander and a Diploma; When Russian troops came to the Balkans, especially to Bulgaria, there began national patriotic wars: the Bulgarians organized brigades of the peoples patriots to help the Russians. It contributed to the fact that after the long siege on November 28 (10 of December) 1877 the Russian traces took Plevna, and that was a break in the war, after which the Russians commenced an attack in the Balkans. The fights in the regions of Shipka and Sheynovo were decisive for the end of the war. In January 1878, when Adrianopole fell down, they started negotiations.

Ferrying across Danube, seizure of Plevna and taken prisons Osman-Pasha and his army with 34 thousand of soldiers, brought Grand Duke Nicolas N.Sr. the Order of St. George of the 1st and 2nd class

After the war and signature of the piece treaty between Turkey and Russia on February 19 (March, 3) 1878, Grand Duke was promoted to Field-Marshal-General on April 16, 1878.

In 1862 when Prince of Oldenburg had to resign his title / Honorary President of the Imperial Free Economic Society due to his high occupancy, on the request of the Society and with approval of the Emperor the title of the Honorary President was accepted by the Grand Duke Nicolas Nikolayevich Sr. on April 28, 1862.



Volkov Sergei Ivanovich

*Colonel of the General Staff,
Director of the St.-Petersburg
Mining Institute, writer*

*President of Free Economic Society
12.1865–1868*

Sergei Ivanovich Volkov was appointed director of the mining institute, when it was organized from a mining school, founded by Andrei A. Nartov, still another president of the Free Economic Society.

Upon introduction of a new statute, transforming the school into a closed establishment of military education, the presidency was gained by Volkov, who was to hold the office from 1848 till 1866. He did a lot of good for the institution's benefit. He strongly objected to military regimentation being actively introduced at his school. Delegated by the progressive-minded part of the faculty, Volkov filed an application with authorities for the return to the school of the status of an open establishment of higher education, which was expected to appreciably raise the quality of instruction

In 1865 S.I. Volkov was appointed a member of the Military Council. The same year he was elected President of the Imperial Free Economic Society and held those obligations till 1868.

As a pedagogue and a scientist, Sergei Ivanovich held the course in VEO to the development in the country of agricultural science and education. During his presidency pilot sites and agricultural schools were developed. In particular, he organized in the firm of Ochktinsk a pilot site and chemical laboratory as in the western countries. With that aim they invited specialists who wanted to work permanently in the firm. Later in polytechnic college in Riga was opened agricultural chemical station, and in Gelsingforce it was opened a pilot station for the seeds control. The school of P.I. Prokopovich played an exclusive role in the development of bee breeding and bee processing.

Sergei Ivanovich also supported initiative of Poltavsk society of agriculture, which organized in the province a trial field.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of the scientists and support of VEO in Russia at the end of the 19th century 61 pilot stations worked, among them 33 belonged to the state and 28 represented different societies and individuals.

As he was an active supporter of technical novelties in the economics, first of all in the agriculture, Sergey Ivanovich was for the initiatives of the IV section of VEO, which was responsible for development of technical progress and trade. During those years Society often jointly with Moscow society of agriculture announced contests on new technical devices for the villages. The inventors were given possible characteristics of new devices. As a results appeared machines, which corresponded to the requirements of the European agricultural devices. As an example of such cooperation in practice was a sorting machine of mechanist from Vologda F.I. Varaksin. That machine had no competitors in Russia and in Europe for dozens of years. Patents were given in England, Belgium, France and some other countries, the inventor was awarded with a medal of the French Academy, and the machine was taken to the London museum with other recognized machines from all over the world.





Suvorov-Rymniksky Alexander Arkadyevich (1804–1882)

*Court of Rymniki, Duke of Italy,
Adjutant General, Infantry General,
Military Governor General of St. Petersburg*

*President of Free Economic Society
1869–1871*

During this time, his mother left for Italy and decided to take her son with her. Abroad, she placed Alexander in the school of the well-known educator Fellenberg, near Bern, Switzerland, where Suvorov spent five years.

At the age of 18, Alexander Suvorov left for Paris, studied for a time at the Sorbonne, and then entered the University of Göttingen.

In 1846, Suvorov was appointed adjutant general, and in 1847 was awarded the Order of St. George, 4th class, for 25 years of service.

At that time, unrest broke out among the lower classes in Kostroma. Suvorov was sent there to restore public order. Contrary to the usual procedure, he acted exclusively with mildness, prudence, and persuasion. Public order was soon restored.

This convinced Emperor Nicholas I that Suvorov was suitable for calming further popular unrest, and he was appointed governor general of the Livonia, Estonia, and Courland provinces, as well as military governor of Riga.

In 1854, Suvorov became commander of the troops of the Riga province. On February 23, 1858, he received command of the Baltic Corps and the troops of the Mitava province, performing these duties in parallel with his role as governor general.

In January 1859, Suvorov received His Majesty's gratitude for governing the territory, was promoted to infantry general, and became chief of the Riga Infantry Regiment. He remained governor general of the Baltic region for 14 years, until April 1861, when he became a member of the State Senate, and on October 18, 1861, military governor general of St. Petersburg.

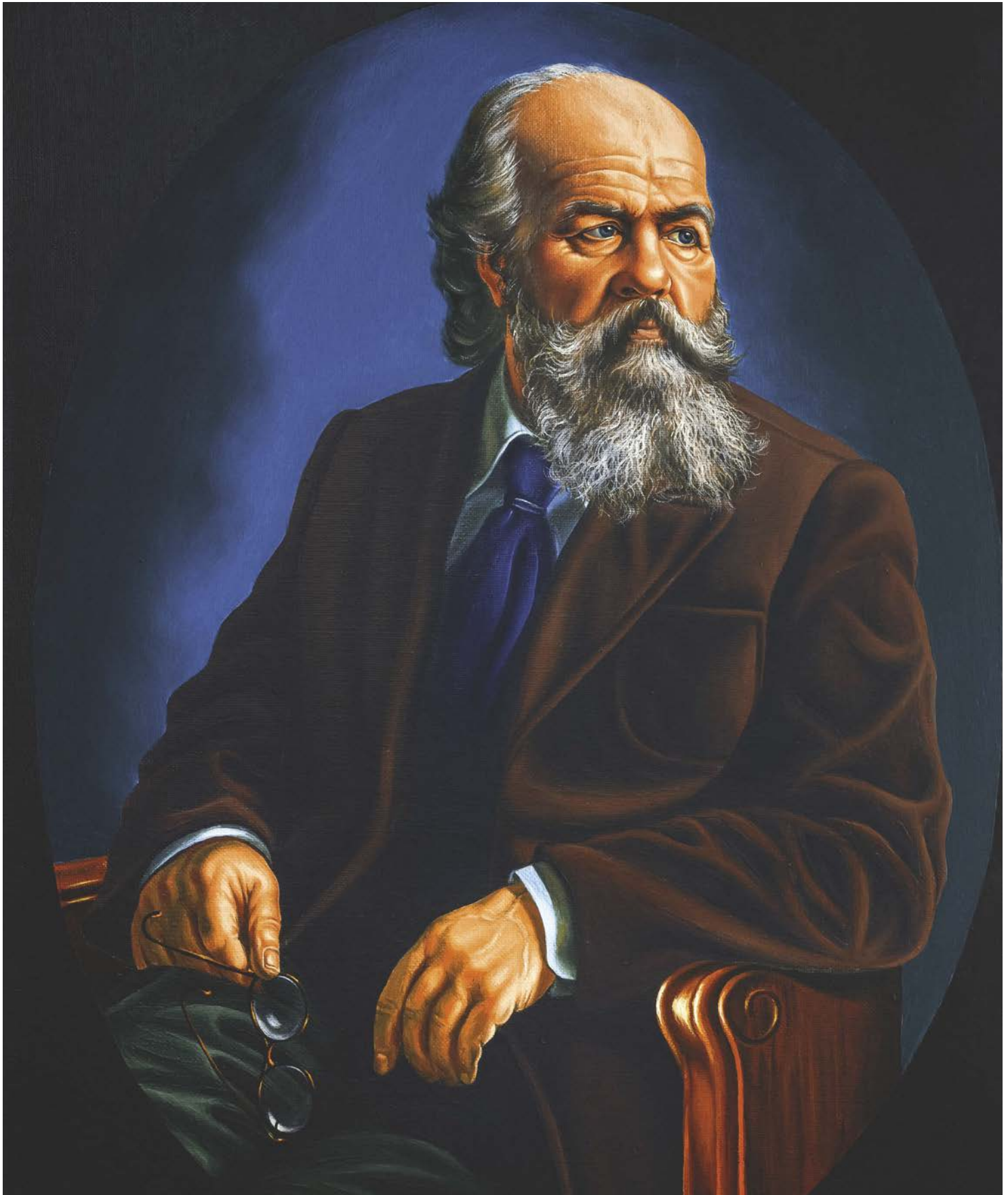
In his last years, Suvorov played a prominent role on the commission for revising the military judicial statute, was President of the Imperial Free Economic Society from 1869 to 1871, and chairman or member of many commissions and public organizations.

Upon becoming President of the VEO, Suvorov supported strengthening the Society's activities. He approved the creation of a commission to address these issues. In its report, the commission noted low attendance at general meetings, a shortage of scientific figures among members who could invigorate the work, and weak activity of branches and committees. The commission recommended updating the VEO's membership and attracting more active scientific workers.

The general meeting held on January 17, 1870, accepted the commission's findings with minor amendments.

Suvorov had a rich collection of books, which in 1884 was transferred to the Imperial Public Library, and an archive with valuable materials on the life and work of Generalissimo A.V. Suvorov. Alexander Arkadyevich Suvorov-Rymniksky died in 1882.





Kavelin Konstantin Dmitriyevich (1818–1885)

*Historian, Lawyer, Publicist, Aristocrat,
Professor at Petersburg and Moscow
Universities*

*President of Free Economic Society
1882–1884*

Konstantin Dmitriyevich Kavelin, a nobleman, was born in 1818. In 1839 he graduated from Moscow University's law department. In 1857–1861 was professor of Petersburg University. He took an active part in developing the question of liberating the peasants and of self-government, protected communal land-ownership. In the 1840s had a close relationship with Herzen and Granovsky.

In 1855 he drew up and circulated in hand-written copies a «Note» on the liberation of peasants having land for a redemption fee in favour of the landlord with state assistance. Herzen and N.G. Chernyshevsky published it in the *Sovremennik* in 1858 and in «*Golosa iz Rossii*» in 1857. Kavelin was removed from delivering lectures to the heir to the throne.

In the pamphlet «*Nobility and Liberation of Peasants*» (1862) Kavelin expressed himself against the idea of a constitution advocating a strong autocratic power. In 1860–1888 he came out against materialism in questions of psychology and ethics.

Apart from working on juridical and historical issues, Kavelin was concerned with psychology, was champion of the human personality and believed in peaceful social progress.

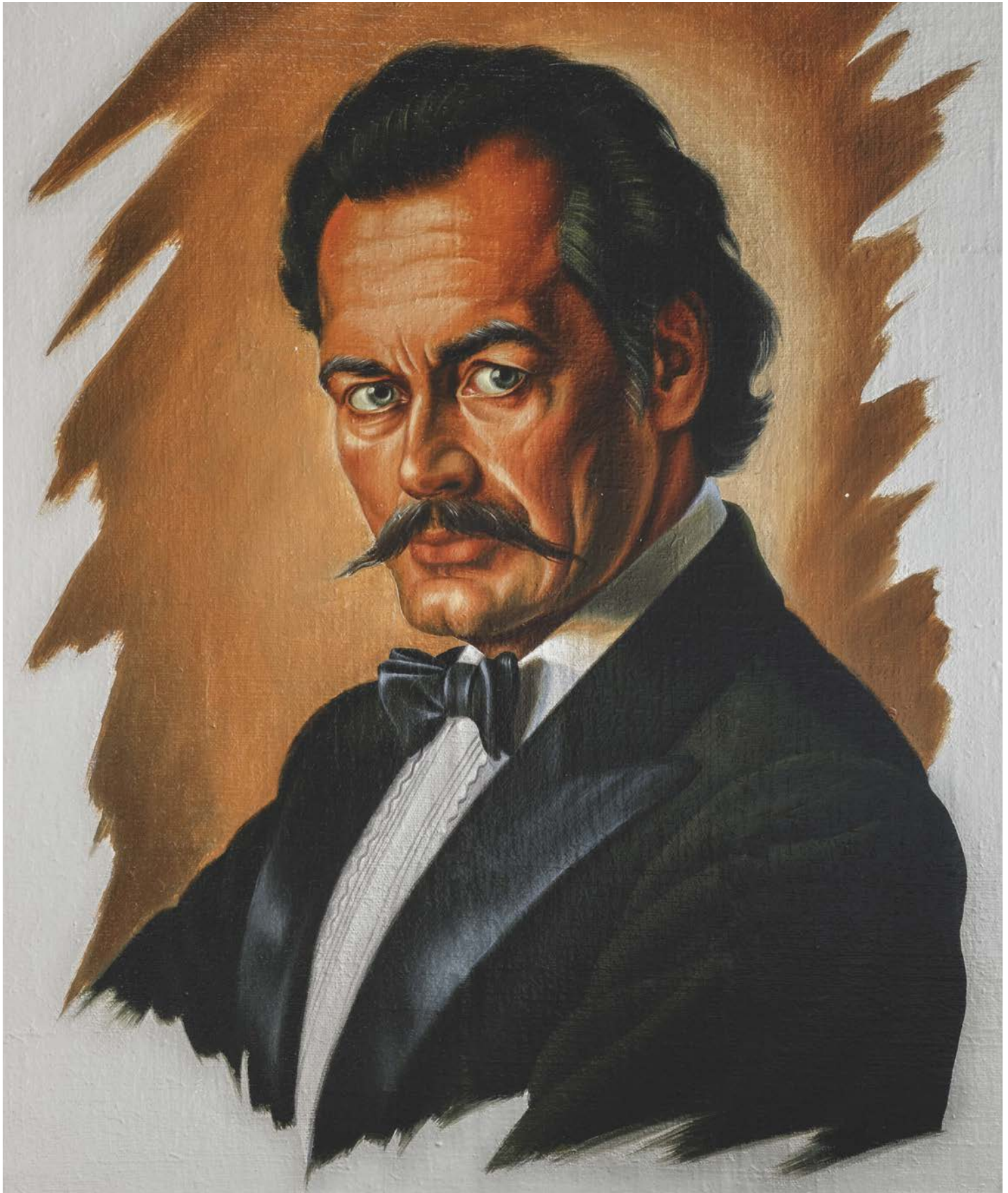
Konstantin Dmitriyevich Kavelin from November 1856 till May 1857 was a Secretary of the Imperial Free Economic Society and in 1882 became its President. When professor Kavelin became the President of VEO he addressed the Board of the Society with a report. He wrote in his report that some members and he himself were not satisfied with the work of the Society and wanted to make it more dynamic and a bit different. In particular, he pointed out misbalance between studying of scientific-technical part of agriculture and its economic conditions. Kavelin thought, that new approaches in the farming, new sorts of plants, invention of new agricultural machines and other things could not improve agriculture in many cases. Corresponding economic conditions were necessary for that. As an example, Constantine Dmitriyevich spoke about common farming and some method, which did not allow advanced farms to apply new methods of economics. Absence of good credit system did not give any possibility to obtain pedigree cattle and new machines. Kavelin considered, that VEO must be oriented to solution of economic problems in agriculture. He considered the most important of them the following: elaboration of recommendations on lands organization in the medium and small farms; elaboration of methods of application of new approaches in the farming and cattle breeding; search of methods to make available good agricultural devices, improved seeds and cattle breeds; organization of the accessible credit; protection of farmers against local buyer-ups, «kulaks» and shady dealers.

Society discussed the report of K.D. Kavelin, put into agenda discussion of some of the problems, but real results were not obtained.

In 1884 K.D. Kavelin gave up the post of the President of VEO because of the health problems.

Konstantin Dmitriyevich Kavelin died in 1885.





Korf Pavel Leopoldovich (1837–1913)

*Baron, Chairman of the Schlüsselburg
and St.-Petersburg City Council*

*President of Free Economic Society
1884–1894*

Baron Pavel Leopoldovich Korf is one of the sons of the director of the Arakcheyev cadets' corps, was born in 1837.

In 1884 Baron P.L. Korf was elected President of Free Economic Society and held that post for 10 years. When he headed VEO, Pavel Leopoldovich in December that year delivered a report at the Imperial Free Economic Society on our grain trade on the European market. He proposed to look into the causes and discuss ways of resuming Russian grain exports abroad. A special commission was set up which drew up a number of reports which were published in a separate book. P.L. Korf actively promoted development of agricultural science and trials. During the years of his presidency pilot fields were organized in the villages of the «White Well» and «Studenok» in Charkov province, in «Gavrilovka» village of Ekatherinoslavskaya province, in the estate «Bogodukhovo» of a member of VEO N.I. Tolstoy in the Orlovskaya province and other. Sometimes those stations made trials not only in their fields, and tried to cooperate with local population and intelligentsia.

Pavel Leopoldovich supported idea of creation of awards in VEO to commemorate remarkable participants of the Society. Thus, in 1886 were established the medals named after A.M. Butlerov for the achievements in the bee breeding and another medal named after P.A. Zarubin for the works in the sphere of land measuring, in 1887 another medal was established to commemorate A.J. Khodnev for the active participation in the activity of VEO and one more named after A.F. Middendorf for successes in cattle breeding.

As leader of the nobility, Pavel Leopoldovich Korf had stable influence on rural activity. He separated the sphere of activity of the Uezd from that of the municipal councils. Korf admitted participation of the owners in the Zemstvo activity without voting at the meetings.

In 1863 P.L. Korf opened in Tsarskoyeselsk community a teachers' school, and several mutual aid and insurance funds. Thanks to those organizations participants of that funds and their families were provided by pensions, formed by obligatory sums from the salaries of those who worked. He launched planned construction of Gubernia roads, carried out an assessment of the municipal property, took care of the draining of marshlands, introduced voluntary Zemstvo insurance, opened courses for teachers, organized the first congresses of doctors and teachers, allocated means for veterinary service and construction of infectious barracks, and established the mutual credit society.

In 1874–1875 he was chairman of the Schlüsselburg and Si Petersburg Gubernia Administration. In 1878 Korf was elected mayor. He proposed that monuments be erected to Alexander II and Alexander III. Pavel Leopoldovich Korf died in 1913.





Bobrinsky Alexei Alexandrovich (1852–1927)

Count, Senator, President of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, President of the Russian and Slav archaeological branch of the Russian Imperial Archaeological Society, a member of State Duma of the third convocation and of the State Council, Minister of Agriculture

*President of Free Economic Society
1894–1895*

Alexei Bobrinsky belonged to the known family of the Count Bobrinskys, established in 1762.

His grandfather, Count Alexei Bobrinsky, Sr., owner of a famous sugar refinery, was active in the Free Economic Society for many years since 1836. The grateful society hung his portrait in its conference hall and established a medal of his name after his death.

Alexei Bobrinsky, Jr. Was born in 1852, graduate of the St-Petersburg University, was employed with the Committee of Ministers chancellery

Elected Marshal of the Nobility of the St-Petersburg area, 1875, and province, 1878. President of the Imperial Archaeological Commission since 1866. President of the Russian and Slav archaeological branch of the Russian Imperial Archaeological Society, 1885–94.

President of the Imperial Free Economic Society, 1894–95.

That was hard time for the Society. Although in 1894 the Emperor Nikolay II confirmed the status of VEO, but under influence of the reactionary and religious forces he followed the course of his farther, which was conservative. The period of prosperity was changed by increasing stagnation, enforced by the liberal moods of some members. The authorities were not happy with such situation. In 1895 the VEO Literacy Committee was considered unreliable and was taken out of the Society, then another committee on the assistance to the hungry people was closed at all. Some publications were interdicted.

However some scientific programs were continued. In 1892 under the Forestry department of VEO V.V. Dokuchaev headed a special expedition on testing different methods in forestry and water economics in the steppe of Russia. By the efforts of the expedition were organized experimental stations in the central and black earth zones of Russia. That work was followed by the second expedition headed by the known geographer and land-surveyor A.A. Tillo. The both expeditions executed theoretical researches on agricultural and forestry melioration, worked out methods on rational agricultural works in steppe.

Senator since May 1896. Chairman of the Permanent Council of the United Nobility Leagues, 1905–1917. A landowners' congress of the Kiev province elected Count Bobrinsky to the State Duma of the third convocation, 1907. Appointed member of the State Council, 1912–1917. Aide to the Minister of the Interior for a short time in 1916, later Minister of Agriculture. On that post, he pursued the policies of stringent foodstuff rationing with permanent grain and bread prices maintained.

Entered the Council for Russian State Consolidation after the revolution of October 1917.

Emigrated in 1919.

Count Alexei Bobrinsky died in 1927.





Heiden Peter Alexandrovich (1840–1907)

Count, Marshal of Nobility, prominent public figure, deputy of Russia's first State Duma

*President of Free Economic Society
1895–1906*

Peter Heiden was born in 1840. An artillery man by training, he spent some time serving in the army, then was a member of the district courts of Voronezh and St. Petersburg, an assistant to a district court's chairman, and a member of the St. Petersburg judicial chamber. Imparting to his judicial activity not only a deep understanding of the spirit and the meaning of laws, but also refined judgment of everyday life, he resisted mechanical application of the Code of Laws and court charters.

In the period between 1886 and 1890, he was chief of the chancellery for public petitions addressed to His Majesty, to then switch over to zemstvo affairs (the zemstvo was a type of rural council). As the Opochetsk District's Marshal of Nobility, he was for a long time involved in the activity of that district's and the surrounding Pskov Province's zemstvos.

In the famine-stricken years of 1891 and 1892, he contributed to a relief effort, personally going to Simbisk to distribute the 50,000 roubles collected by English Quakers and entrusted with him, in cooperation with local peasants, doctors and teachers. He did the same kind of job in the Opochetsk District in 1905, for an organization affiliated with the St. Petersburg healthcare society. He also took part in sessions of Petersburg's Russo-Dutch committee for dispatching two groups of nurses to the Russian army in Manchuria in 1904.

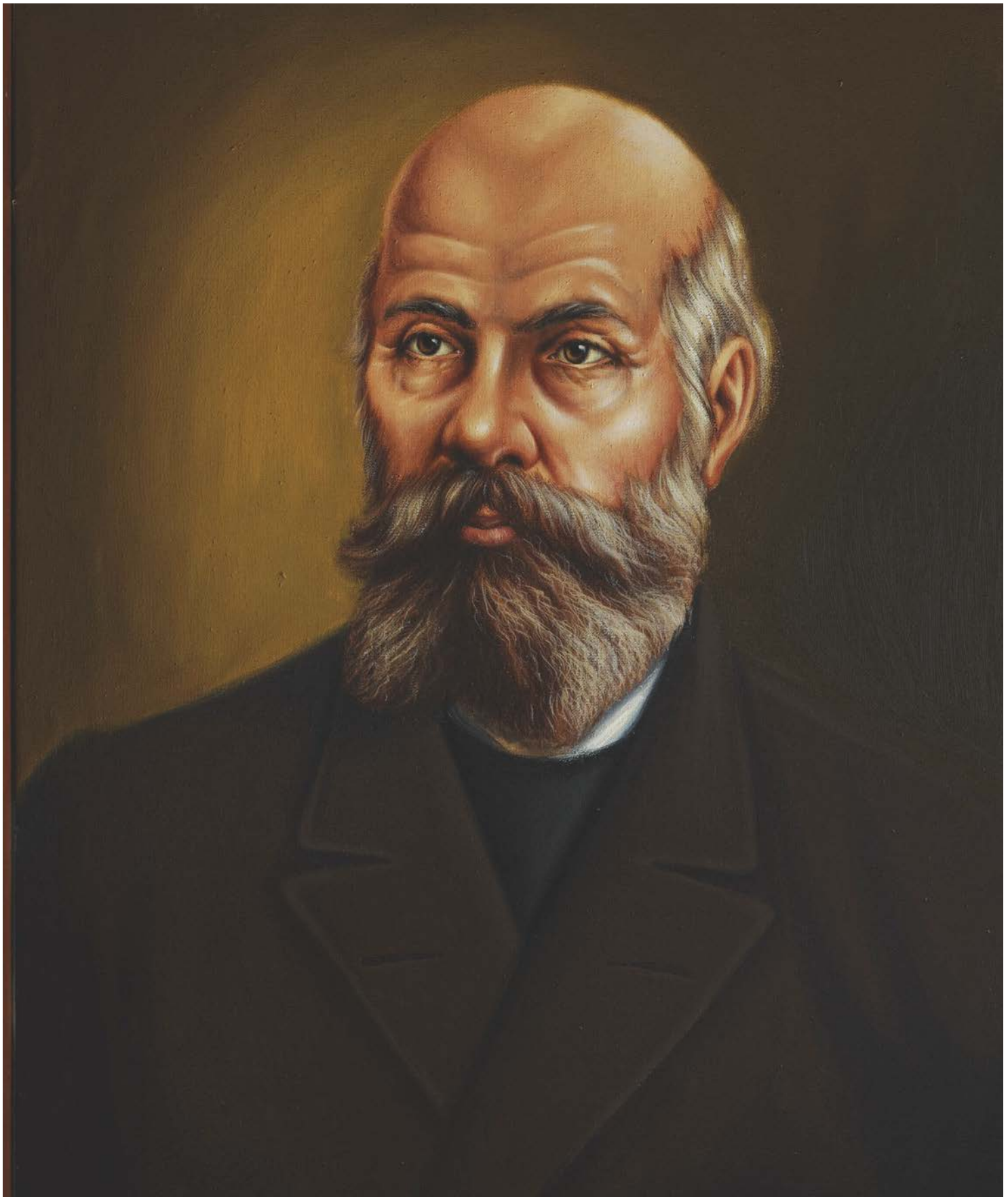
Elected as president of the Imperial Free Economic Society in 1895, Count Heiden for ten years focused his efforts on the protection of the rights of that society and the affiliated Literacy Committee. Along with that, he took in those conferences of zemstvo activists on Russia's outstanding needs that played such an important role in 1904 and 1905. «Transactions of the Free Economic Society» carry his letter, full of civic courage and firmness, to Interior Minister von Plehve, on the reprimand issued to him for attending a conference of zemstvo activists at the office of Moscow District government head D. Shipov in May 1902. The chairman and an active member of zemstvo congresses, a patient and careful debates listener or a skillful helmsman and unifier of heterogeneous forces, direct and frank, he was one of the organizers and members of the zemstvo activist delegation that on June 6, 1905, heard in Peterhof the words about «the Tzar's inflexible will» to convene deputies elected by popular vote.

In his beliefs, Heiden belonged to the progressive-minded conservatives, those spurred into action by the great reforms of Emperor Alexander II. Count Heiden was destined to serve all the institutions brought to life by the great reforms and to witness their evolution. He was able to uphold things treasured in the past and to create things necessary in the future. With these goals in mind, he set up a «peaceful renewal» party in the first State Duma, to which he was elected in 1906.

Count Heiden died in Moscow on June 15, 1907. He was buried at his estate, in the Opochetsk District, of the Pskov Province.

The Heiden-founded Peaceful Renewal Party and the Free Economic Society in 1907 published booklets dedicated to his memory an offering a detailed review of his activity and the book of A.F. Kony «On the way of life».





Famintsyn Andrei Sergeevich (1835–1918)

Botanist, Full member of the Russian Academy of sciences, President of Pedagogical society, Chairman of St.-Petersburg biological society

*President of Free Economic Society
1906–1909*

Andrei Sergeyevich Famintsyn was born near Moscow in 1835. Upon completion of the 3rd Petersburg Gymnasium, he entered the natural science division of the Physics and Mathematics Department at St. Petersburg University. He studied botany under the guidance of professor L. Tsenkovsky. As a student, he received a gold medal for his work «Natural History of St.-Petersburg's Coniferous Flora». Upon graduation, he went abroad with his own money, to spend two years working in Heidelberg, Freiburg, and in the Mediterranean.

Upon his return to St.-Petersburg in 1861, he defended a master's thesis, «A Chemical Physiological Experiment on Ripening of Grape», and began lecturing on anatomy and physiology at St.-Petersburg University. That same year, he was placed in charge of the botany department at the Academy of Medical Surgery, but soon abandoned it to focus all his energies on the University.

On defending in 1867 a doctoral dissertation («The Impact of Light upon Algae and other Similar Organisms»), he was confirmed as professor extraordinary. In 1872 he was appointed professor extraordinary.

In 1878, Famintsyn was elected as adjunct of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and later as academician extraordinary (1883) and ordinary (1891) academician.

In 1889, Famintsyn left the University, receiving the title of a member emeritus. He set up a botanical laboratory at the Academy of Sciences. Apart from physiological research, Famintsyn is the author of a number of works on anatomy and morphology. His purely physiological studies are devoted mainly to the effect of light on various physiological processes. He also studied the impact of light on the motion of zoospores, on the production of chlorophyll, etc. His morphological experiments had to do with the problem of embryonic layers and the nature of lichens.

An attempt to make lichen gonidia live an independent life led to the discovery of symbiosis of fungi and algae. Famintsyn also explored the spherical crystals of calcium carbonate, comparing their structures with those of starch grains.

Famintsyn's activity was not confined to research, though. He was not only the first Russian botanical physiologist, but a teacher to a whole generation of physiologists. The outstanding scientists Timiryazev, Baranetsky, Borodin, Batalin, and Ivanovsky were only a few of his students.

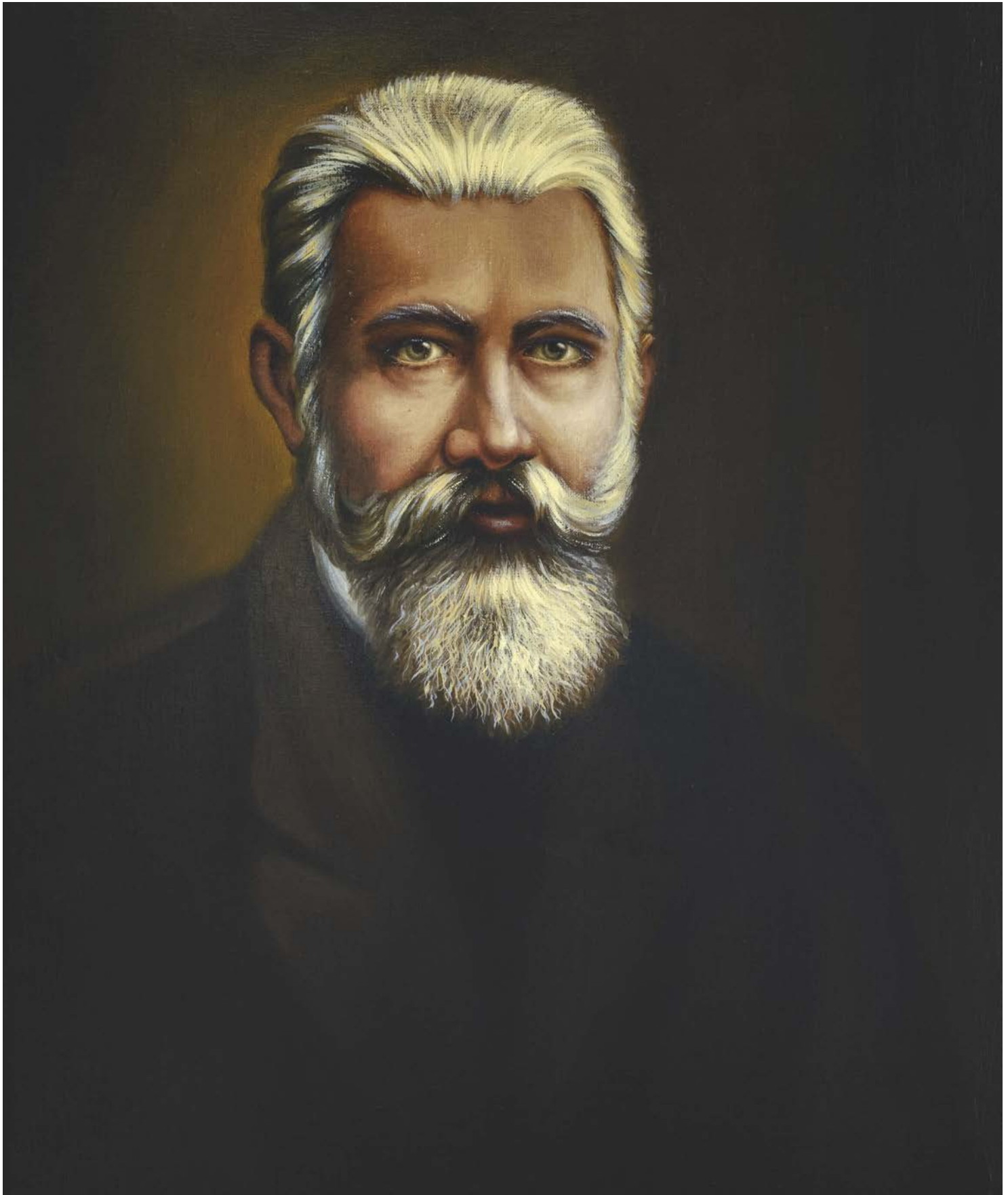
In 1901, Famintsyn contributed to the foundation, at the St.-Petersburg Academy of Sciences, of the Bureau of Natural Science and Mathematics Bibliography in Russia (including Poland and Finland), and became its chairman.

Worthy of attention is Famintsyn's article on education reform in Russia (1901). He was also the author of a note on the necessity of setting up an agronomic institute.

For several years, Famintsyn was Vice President and, from 1906 to 1909, President of the Imperial Free Economic Society, President of the Pedagogical Society, Chairman of St.-Petersburg biological Society.

Famintsyn died in 1918.





Posnikov Alexander Sergeyeovich (1846–1921)

Outstanding economist, lawyer, publicist and public figure, one of the first specialists in common farming, one of the founders and director of the St.-Petersburg Polytechnic Institute, deputy of the 4th State Duma

*President of Free Economic Society
1909–1911*

Alexander Sergeyeovich Posnikov was born on December 14, 1846. Graduate of the department of law at the Moscow University; holder of a master's and doctor's degrees in political economy.

He gave lectures at the Demidov Law Lyceum in Yaroslavl until 1876, when he moved to Novorossiysk to get a chair at the local university. Although he did not stay long in Novorossiysk either, his lectures had a strong impact on the university and on the development of Russian economic science as a whole as many of his disciples (M. Ya. Gertsenshtein, G.B. Iollos, A.A. Manuilov) later became outstanding economists.

In 1882, Posnikov quit professorship and dedicated himself to elective council activities in the Smolensk province. Simultaneously, he went into journalism and acted as the editor-in-chief of «Russkiye Vedomosti» newspaper together with V.M. Sobolevsky from 1883.

In 1896 when he was elected district head of nobility in the Vyazma district, he reverted his attention to academic work. In 1902, with the inauguration of the St. Petersburg Polytechnic Institute (which was founded partially on Posnikov's initiative), Posnikov was appointed dean of the institute's economic department and lectured in political economy for many years.

In 1906, Posnikov became one of the founders of the Party of Democratic Reforms.

Posnikov was rated as one of the best specialists in the agrarian issue and frequently spoke on the subject at various public gatherings in Moscow and St.-Petersburg and at meetings in the Imperial Free Economic Society, where he presided from 1909 to 1911.

In 1912, Posnikov was elected deputy of the State Duma from the St. Petersburg province.

Posnikov's most outstanding publicist works that had the strongest impact on society were the following articles (editorials): «On Privately Owned Farms», «On the Peasant Agricultural Bank», «On Village Community Charges», «On Landownership amidst Nobility», «On Buyout of Land Allotments», «On the Food Issue», «On District and Parish Schools» From 1885 to 1895 there were published his analytical materials, devoted to the Anniversary of the Peasant Reform. An important place in his work took publications «On Workmen Insurance in Germany», «The Agricultural Situation in the United States of America», «On the Agreement with Germany». As a deputy of the State Duma he paid special attention to the legislative work of the deputies and he devoted the article to that subject: «Legislative Exercises of the Third Duma's Land Commission», «What Has the Third Duma Done for the Country and What It Can Still Do», «Economic Liberalism and the Law of November 9, 1906», «The Land Issue in the Duma» and others.

Alexander Sergeyeovich Posnikov died in 1921.





Kutler Nikolai Nikolayevich (1859–1924)

*Statesman, Interior Minister's aide
and finance Minister's aide, Deputy
of the 2nd and 3rd State Dumas*

*President of Free Economic Society
1912–1913*

Nikolai Nikolayevich Kutler was born in 1859 in a family of noble landowners from the Tula province. After graduating from the department of law of the Moscow University (Candidate of Law), occupied posts in the following succession: solicitor, assessor of taxes, manager of fiscal chamber, vice-director and director of wages department, interior minister's aide and finance minister's aide. Directed agricultural banks for peasants and nobility while occupying the latter position. Appointed Commander-in-Chief of Land-use and Farming on October 28, 1905.

In 1894, compiled the «Brief Historical Essay and Survey of the Current State of Legislature in Zemstvo Duties», the «Project of Key Reasons for Reforming Zemstvo Duties» and an explanatory note to accompany the «Project» on request of the High Commission on Reconsideration of the Rules of Zemstvo Duties set up under the finance ministry.

Deputy of the 2nd and 3rd State Dumas. Was elected St.-Petersburg's deputy to the State Duma from the list of candidates from the Party of People's Freedom (constitutional democrats) and acted as one of the party's leaders in the Duma.

Kutler was widely known as a specialist in the peasant issue. For a while, he worked for a commission on the project of improving the landuse and landownership systems for peasants, which was set up at the Special Conference. Joined commissions on the creation of a agricultural bank for peasants, on lease of land, etc. Was invited to join various activities and to work for various departments related to the peasant issue. With his vast and thorough knowledge of peasants' life and the actual status of peasants in Russia, Kutler adhered to the view that Russia's key task in solving the peasant issue was to give equal rights to peasants and other classes.

Acted as President of the Free Economic Society (1912–1913).

Despite persecutions of the tsarist government, worrying about enforcement of the liberal activity of the Society, VEO continued its educational and organizing activity. In 1912 were held 5 general meetings and in 1913 were held 4 general meetings, the first and the third branches were also very active, as well as library and scientific-agricultural commission. Several times were organized joint meetings of the branches and commissions, and acute reports and scientific articles were discussed. Among such was a report by A.V. Chayanov «Dependence of the staff and number of people in the farmer's family on its economic activity», there were three reports by V.M. Benzin about situation with the farmer's economy and methods of cultivation of new sorts of agricultural plants in the United States, there was an article by A.E. Lositsky «Disintegration in the community» and some other. Scientific public was interested very much in the research work by the Count P. Tolstoy «Russian communities — about the reform in the food legislation in 1909–1910», which was published in 1912–1913 in several volumes of «Transactions of VEO». Special meeting of VEO was devoted to the memory of the known statistician, economist and publicist, a member of Board of VEO N.F. Annensky.

When N.N. Kutler left the post of the President of VEO he continued his public activity.

Headed the Council of Industrial and Trade Conventions in 1917. Joined various commissions of the Provisional Government. Worked for Gosbank after the October revolution.

Nikolay Nikolayevich Kutler died in 1924.





Kovalevsky Maxim Maximovich (1851–1916)

Full member of the Russian Academy of sciences, historian, lawyer, sociologist, professor at Moscow University

*President of Free Economic Society
1914–1915*

One of the prominent Russian lawyers of his time, Maxim M. Kovalevsky was born in Kharkov in 1851, to a wealthy aristocratic family. He attended Kharkov University, where, under the influence of D. Kachenovsky, he began studying the history of English institutions. He then continued his studies in Berlin, Paris and London.

From 1877 to 1887, he was professor of public law and comparative history of law (the history of foreign law) at Moscow University, while occasionally delivering lectures at Oxford and Stockholm.

President of the Free Economic Society in 1914 and 1915.

Activity of professor Kovalevsky as President of VEO coincided with beginning of the First World War. That was why VEO directed all its forces to the organization of assistance to the victims of war, to the discussion of the questions of the state budget during the war and situation in the economics. 16 periodical editions of «News of VEO», which were published as annexes to «Transactions of VEO» in September-December 1914, were devoted to those problems. There were regular publications of analytical articles and reports on collection of donations.

Kovalevsky attached great importance to the socio-economic conditions of society's development, which he regarded as a basis and a linking element determining in no small measure a country's political system. He always tried to prove that ideas are the deciding factor of historical development.

Kovalevsky contributed articles on the emergence and evolution of community farming, using the examples of Russia and the Caucasus, and also on causes for the breakup of the collective forms of farming. In his works, Kovalevsky not only offers nice, original wording and provides rules and their application options well in line with the spirit of the method of historical comparison, but also zealously vindicates all major conclusions made with his help by advanced social ethnologists: the tribal system and matriarchy as a starting point in the society and family evolution and common ownership of land as a primary form of ownership.

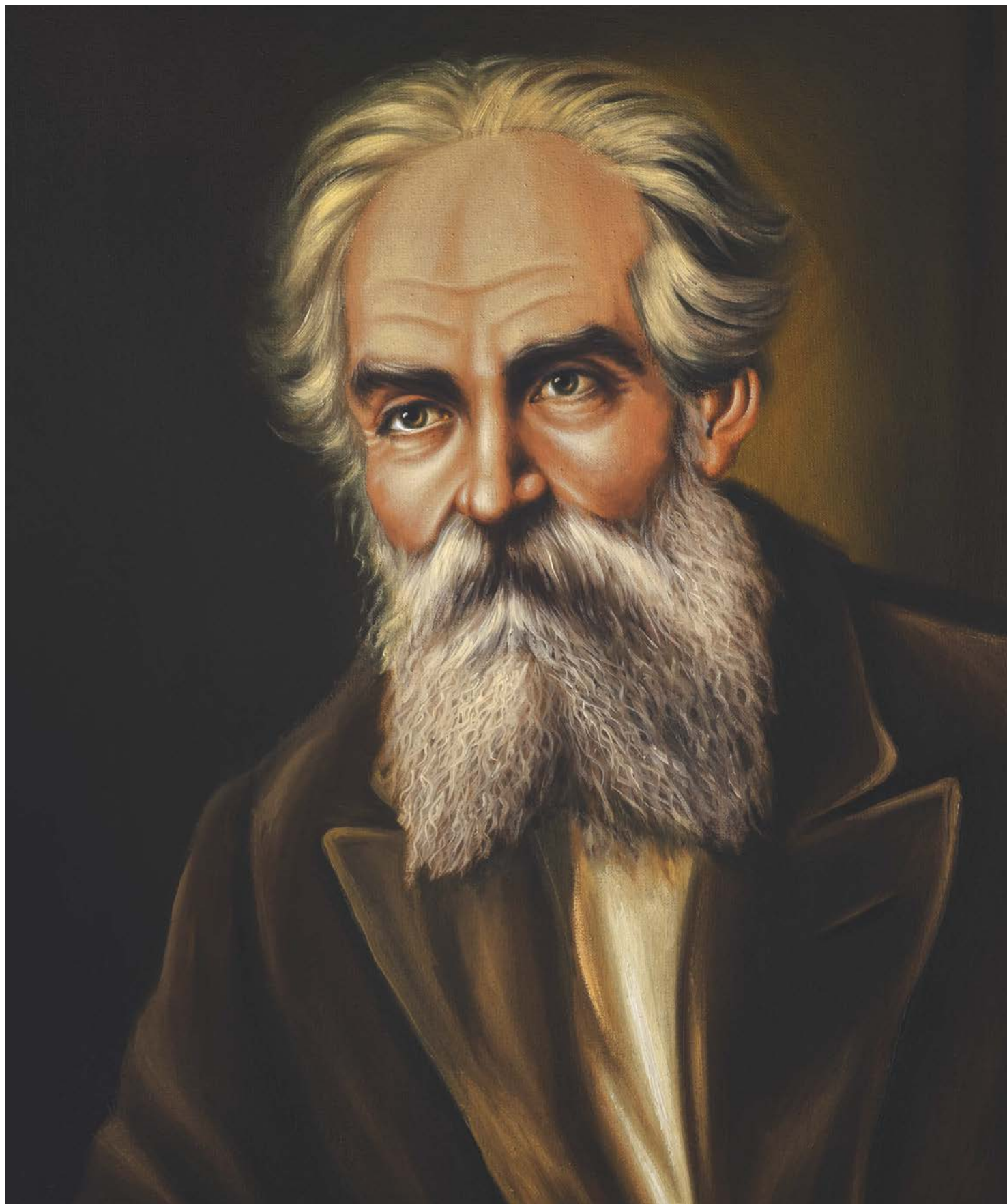
While recognizing consistency of the evolution of societal relations, he repeatedly points to the strong impact of artificial causes, such as a government policy or an alien ideological system imposed by invaders.

Kovalevsky's works on historical comparison are of particular importance for Russia, as they show the best way of studying its law, extremely diverse to meet the diversity of ethnic groups living here and the particularities of the lifestyles of its regions and population groups.

Kovalevsky's research and literary activity is a phenomenon with no analogues in scientific literature of that period. In 1914 he was elected Full member (academician) of the Russian Academy of sciences. Even today there are references to his scientific transactions on the general questions of social development, of community relations.

Maxim Maximovich Kovalevsky died in 1916.





Chaikovsky Nikolai Vasilyevich (1850–1926)

Public figure, leader of the Russian cooperative movement, member of the Central Committee of the Labour Party

*President of Free Economic Society
1915*

Russian political figure, was born on December 26, 1850 in the family of a Vyatka landowner. He graduated from St.-Petersburg University. In the late 1860s, he joined a revolutionary group of populists (called the Chaikovskiyites), but left the movement after its defeat and emigrated to Europe (1874) and America (1875), where he attempted to create a land commune. In 1880 he settled in London and took part in the printing of populist literature, «The Russian Press Foundation», in the 1880s and 1890s.

He joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1904 and returned to Russia in 1906, to be arrested in 1907. In 1910 he was released, broke up with the Socialist Revolutionaries and stopped his political activities. Instead, he became an active member of the cooperative movement

During the First World War of 1914–18, Chaikovsky was a social chauvinist and a leader of the Russian Union of Cities. In 1915 he was elected President of the Imperial Free Economic Society. When the war began, the Society organized assistance to the victims of that world war. They discussed at the meetings questions of the state budget of the military time and situation in the economics. But during one of the meetings in 1915 it was suddenly interrupted and interdicted at all.

The last general meeting was held on January 16, and the meeting of the III branch of VEO was held on January 22, 1915. Undoubtedly, such decision was taken under the influence of the majority of VEO members, who were against the war. Among such was an article of N.V. Chaikovsky. Although it was formally devoted to the results of the meeting in Moscow committee of the agricultural communities, but in reality it expressed negative position to the world war.

After the February 1917 revolution, he was member of the Central Committee of the «Joint Labour People's Socialist Party» and member of the executive committees of the Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was renamed) Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' deputies and the All-Russian Union of Peasants' Deputies.

The October 1917 Revolution turned him into a bitter enemy of Soviet power. In 1918, he helped to organize the Union of Revival of Russia. When foreign troops landed in Arkhangelsk in August 1918, he became chairman of the «Supreme Government» of the Northern Region. In September 1918 he was elected to the Ufa Directory.

He left for Paris in January 1919 and became member of the Russian Political Conference, which supported various White Guards governments. In early 1920, he was incorporated into the South Russian Government of General A.I. Denikin. In January 1921 he helped to create the Action Center in Paris, one of whose tasks was to organize subversive actions in Soviet Russia.

Nikolai Chaikovsky died in London on April 30, 1926.





Kerensky Alexander Fyodorovich (1881–1970)

Political figure. Minister-Chairman of the Provisional Government (1917), deputy and the leader of labourist party in the 4th State Duma

*President of Free Economic Society
1917*

Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky was born in 1881. Worked as a solicitor in St.-Petersburg; often took on political cases, such as the Dashnaksutyun case in 1912 (the case of an Armenian revolutionary political party whose members called themselves Dashnaksakans; was founded in the Caucasus in 1890 and comprised separate political societies).

In the summer of 1912, Kerensky traveled to Eastern Siberia to study the circumstances of a bloody clash between troops and Lena goldminers on strike. Upon his return to St.-Petersburg, he read reports about the event and acted as an editor of a book entitled, «What Really Happened on the Lena» (Moscow, 1913).

Elected to the 4th State Duma in 1912 and acted as chairman or chairman's aide of the working group faction where he took on a leftist position. Made speeches in the Duma about the agrarian, workers', budget etc. issues, openly declaring himself a socialist

The harsh criticism of his behavior that came from the Polish Kolo on June 5, 1913 prompted Rachkovsky to challenge him to a duel. Kerensky's anti-duel principles made him decline the challenge and thereby give rise to controversial reaction: the Polish Kolo's judgment was that Kerensky had «dismissed himself from the category of people whose dignity is based on responsibility for their words and actions», while the working party, social democrats, constitutional democrats, progressive people and a number of prominent public figures voiced a radically different view by saying Kerensky's decline was an action that deserved respect.

In October of 1913, Kerensky, among other people, initiated a resolution that was passed by solicitors of the St.-Petersburg district court and concerned the Beilis case (Kiev). For that resolution he was among others brought to trial and sentenced to eight months of imprisonment. (There was an appeal against the sentence then).

Alexander Kerensky took an active part in the February upheaval of 1917. Joined the socialist-revolutionaries in March, 1917.

Headed the Provisional Government on July 8, 1917. Was appointed Supreme Commander-in-Chief on August 30.

During those stormy days A.F. Kerensky headed Free Economic Society, which restarted its activity after February revolution. That was natural. Socialists-revolutionaries were among the first, who advanced democratic reforms and radical reforms in agriculture and they had strong influence in VEO. Together with the «mensheviks» they headed the Councils of the workers and soldiers. It was natural, that in Petrograd VEO gave its premises for the headquarters of Petrosoviet. Under his active assistance VEO opened in Petrograd a section of the League for agricultural reforms.

Emigrated in 1917. Founder of the League of Struggle for People's Freedom. Author of memoirs and historical research works, compiler and editor of documentaries about the history of the Russian revolution («Kornilov's Case», 1918, «Gatchina», 1922, «From Far Away» 1922, and others).

A.F. Kerensky died in 1970.





Khachaturov Tigran Sergeevich (1906–1989)

Academic secretary of the Economics Department of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Editor in chief of the «Questions of Economics» magazine, the author of methods of determining the economic effectiveness of capital investments and new equipment

*Chairman of Research and Economic society
1982–1987*

Tigran Sergeevich Khachaturov was born in 1906. He graduated from the statistics chair of the department of social sciences of Moscow State University in 1928, Khachaturov became a Corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1943 and academician in 1966.

He started his teaching career in 1930. In 1945–49, he was director of the National Research Institute of the Railway Transport, and in 1955–59 director of the Institute of Comprehensive Problems of Transportation.

In 1957 he was elected chairman of the research council on problems of economic effectiveness of fixed assets, capital investments and new equipment (USSR Academy of Sciences). In 1958 he became a member of the editorial board of the magazine «Herald of the Soviet Academy of Sciences» and member of the state expert commission of the Gosplan State Planning Committee.

In 1967–71, he held the post of academic secretary of the Economics Department of the USSR Academy of Sciences and in 1966–88 was chief editor of the magazine «Questions of Economics». He became professor at the Academy of Social Sciences under the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee in 1964 and a professor at Moscow State University in 1971. In 1976, he became head of the forecasting laboratory of the university's economics department and dean of the department of economics of the use of natural resources at Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov in 1987. In 1975 he was elected deputy academic secretary of the Economics Department of the USSR Academy of Sciences and member of the academy's council on international cooperation in social sciences. He is an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, honorary doctor of the O. Lange Economic Academy in Wroclaw (Poland), and a foreign member of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

T.S. Khachaturov wrote over 600 books and articles, created a number of research sectors in the sphere of the theory and practice of economic effectiveness of capital investments, the economics of capital construction and transport. His works «On the Transport Structures in Capitalist Countries and the Soviet Union» (1939), «The Railway Transport of the Soviet Union» (1952), «The Economics of Transport» (1959) and others played a major part in the development of the economics of transport as a sphere of the economic science. Khachaturov's research laid the foundations for the development of the theory of economic effectiveness. He stood at the cradle of the current methods of determining the economic effectiveness of capital investments and novel equipment. In the last few years of his life, Khachaturov focused his attention on the elaboration of the economic foundations of the system of rational use of natural resources and wrote a book on «The Economics of the Use of Natural Resources».

In 1981 T.S. Khachaturov together with professors of economic faculty of Moscow State University G.Kh. Popov, A.D. Sheremet and other scientists -economists addressed the Central Committee of the Communist Party with a proposal to create in the USSR one united public organization of economists with branches in all regions of the country. That idea was supported by the scientific publicity and in December 1982 was created Research and Economic society, which carried on the traditions of the Imperial Free Economic Society and was its spiritual successor. T.S. Khachaturov became the first chairman of the Research and Economic Society. In 1987 Tigran Sergeevich retired because of his health and the same year was elected by the Society its honorary member.

He was awarded with several orders and medals.
He died in 1989.





Pavlov Valentin Sergeyevich (1937–2003)

Prime Minister of the USSR, member of the Presidential Council and Security Council of the USSR, Vice-President, Chairman of the Academic Council of the International Academy of Management, director of the Institute of Research and Support of Regional and Industrial Development under the International Union of Economists, Vice-president of Free Economic Society of Russia

*Chairman of Research Economic society
02.07.1987–10.12.1987*

*President of All-Union economic society
10.12.1987–1991*

Valentin Sergeyevich Pavlov was born on September 26, 1937 in Moscow.

Started his professional activities in 1958 after graduating from the Moscow Financial Institute (now called the Financial Academy of the Russian Government). Profession: economist specializing in currency circulation, finance and credit.

Worked for the system of economic management of the USSR for many years. Occupied a number of major posts in the system of government administration. In 1979–1985 — Head of the Department of Finance, Cost and Prices, member of the Board and of the State Planning Committee of the USSR; in 1986 — first deputy Minister of Finance of the USSR; in 1986–1989 — Chairman of the State Committee on Prices and Price Formation of the USSR; in 1989–1991 — Minister of finance of the USSR, in 1991 — Prime Minister of the USSR, member of the Presidential and Security Councils of the USSR.

Made a substantial contribution to the development of the state decisions, which outlined the evolutionary development of market economy in the USSR. Became widely popular in society and among specialists as the author and organizer of a wholesale and purchase prices reform of 1988 and as the creator of vertically integrated independent tax inspections and a pension fund (set up in 1987–1989). Authored the idea of dividing the single state budget of the USSR in two (the current and the development budgets, 1990) and of making the first agreement in the history of the country between the government and the Labour Union of the USSR on payment for labour and employment (1991).

Apart from practical work, Pavlov did research work and took part in public activities. The positions he occupied in this sphere are: Doctor of Economy (1981) and Full member (academician) of the International Academy of Management (1998).

In July 1987 — Chairman of the central Board of the Research Economic Society, which was transformed into the All-Union Economic Society in December 1987 at the II Meeting. He was elected its President at the organizational meeting and held that post till 1991.

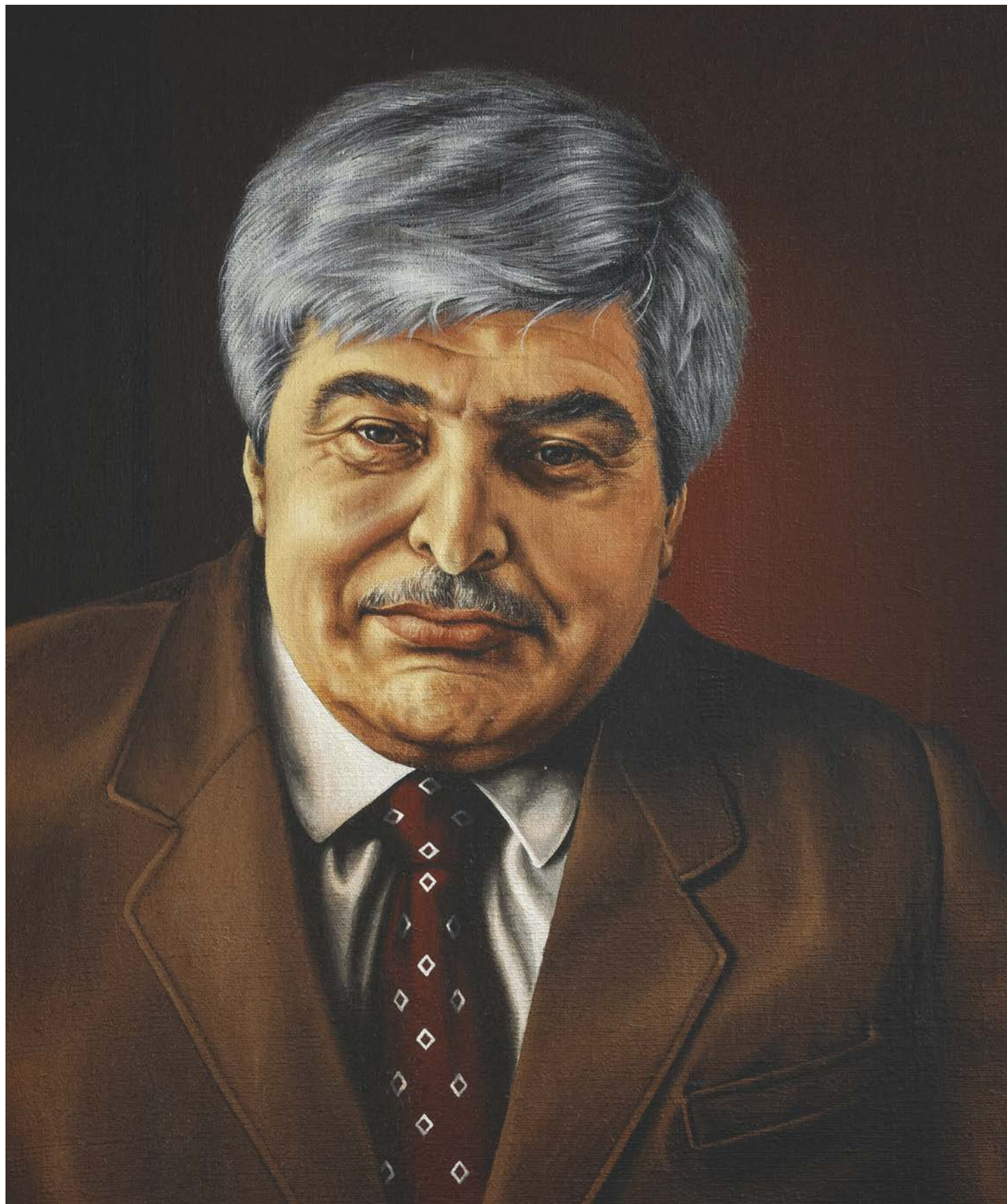
In 1987–1991 — co-Chairman of the international «Moskovskiy Club»; founder and first Chairman of the Board of «Delovoi Mir» publishing consortium. V.S. Pavlov was the author of many books, manuals and articles in economy and public life.

On August, 1991 Pavlov joined the GKChP (the acronym for the emergency committee that attempted a coup), After its failure he was arrested. Was granted an amnesty in January, 1993.

In the years that followed, he headed the Rublevsky and Chasprombank commercial banks, worked as financial adviser for the Promstroibank joint stock bank and as director of Doverie Ltd., director of the Institute of Research and Support of Regional and Industrial Development under the International Union of Economists.

Valentin Sergeyevich died on March 30, 2003. Funeral was organized by the Free Economic Society of Russia.





Popov Gavriil Kharitonovich (1936)

Chairman of the Moscow Council and the first Mayor of Moscow, People's Deputy of the USSR, Laureate of the Lomonosov Premium, President of the International Union of Economists, President of the International University, Full member of the Russian Academy of natural sciences, Doctor of economic sciences, professor

*President of Free Economic Society of Russia
09.01.1992–02.03.2016*

Statesman, economist G.Kh. Popov was born in Moscow in 1936. During 1954–1959 he studied at the economic faculty of Moscow Lomonosov State University.

In 1970 he became the youngest Doctor of Economic Sciences in the country, defending his dissertation on "Methodological problems of the theory of management of public production". In 1971 he was awarded the title of professor at the Department of Planning of the National Economy.

From 1963 to 1988 he worked at the economic faculty of Moscow State University as an assistant, associate professor, head of laboratory, head of department, and dean.

In 1971–1973 G.Kh. Popov combined teaching at Moscow State University with research work at the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences (INION) of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

Professor G.Kh. Popov is the author of more than 400 scientific works. His books were republished in the USSR and translated in China, Hungary, Bulgaria, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cuba, and other countries.

In 1990 he was elected deputy of the Moscow City Council, later becoming its chairman.

In 1991, with the votes of more than 3 million Muscovites, he became the first Mayor of Moscow in free alternative elections.

In January 1992, G.Kh. Popov was elected chairman of the Russian Movement for Democratic Reforms, and in 1995 chairman of the "Social Democrats" association.

From 1991 to 2018, G.Kh. Popov was President of the International Union of Economists and President of the International University in Moscow.

From August to the end of 1991, G.Kh. Popov served as President of the All-Union Economic Society (the historical name—Free Economic Society of Russia—was restored in 1992).

On January 9, 1992, delegates to the First (founding) congress of the VEO of Russia elected Gavriil Kharitonovich Popov as their President. This choice was confirmed in 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010.





Bodrunov
Sergei Dmitrievich
(1958)

*Corresponding Member,
Russian Academy of Sciences,
Doctor of Economics,
Professor.*

*President of the Free Economic Society
of Russia from 03.03.2016 to the present*

Born on August 25, 1958 in the village of Bryliova, Gomel region (nowadays, Belarus).

He is the author of globally recognized groundlaying works on the New Industrial Society of the Second Generation (NIS-2) and the theory of noonomy. In particular, in 2018, his book 'Noonomy' was awarded with the WAPE Prize "Distingwished Achievement Award of World Political Economy for the 21th Century".

Bodrunov's books have been published in 15 countries; his theory of noonomy is being taught at universities around the world.

600+ scientific papers, 35 monographs, 10 textbooks.

Director and founder of the S.Y. Witte Institute for New Industrial Development (INID), methodologically guided by the Russian Academy of Sciences, and being a part of the organizations under the Academy's Department for Social Sciences.

You can check his full biography on veorus.ru, inir.ru and other websites.



CHRONICLE
OF ACHIEVEMENTS
THE VEO OF RUSSIA
IN THE HISTORY
OF THE COUNTRY



ABOLITION OF SERFDOM: VEO LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR PEASANT REFORM

The peasant question surrounding the situation of serfs and the avenues for agricultural development, was the central, most challenging, and sensitive issue that the Free Economic Society consistently voiced for decades — though with varying degrees of courage.

Imperial Initiative: Letters from an “Anonymous Person” and a Competition Announcement

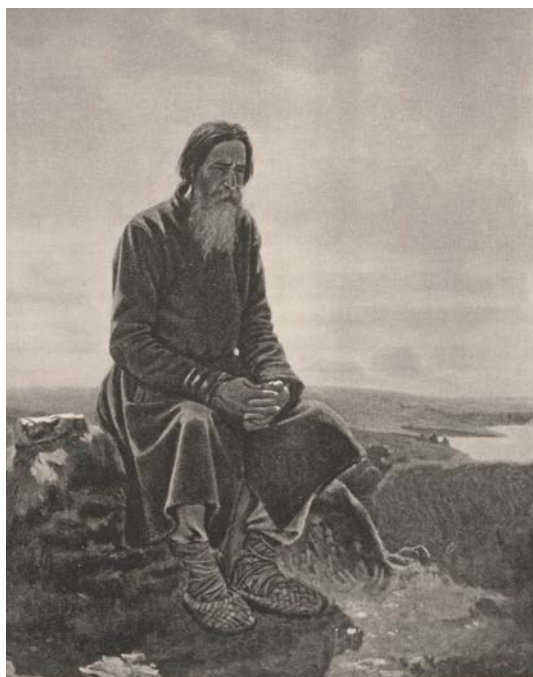
The first letter signed “I. E.” and its fate

Within a year after its establishment, the Free Economic Society launched its inaugural competition to answer the question, “Which is more useful to the society — that a peasant owns land or only personal belongings — and how far their rights for both should extend?” It was a direct challenge to the prevailing serfdom, albeit expressed in a purely theoretical and academic guise.

The topic presented to the members of the Free Economic Society was suggested by the Empress herself. At the dawn of her reign, Catherine II pondered upon the ways to improve the peasants’ plight. She regarded this as the most fundamental and pressing issue from which, in her view, the Society ought to commence its endeavors. She explicitly declared that before proposing new agricultural techniques and improved tools, it was essential to deliberate on how the existing state status of Russian peasants affected their labor. Catherine II rightly reasoned that no matter how many advanced tools and improved methods of cultivation were proposed, they would fail to foster fruitful and productive work among the peasants if the state institutions themselves suppressed them. For instance, if the peasants did not directly and invariably own either their own labor or the land they tilled.

Yet, wary of constraining the creative freedom of the Society’s members and eager to grant the contestants broader latitude in addressing this paramount social issue, Catherine presented them topic that stirred her not in her own name, but as that of an “anonymous person”. For the first time, the “anonymous person” addressed the members of the Free Economic Society in late 1765, shortly after its establishment.

“A peasant in the field”
by V.G. Perov, 1876





The “anonymous person” once again addressed the Society, this time posing the question more clearly: Does a peasant need privately owned land for public welfare?

A letter from an anonymous person to the Free Economic Society, received in late 1765.

Honorable Members of the Economic Society,

For honest patriots such as myself, your useful establishment has come as welcome news.

Due to my limited intellectual capacity, I am unable to write you a useful essay. Instead, let me ask you questions for the benefit of the society: Some wise authors have written, and experiments have proven, that neither skilled craftsmanship nor well-founded trade can exist where agriculture is destroyed or conducted negligently, and that farming cannot prosper where the tiller owns nothing. This rests upon a simple principle: every person takes greater care of their own property than of that which another might take from them.

Thus, accepting these principles as undeniable, I kindly request you to decide: What does the property and inheritance of the tiller consist of, or should consist of, to ensure the confident progress of agriculture? Some believe that property should consist of a plot of land owned by the father, his son, and their descendants thereafter, along with any movable or immovable property they may acquire, while others believe that a single plot of land should be allocated to a group of four to eight members of different kinship lines, with an elder appointed as the head or so-called master of that community. Accordingly, the son inherits nothing from his father, and as a result possesses nothing — only what belongs to the community is regarded as his property. Thus, I find myself at a total loss, unsure whether to rely on the precise or the speculative meaning of the word “property”. To this day, I have considered property to be something that no one can take away from me or my children without a lawful reason, and in my opinion, that alone can make me a diligent person; however, I do not insist on my opinion, but await your decision as an instruction to me and my descendants, thus expressing my respect”.

Honorable Members of the Economic Assembly,

Yours truly,

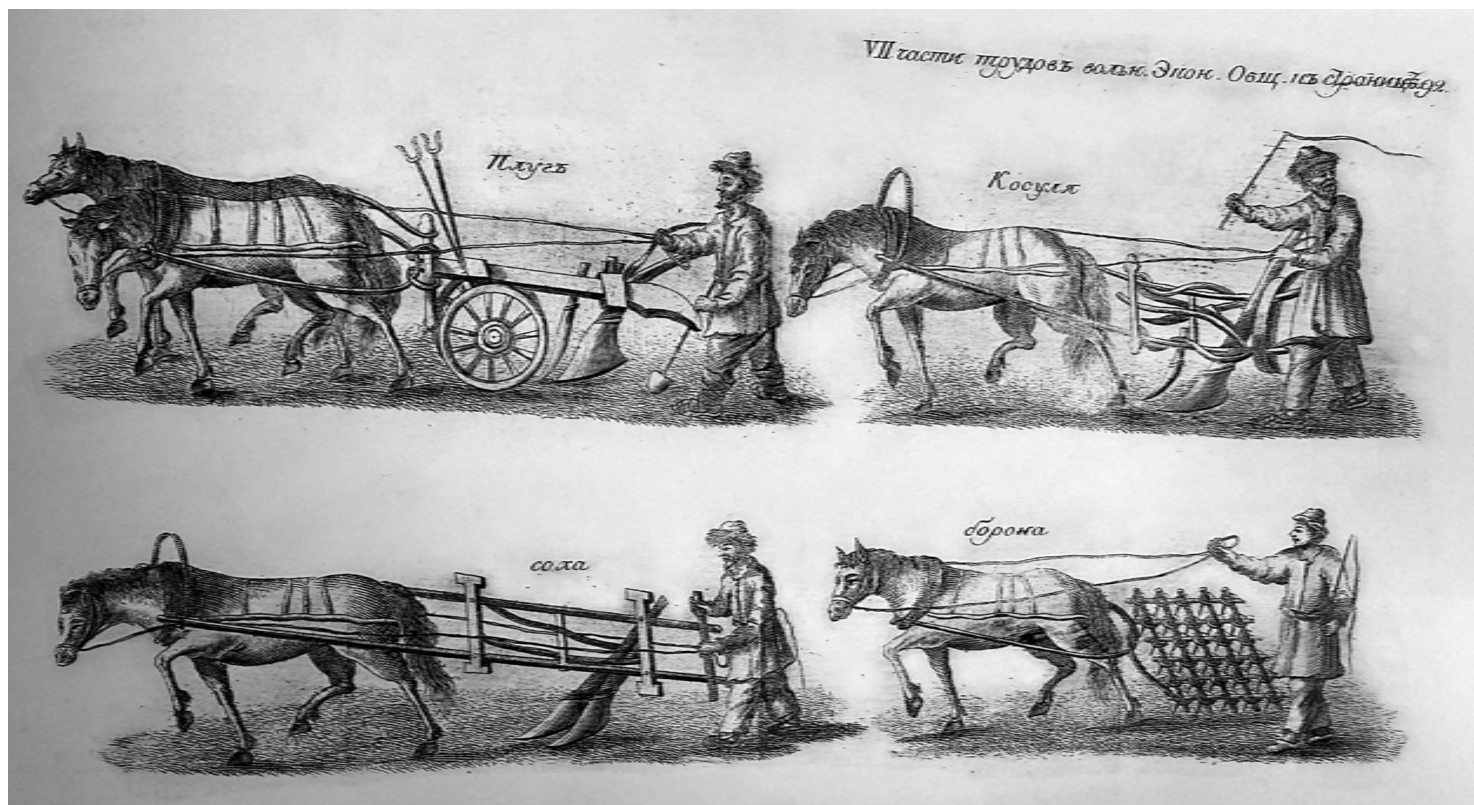
I.E.

But the members of the Society, being enthusiastically engaged in numerous new projects, disregarded the question put forward by that anonymous person. This question was not even brought forward for discussion at the Assembly.

The second letter signed “I. E.” and the Society’s reaction

Having received no response to her previous letter, the “anonymous person” once again addressed the Society, this time posing the question more clearly: Does a peasant need privately owned land for public welfare?

On November 1, 1766, the first anniversary of the establishment of VEO, Secretary Nartov presented a second letter and a thousand chervonets for the Society’s needs.



Peasant tools for cultivating the land. A drawing from the Proceedings of the Free Economic Society. 1767

Second letter from the anonymous person to the Free Economic Society, received on November 1, 1766.

*Esteemed Gentlemen,
My Lords,*

"Having neither the time nor the ability to compose notes for the public benefit and to send them to the honorable Economic Assembly, I nevertheless feel it my solemn duty to contribute, in whatever way I can, to your endeavors beneficial to our country. It has come to my knowledge that you are facing a shortage of funds to distribute rewards for the public tasks you have set forth, as well as to remunerate the translators and scribes working on your affairs. Therefore, I kindly ask you to accept a thousand chervonets, which I send to help cover such expenses, as you may find necessary. Furthermore, I would be pleased if you could announce the first task, with the promised reward to the one who most clearly proves the following: What constitutes the property of a tiller — the land they till, or their personal belongings — and what rights may they possess over both for the public good? I am honored to inform you that I am the same person who, last year, addressed the esteemed assembly in a letter, by signing it:

I.E.

The tone of the letter, the generous sum, and the initials convinced the members of the Society that the letter was written by Catherine II. On November 6, 1766, VEO convened an extraordinary meeting to formulate a question for public deliberation.



Alexander Petrovich
Sumarokov

Public Response: Opponents and Supporters of Public Deliberation

Noblemen's Protest: Letter from A.P. Sumarokov (November 28, 1766)

The announcement of the competition stirred unease among the nobility. On November 28, 1766, Active State Councillor A.P. Sumarokov sent a letter contained strong criticism:

The question posed for consideration — which is more useful to the society — that a peasant owns land or only personal belongings — cannot be resolved without prior clarification. For instance, if we ask whether a nobleman should know how to write in Russian, the appropriate response must be: a Russian nobleman should, whereas an English nobleman can live without Russian language. Likewise, with regard to peasants: Do we mean free peasants or serfs? But first, we need to ask ourselves, do serfs really need freedom for the common good?

If I ask whether the canary that entertains me needs freedom or a cage — and whether the dog that guards my house needs a chain — the answer would be: the canary is better off without a cage, and the dog without a chain. Yet, the canary would fly away, and the dog might bite people. Thus, one thing is essential for the peasant, and the other for the nobleman. Now, the question remains: What is more important for the common good? And if freedom for the peasants is more vital than restraint, we must proceed to resolve the task that has been set before us.

The nobles and the peasants themselves would answer that it would be better for the peasants not to own land — and that this is impossible, since all land is owned by the nobility. Another question arises: Should the nobles give their purchased, granted, hereditary, or other lands to the peasants if they do not wish to do so? And can peasants in Russia own land if that right belongs to the nobility? What will a nobleman be like if the working peasants and the land do not belong to them, and what will be left for them? However, peasant freedom is not only harmful to society but also detrimental, and we do not need to explain why.¹⁸

Most nobles shared such views, perceiving the discussion as an encroachment upon their privileges. Without further deliberation, VEO filed the letter in the archives.

Concerns within VEO: Melissino and the Eulers

Even the members of the Society were not in agreement on the matter. The Chief Procurator of the Synod, I.I. Melissino, warned of the dangers associated with peasant freedom, citing the writings of the German landowner Schultz as a cautionary example. The Eulers, who joined VEO shortly after the competition was announced, acknowledged in their speech:

"If this truth is indisputable, then the difficulties that will immediately arise — should they seek to introduce significant reforms concerning the land where the peasant is accustomed to live in slavery, and the noble to wield unlimited power or dominion over them — transforming slavery into freedom... These difficulties will be great and almost insurmountable.¹⁹"

Despite the doubts, the competition was approved — the support of the Empress played a decisive role.



Sale of serfs at auction.
By K. Lebedev. 1911

Course of the Competition

The competition received a large number of submissions not only from Russia but also from all over Europe. The best scientists and economists, enlightened men of the age, including Voltaire and J.F. Marmontel, submitted their essays.

The call made by Russia was echoed throughout Europe. That event set into motion a wave of publications in the European press regarding the necessity of freeing the peasants. The discourse on property rights and freedom of peasants — the most vital social issues at that time — unfolded not only within the confines of contest essays. Many European publicists, who did not partake in the competition, deemed it necessary to resolutely voice their support for the oppressed peasant class through magazine articles or individual essays. The voice of justice rang out more powerfully.

A total of 162 works were submitted for the competition on peasant property²⁰. Of these, 129 works were in German (one of them even in verse), 21 in French, 7 in Russian, 3 in Latin, 1 in Swedish, and 1 in Dutch. The submission of essays was delayed. The deadline had long passed, yet works continued to arrive — by the deadline, 120 responses had been received, with the rest arriving later. Ultimately, at the meeting on March 19, 1768, a decisive decision was made: “henceforth, no works shall be accepted”.

To select the works, three committees were established:

- For Russian and French works: I. Chernyshev, Z. Chernyshev, Teplov, and Taubert;
- For German and Latin works: Melissino, Taubert, Klingstädt, Nartov;
- For German works: L. and A. Euler, I. Model, V. Woolf.

The mottos of the works reflected the spirit of the era: “Freedom and Property”, “The Welfare of the State is Tied to the Welfare of the Peasant”, and “It is Remarkable that Even on the Shores of the Neva, Friends of Humanity Were Found”.

The competition entries were selected in several stages. Initially, as was noted, the essays were reviewed by the designated committees. Subsequently, if approved by the committee, the works were read aloud at a general assembly. If the assembly found an essay worthy, it was admitted to the second round of the competition. In total, 16 works advanced to the second round.

To determine the winner and prize recipients among the 16 shortlisted works, a special committee²¹ was elected by secret ballot. This committee included Z.G. Chernyshev, A.S. Stroganov, V.G. Orlov, I.I. Taubert, T.I. Klingstädt, and F.I. Aepinus. The final selection of the most deserving works was scheduled for April 9, 1768, when the competition committee, “having thoroughly reviewed all submissions for a second time”, divided them into four “classes”. The preferences were distributed as follows.

The first prize was awarded to the French work numbered 154, bearing the motto “All rights call for freedom, but there are limits”, authored by a Juris Doctor, a member of the Dijon Academy, Bearde de l'Abbaye. His work was “unanimously judged to deserve the first place and precedence over all others”. The competition committee’s decision states that “the author of this work, in the first section, thoroughly argues the immense benefits any state gains when the tiller possesses both property and freedom. In the second section, he first describes all the difficulties associated with such an undertaking, and then presents

Gold Medal of VEO





Leonhard Euler

methods to achieve this great goal without disturbing the order and tranquility of the state". This work has precedence over all other essays on the subject. This work best addresses the question; all its arguments are well-founded, and its style is exceptionally eloquent.²²

The «Second Class» included works by the Russian jurist Polenov (No. 148, with the motto "Good morals have greater force than good laws"), the Germans Wöllner (No. 54, with the motto "Catherine"), and Meck (No. 161, with a motto reflecting the Russian proverb "Haste Makes Waste"), as well as the Frenchman Graslin (No. 100, with a motto quoting Horace: "Nature, in truth, makes neither him nor me nor anyone else lord of the soil as his own").

These works were recognized as "most suitable for the award-winning essay" (they were said to have received an "accessit"²³). Subsequently, two of the authors of these works, Meck and Polenov, were awarded medals worth 12 chervonets each²⁴. Graslin and Wöllner — and about whom the Society had information that they had sufficient means — were sent diplomas of honorary members of the Free Economic Society. The same diploma was awarded to the winner of the competition.

The content of the winning and award-winning works is of exceptional interest to us. It allows us to understand the sentiments of the Society's members and to clarify their positions on one of the most complex and delicate socio-economic issues of that time.

Winner: Bearde de l'Abbaye

Bearde de l'Abbaye's essay is divided into two parts. The first explores the fundamental question: what is more advantageous for the state — whether a peasant should possess ownership rights or not. The second part delves into the practical measures required to actualize the theoretical conclusions developed in the first part.

According to the author, peasants are the roots and foundation of the whole state; they serve as a barometer, revealing its true strength. The poorest peasant is more beneficial to the state than a leisured, stingy, and ignorant nobleman. Peasants benefit the state chiefly through their role in increasing the population. It is, therefore, essential that peasants be granted an inalienable property, so that they can be sure that their children will never starve. However, before granting them land, it is essential to first make them free people, *"...we cannot speak of any peasant property if the peasant is a serf and belongs to others". The whole world beseeches the rulers to emancipate the peasants. "The glory of kings, constituting the glory of the state, can shine only brighter through the gift of freedom. Throughout the world, a voice resounds in praise of this invaluable treasure. The self-interest of rulers obliges them to restore to the peasants the blessing bestowed upon them by the Lord",²⁵ said Bearde. The wealth and power of the state are direct results of the Freedom and prosperity of the peasants.*

The peasant sustains others through their labor; therefore, de l'Abbaye asserts, they have the inalienable right to demand recognition, privileges, and, above all, the right to landownership. *"It is truly astonishing that those who endure continuous work for their entire lives, nourishing others, are often the most poorly nourished themselves; that the working class — those from whom the state derives its principal wealth — they are the poorest of all,"²⁶ said the author.*

According to de l'Abbaye, the most effective way to encourage tillers is to make them landowners of the land they till. To have only personal be-

Peasants must come to understand the true worth of freedom and pursue it with fiery passion. They should not be made owners before they are truly worthy of it. Hope for freedom must be their reward for great diligence

longings means to have practically no property. In a country where land is scarce, it may be wise to take precautions to prevent too much territory from falling into the hands of the peasants. However, in a vast and sparsely populated empire, no measure — however small — capable of fostering population growth should be neglected or overlooked. It is especially important that the peasant's ownership of the land be inviolable — that land could only be taken away in cases of debt or in other extreme cases.

However, it is no coincidence that Bearde de l'Abbaye's work includes the caveat that "there are limits". In the second part, dedicated to practical solutions, he warns rulers against undue haste — it is dangerous to let the bear off the chain without first taming it. There is another danger — the peasant may indulge in idleness and suffer from hunger, just as freed slaves in America often fall into poverty. Therefore, before granting any form of property rights, it is essential to prepare the serfs to perceive and accept their freedom. Until this is achieved, the peasants may themselves prefer slavery, due to their brutality and ignorance.

According to de l'Abbaye, education is the most effective tool in this case. Peasants must come to understand the true worth of freedom and pursue it with fiery passion. They should not be made owners before they are truly worthy of it. Hope for freedom must be their reward for great diligence. *"Grant the peasant property and freedom, says the author — but only in small quantities. Create distinctions among slaves; let diligence and merit be rewarded. First, give them the right to possess movable property, and then immovable property. Let the peasant who has become a proprietor look down with contempt on his former comrades who remain in bondage, and let the free peasants be distinguished from the serfs by their attire"*.²⁷

Bearde de l'Abbaye asserts that landowners have nothing to fear from the liberation of peasants, because their incomes will only increase, *"Give the peasant property so they can consider themselves the rulers of a small estate; then you may safely entrust them with your farms. You need not fear that rent will go unpaid — their little plot of land, or better yet, the attachment they will develop toward their new property, will serve as your guarantee"*. In this way, the wealthy, by making the peasants happy, will increase their own resources and secure the flow of their incomes".²⁸

So, despite the passionate arguments in the first part of his work, de l'Abbaye entrusts the resolution of the peasant question to the landowners. The state should not intervene; the lord himself should grant land to the peasants as a reward for their exceptional diligence. Moreover, the determination of the degree of this diligence and the size of the land allotment will also depend on the landowner. It follows from the author's reasoning that the piece of land granted to the peasant should not fully ensure the sustenance of their family". This is precisely why there are hopes for increased income for the landowner, since the peasants will be compelled to rent their lands — not out of coercion, but driven instead by a stronger motive: the necessity to ensure their livelihood.

Moreover, the "preparation" of the peasants for the acceptance of freedom was expected to take considerable time. Bearde's essay essentially proclaimed the necessity of freeing the peasants and granting them property rights, but it postponed the resolution of the issue to a later time.

Bearde de l'Abbaye's work was published not only in French, but also in Russian in Part VIII of the Proceedings of the Free Economic Society²⁹. The opinions of the members of the Society regarding the publication of the Russian translation of Bearde's work were divided. Most of them considered it a dangerous or impractical endeavor.



On the arable land.
Spring. By A. Venetsianov.
The first half of the 1820s

When the translation³⁰ along with the original was submitted to the Empress, she approved it and said that she did not find anything in the work that could not be published; however, she left the decision to the “members of the Free Economic Society whether to publish this work or not”. They took a long time to decide on this matter. Ultimately, to the credit of the Society, the publication took place with the support and votes of G. and V. Orlov, L. and A. Euler, Z. and I. Chernyshev, R. Vorontsov, Y. Sievers, I. Melissino, G. Teplov, I. Taubert, T. Klingstädt, J. Stäehlin — and the donor who donated money for the first translation of the work — A. Stroganov.

It is worth noting the stance of the Novgorod governor Y.E. Sievers, who was especially enthusiastic about Bearde’s work. Regarding the discussion of publishing its translation into Russian, he wrote, “I consider Bearde de l’Abbaye’s work so valuable that it would be desirable for it to be translated into all languages and published for the benefit of mankind”.

A Radical Approach: Jean-Joseph-Louis Graslin

The essay by customs collector Graslin from Nantes, classified as a Class II work, was in many ways more radical than Bearde’s essay. Through theoretical reasoning, Graslin concludes that “the public interests require that land be owned solely and exclusively by those who till it — namely, the peasants”. At the same time, ownership should be limited to the amount of land they can cultivate themselves; otherwise, they will turn into owners of patrimonial estate.

According to the author, political economy knows no other problem whose solution would be more beneficial for all humanity. However, realizing that the issue needs to be addressed from the perspective of the benefit of a specific country within the existing state structure, Graslin writes, “*If the institutions in a particular country do not allow for such a great reform as the abolition of all manorial ownership and the restriction of property rights to the amount of personal labor for land cultivation, then, in any case, it is unacceptable to maintain a situation in which the tiller is deprived of their property. If the greatest benefit for all people lies in the tiller being the sole owner of the land... then the greatest harm to all people results from a situation where the tiller is the only one who is deprived of this right*”.³¹ Needless to say, Graslin considers it necessary to grant the tiller the right to ownership of movable property.

In full accordance with the Enlightenment concept, Graslin believes that the situation in which landownership is a privilege of the feudal lords violates the natural order of things and defies common sense”. He asserts that granting peasants the right to land ownership in a state led by a monarch is beneficial not only for the peasants but also for society as a whole and for the monarch himself. And feudal landownership, accordingly, causes enormous harm both to the peasants and to society as a whole. Graslin makes no secret of his distaste for the feudal lords, whom he calls parasites, supported by others’ labor.

Based on this, he says that if it is impossible to do without domains, the state and the monarch would benefit more if all land belonged to the state rather than to landlords (i. e., that manorial landownership is more beneficial). By turning domains into state property, the monarch will save the state from the loss of labor caused by landlord landownership.

Although this is the lesser of two evils, since “in theory, manorial holdings are considered the property of the sovereign”, in practice, there are

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numerous abuses by landlords regarding the determination of rent sizes and its collection. *“It is quite clear”*, Graslin concludes, *“that neither a state with enormous possessions nor landlords whose possession are limited by time can undertake costly improvements”*. *In this regard, only the owner-cultivator, motivated by self-interest and driven by the confidence that he will be able to pass his estate to his children through ownership, can be relied upon*.³²

Moderate Germans: Wöllner and Meck

The authors of the German works, who also received accessit — Meck and Wöllner — adopt more moderate positions regarding the competition task than Graslin, and this is not surprising. It would be difficult to expect the same level of radicalism from the Germans as from the French. Most people were free in France at the time — there were few peasants tied to the land without the possibility of leaving it — and most of them were dependent only as long as they owned the land, becoming free as soon as they left it. In Germany, by contrast, there were hardly any free peasants; they were mostly attached to the land and enslaved.

Wöllner, a Halberstädt canon who later became Minister of Justice, begins his treatise with the idea that it would be more beneficial and advantageous for society if peasants owned their own land. He supports his idea with considerations regarding the important significance of property rights for agriculture and population growth. He advises distributing land to peasants as private property, so that they pay a precisely determined tribute and perform specific labor. Wöllner considers it important for the government to encourage landowners who have transferred land to peasants’ ownership, as well as to support peasants with many children.

However, his practical steps for the near future are limited to granting peasants not so much the right of ownership, but rather the right of hereditary land use. Wöllner proposes that the Free Economic Society, with the permission of the sovereign and the consent of the landowners, draft a law under which serfdom would be amended and aligned with the requirements of the common good.

The Livonian nobleman von Meck, in response to the competitive question, argues that peasants should have freedom and property, but he advises not to rush with these beneficial grants (remember the epigraph of his work: “Haste makes waste”).

If serfdom is abolished immediately, says Meck, freedom could turn into wildness; peasants might abandon the lands they previously cultivated and become wanderers searching for places where they can obtain land without obligations and monetary dues. Before abolishing serfdom, peasants should first learn the value of property. Attention must be given to better education for peasant children and to teaching peasants to love farming.

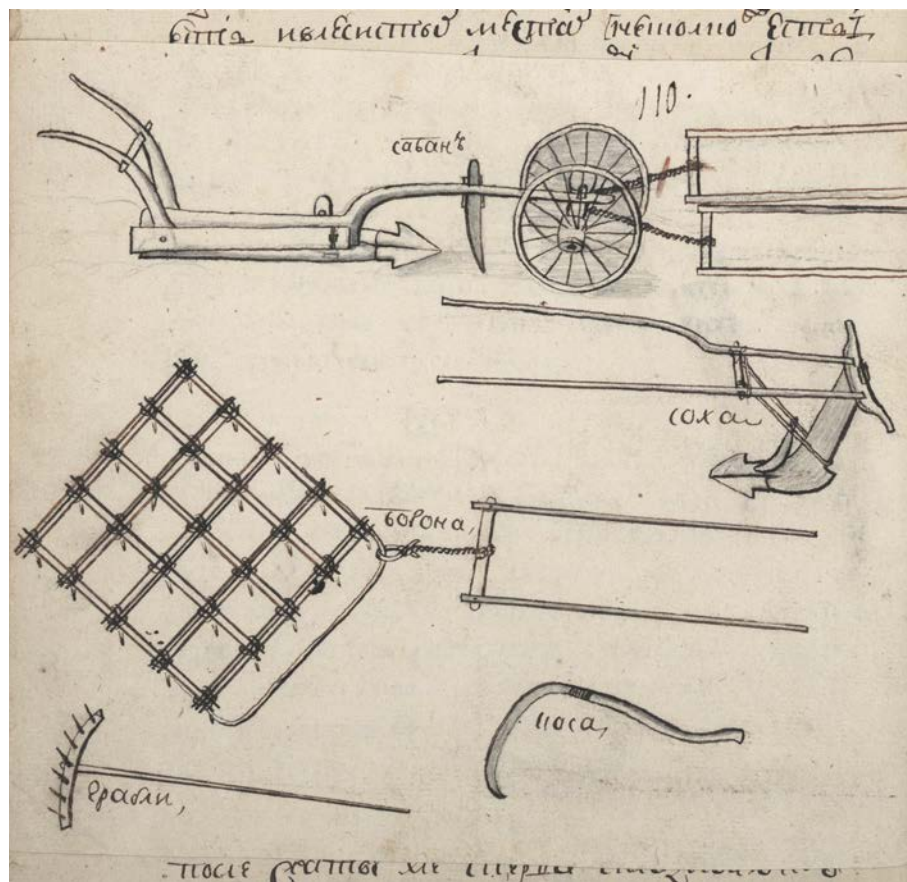
Meck advises starting the granting of property rights with movable property. Then, when all or most peasants have acquired movable property, to grant them full ownership rights to the land.

One cannot help but be surprised that the Society, composed mainly of large landowners, chose and highlighted these particular writings. All the awarded and commendable works advocated for peasant ownership in one form or another. Among the well-known approved works, there was not a single one that was openly pro-serfdom! Although plenty of works were submitted to the competition.



Prince Mikhail Mikhailovich Shcherbatov

Peasant tools for cultivating the land. A drawing from the Proceedings of the Free Economic Society



For example, the previously mentioned work No. 97 or essay No. 23 by I. Stepanov, a deputy of the Legislative Commission representing the Vereya nobility. It is sufficient to recall the work of the largest and most authoritative noble publicist, Prince M.M. Shcherbatov, in which he vigorously opposes proposals to grant peasants ownership rights or freedom.

Of course, by awarding the victory to de l'Abbaye, the Society showed a certain degree of caution. But, at that time, it could hardly have been otherwise. Openly proclaiming the necessity of fundamentally overthrowing the entire existing state structure, without a clearly developed action program and while hesitating about the ultimate success, was, to put it mildly, imprudent.

By selecting the authors of these particular works as winners and laureates, the Society sent a clear signal: serfdom undoubtedly hampers the country's development and should be abolished in the future. But precisely in the future, gradually and with utmost caution. The signal was addressed primarily to scholars and individuals who had influence over the government. In this case, the Free Economic Society was guided by the primary principle in healthcare "First, do no harm!" The history of our country has more than once, especially in the 20th century, demonstrated how justified adherence to this principle is and to what social catastrophes its violation can lead.

This position of the Society was vividly demonstrated in the discussion of Polenov's work, which, of course, is of the greatest interest to us. This is the only Russian work admitted to the second round of the competition, whose fate unfolded in an exceptional way.



Barshchina. Engraving from
the book by A.T. Bolotov
"The Village Mirror..."
(St. Petersburg, 1798–1799)

Russian Radical: Aleksey Polenov

By the time the competition was announced, Aleksey Yakovlevich Polenov was a well-educated 28-year-old young man. He had just returned from Germany, where he studied feudal law and immersed himself in the intricacies of Roman law and German casuistry. He was keenly interested in Russian history and dreamed of making Russian legislation more just. "...I examine [Russian] decrees and statutes and find almost nothing but disorder, confusion, deficiency, and injustice. I have noticed such notable flaws in our laws that they can sometimes cause great harm to both the sovereign and the people", he wrote to I.I. Taubert.

Holding a modest position as an academic translator, A.Ya. Polenov obtained permission to undertake the translation of one of the most important and most radical works — III Sh. Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*. Polenov's translation was published in 1769³³ and became the first edition of Montesquieu's works in Russian.

The essay submitted by Polenov to the Free Economic Society's competition in February 1768 contained a vehement critique of serfdom. "Our peasants, through their sorrowful example, can demonstrate how destructive ultimate oppression is for people. Therefore, first and foremost, we should reflect on abolishing the shameful trade — fueled by human blood — for the glory of our people and the benefit of the society. In this case, without making the slightest distinction between inanimate objects and humans, we sell our neighbors like a piece of wood and show more compassion for our livestock than for people",³⁴ Polenov describes the dire condition of the serfs.

He argues that "ownership of movable and immovable property" constitutes the only way "to encourage peasantry and improve their condition". According to Polenov, a peasant-owner tends to cultivate the land better, making him wealthier and more eager to marry and have children. This, in turn, increases the population, improves the collection of taxes, and consequently raises the state's revenues.

He also mentions that the deprivation of property rights and the oppression of peasants can be very dangerous, citing, for example, slave uprisings in antiquity and the relatively recent Cossack revolts in Poland. "The Helots who endured the hardships under the yoke of unbearable slavery, shock the Lacedaemonian Republic with terrible force; the Romans, to their great detriment, ended the slave war and saw Sicily — their best province — brought to ruin by the slaves. Similarly, our neighboring Poland suffered great damage during the Cossack uprisings, ravaged by oppressed peasants. And indeed, a person who has no benefits motivating him to preserve such a society — where he leaves nothing behind and is constantly suffering — should have little love for it... Sometimes, also, such people, seeing no end to their misfortunes, fall into despair and resort to dangerous extremes that threaten every society",³⁵ Polenov wrote in his essay, almost predicting the Peasant War that shook Russia in 1773–1775.

Polenov's proposals for improving the plight of the peasants were, in some respects, similar to de l'Abbaye's proposals. They included the mandatory presence of doctors and trained midwives in villages to preserve the population, the establishment of peasant schools, and the publication of books for their enlightenment. Polenov's most important requirement is the "precise establishment" (or, as we would today say, "legislative codification") of the peasants' obligations in favor of the landowner. "Such an establishment will protect the peasants from the arrogance

***According to Polenov,
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more eager to marry
and have children***

Harvesting

of their landowners, who torment them without any mercy or compassion, taking everything they lay their eyes on, and thereby bring them into unfathomable poverty from which they can never escape”.³⁶

Polenov also proposed the establishment of peasant courts to resolve disputes between landowners and peasants, as well as among the peasants themselves, with the aim of protecting the peasants from the arbitrariness of the landowners.

The competition committee did not immediately award an “accessit” to the essay. Its decision stated that the work, “*although considered by some members of our committee to be the best and most substantial after work No. 154 — thus deserving an accessit — others, upon examining the style beyond the content, found in it many excessively strong and currently inappropriate expressions. Therefore, they deemed it necessary that, if anyone in the assembly knows the author, they should immediately instruct him to promptly revise it [the work], and then his work should also be included in the second class and be granted the advantages appropriate to that class, except for printing*”.³⁷ And only later did the general assembly approve the decision to award an accessit to the work.

Thus, Polenov’s work resonated with the members of the competition committee and the general assembly. It should be noted that neither the committee nor the assembly included the most anti-serfdom members of the Society, such as G.G. Orlov, R.I. Vorontsov, T.N. Teplov, I.G. Chernyshev, Y.E. Sievers, and some others. However, while approving the “spirit” of the work, the Society could not accept its content. Publishing Polenov’s statements, especially in Russian, would not merely be “cutting the branch” on which the nobility “sat” — it would mean undermining the very “tree” of the state structure at its root.





Collection of arrears.
By V. Pukirev. 1875

Polenov presented to the Society a new, shortened, and softened version of his work, but even this version was not published. The original version of Polenov's work was published only in 1865 by the author's grandson, D.V. Polenov.

A New Round of Discussions: The Peasant Question under Alexander I (1801–1825)

During this period, discussions in VEO became more intense and practical. Important: the composition of works changed — Russian-language works predominated (unlike the 7 Russian works out of 162 during Catherine II). This reflected the growth of the domestic intellectual environment, although the quality of the works varied, “Some of these Russian writings are below any criticism, but nonetheless, even this was a significant step forward — that the issue of peasant life changes was being discussed not only in the capital cities but also in some remote Great Russian and Ukrainian regions.”³⁸

Key discussions and tasks of VEO

- Economic Systems: Corvee (Barshchina) vs. Quitrent (Obrok) (Task of 1809)

The Society posed the question: Which system is more beneficial for the state, landowners, and peasants — corvee (barshchina) or quitrent (obrok)? The responses revealed a sharp contradiction.

Pogodin (Orel landowner, laureate of the gold medal), a fervent supporter of corvee, considered the quitrent system to be harmful to the morality of peasants. He set a high standard for corvee plowing — 1.5–2 dessiatines per household, which, according to V.I. Semevsky, was burdensome and exceeded the norms of the 18th century. He believed that “the quitrent system was much more profitable for landowners than corvee” (with income of up to 106 rubles per household compared to 30 rubles of a quitrent), but it was harmful to peasants”.

Shvytkov (proofreader, laureate of the gold medal): also supported corvee, considering a quitrent to be the cause of arrears. He demanded restrictions on seasonal (temporary) work, seeing in it a source of “free-thinking” and “arrogance” among peasants. His views were exclusively landowner-oriented; he regarded the sale of people without land as “completely natural and useful”.

Dzhunkovsky (1803): sharply criticized corvee as harmful both to peasants and landowners, stating that “forced labor was minimally productive”. He pointed out that landowners arbitrarily increased a quitrent, forcing peasants to “conceal their income”. He believed that the position of quitrent-paying peasants was better and proposed fixing the quitrent rate for 10 years. His calculations contained the “germ of the task announced by the Society in 1812, concerning which labor was more advantageous — serf's or hired”.

Bogdanovich (Ukrainian landowner, laureate of the silver medal): advocated for a differentiated approach depending on the quality of the land. In small-land estates, he proposed developing factories using peasant labor but acknowledged that “the situation of quitrent-paying peasants was much better than that of corvee peasants”.

- Serf vs. Hired Labor (Task of 1812)

This task, announced with the support of Count N.P. Rumyantsev and with increased reward at the behest of Alexander I, became the central issue. It was “inspired by Adam Smith's classical work”, translated between 1802

Emperor Alexander I passes
to Count S.P. Rumyantsev Decree
on free farmers



and 1806, which argued that “slavery was economically less efficient than free labor”.³⁹

Professor L.G. Yakob (recipient of the main gold medal): his work was the most scholarly and influential. Yakob argued that serf labor was economically unprofitable due to low productivity, poor livestock and inventory, and inefficient labor expenditure by landowners. He asserted that “*the corvee system was less profitable than land cultivation using hired labor*”.⁴⁰ Yakov proposed a detailed plan for gradual emancipation: transferring land to peasants as hereditary leasehold with the right to buy, banning sale without land, and restricting the authority of landowners. However, his plan involved dispossessing the majority of peasants (except tenants) of their land and maintaining the quitrent as “interest on capital”. Nonetheless, his work played a progressive role by undermining the “consciousness of the necessity” of serfdom even among landowners themselves.

Yakob argued that serf labor was economically unprofitable due to low productivity, poor livestock and inventory, and inefficient labor expenditure by landowners

G. Merkel (recipient of the small medal), a well-known advocate for the emancipation of Latvians, also argued that hired (free) labor was significantly cheaper.

General Komarov (recipient of the small medal) defended serf labor, arguing that it was justified by a shortage of labor, the high cost of hired labor, ease of control, and tradition: “The best order for the people is the one they are accustomed to”.⁴¹ He rightly pointed out that Russian serfs were in a better position compared to landless workers in the West.

Unpublished opinions: among the 14 responses, there were radical views (the motto: “Freedom is the first right and the first human well-being”), proposals for “landlord socialism” (common plowing and sharing the harvest equally with peasants), and openly serf-centric ideas (references to Abraham, Isaac, and the “monarchical” structure of the estate).

Other Initiatives and Conservative Resistance

Separation of factory workers from farmers (Task of 1812): an attempt to establish a class of professional workers failed; all 30 responses were deemed unsatisfactory by VEO. Critics (von Bock) rightly pointed out that artificially diverting attention from land amidst Russia’s small population was harmful, and that “the division of labor is impossible with a sparse population.”⁴²

The land question of N.V. Zubov (1820): a Tver landowner proposed abolishing strip farming and “establishing land as an inviolable property of the peasants” (effectively, hereditary ownership with the right to sell among themselves)⁴³. He implemented this idea in his own villages. Zubov’s article and Durasov’s comments (who supported “perpetual plots” without the right to sell them to outsiders) caused a scandal in VEO in 1822. Conservative members (Golynsky, Poshman, P. Sumarokov) accused them of encroaching on sacred noble property and demanded that the articles be abolished as “contrary to the general state regulations.”⁴⁴ Although the majority of VEO members (11 against 10) upheld the publication, it was necessary to include an explanatory note limiting the meaning of “property” to “inalienable possession.”⁴⁵ This episode vividly illustrates the strengthening of conservative sentiments after 1812.



A riding Cossack escorting
a peasant. By A.O. Orlovsky, 1820s



Discussions in VEO on the peasant question became important stages in the formation of public opinion and served as a theoretical basis for future reforms. Despite the limitations of many proposals and failures (such as the task concerning factory workers), the very formulation of questions about the comparative advantages of different systems, peasant land ownership, and the gradual restriction of serfdom within the framework of official society laid the groundwork for the reforms of 1861.

FROM EMPIRICISM TO POLICY: THE PEASANT REFORM IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF VEO

Title of the Collection of materials for the study of rural land communities, published by The Free Economic Society and the Russian Geographical Society in 1880



The peasant land commune (“world” or “society”), with its distinctive forms of landownership — communal possession with household usage and periodic redistribution of land — as well as self-governance and the system of mutual responsibility in dues and obligations — soon drew the Society’s attention. For more than a century and a half, the Society served as the principal scholarly platform where key concepts of the commune were shaped, debated, and evolved — from its perception as a convenient fiscal and administrative tool to its idealization as the “cell of socialism”, or, conversely, to its demonization as the main obstacle to agrarian progress. The activity of VEO in studying the commune proceeded through several stages, each reflecting the evolving socio-economic realities and political contexts of the empire.

The Emergence of Interest and the Accumulation of Facts

Initially, the Society’s interest in the commune was purely pragmatic, related to issues of increasing treasury revenue and improving the efficiency of peasant management. The commune was primarily seen as a mechanism for collecting taxes (mutual responsibility) and maintaining order.

However, in the 18th century, questions regarding land relations began to be raised within the framework of the Society’s announced competitions for the best essays on peasant ownership. Although direct concepts of the commune had not yet been developed, the very fact of raising these questions during the Enlightenment period was significant.

The turning point came in the early 19th century, when, against the backdrop of the growing crisis of serfdom and debates over Russia’s development paths, the commune began to be viewed as a specific — possibly unique — socio-economic institution requiring specialized study. VEO launched an extensive program of collecting empirical data. In its Proceedings, hundreds of descriptions of local customs, land-use systems (such as three-field rotation system, redistribution, and strip farming), tax arrangements, and the functioning of village assemblies from various Russian provinces were published. This work was of immense significance. VEO undertook an enormous, truly titanic effort to collect and systematize materials on the Russian land commune. Its questionnaires, research programs, and publications by local correspondents formed an unprecedented database, without which serious



Rural assembly

discussion of the nature and functions of the “world” would have been impossible.

A typical example of the early stage of understanding is the article “The Allotment of Land to the Peasants”, which was published in the Proceedings in 1857, even before the abolition of serfdom. The article defended communal landownership. “Among the Russian people, under the combined influence of physical, moral, and historical factors, three different types of landownership emerged: the Great Russian — communal; the Little Russian — individual, based on the “lifelong inheritable possession”, which sometimes led to extremes and abuses; and, finally, the Western Russian — farming or folwark system, clearly reminiscent of the Baltic land relations”, the article said⁴⁶. According to the author, Russian communal landownership had its advantages: firstly, it “vigilantly monitors proper land cultivation”, secondly, it makes it easier



Alexander II reads the manifesto of 1861

for the commune to implement necessary improvements such as soil improvement, drainage of swamps, and afforestation, and finally, communal landownership provides peasants with the opportunity to “seek unconditional ownership in the city”.

It is important that even at that time, VEO documented the vast diversity of communal practices across regions, undermining the notion of it as something uniform and static.

The Era of the Great Reforms and the Intensification of Debates

The abolition of serfdom in 1861, which preserved the commune as the main institution of peasant landownership — especially in the Great Russian provinces — made its future a central issue for the country’s economic prospects. VEO became the main arena for intense debates, where fundamentally different concepts clashed.

A protective and conservative concept: the commune as a bastion of stability. Proponents of this approach (Prince A.I. Vasilchikov, partly J.E. Janson and N.N. Kablukov) viewed the commune as a protective social buffer that prevented peasant proletarianization, land specula-

The commune was perceived as an organic, traditional form of Russian peasant life, a guarantee of “people’s well-being” and social harmony

tion, and mass land dispossession, phenomena observed in the West. The commune was perceived as an organic, traditional form of Russian peasant life, a guarantee of “people’s well-being” and social harmony. A.I. Vasilchikov, in his fundamental work “Landownership and Agriculture in Russia and Other European States” (1876), which became a reference book for many members of VEO and was actively discussed at its meetings, wrote, “*The land-based life in Russia should be recognized as entirely distinctive and traditional; it was influenced less than in other countries by external causes or higher decrees. Legislation and rulers rarely intervened in land relations; the peasants’ landholding was an administrative and fiscal measure that did not disturb rural life nor alter the peasant’s relationship to the land. All other reforms decreed by Russian sovereigns — from prohibitions against alienating peasant lands in the Law Book to Alexander and Nicholas’s decrees regarding free farmers and obligated peasants — these decrees bypassed the people, passed far above them, so high that the people were unaware of them: they scarcely affected the internal life of rural communities or the agricultural relations among peasants.*”⁴⁷

For Vasilchikov and his colleagues, the commune was not an anachronism but a viable form of social organization that should be preserved and improved, rather than dismantled — refining it by removing feudal remnants, such as excessive paternalism from landlords and officials.

Liberal-progressive concept: the commune as a brake on modernization. This position was vigorously defended by many leading economists and agronomists associated with VEO, including A.S. Posnikov, I.V. Vernadsky, V.P. Vorontsov, and later P.P. Migulin and A.A. Kaufman. They viewed the commune through the lens of economic efficiency and saw it as the main obstacle to the intensification of agriculture.

Professor A.S. Posnikov, whose works were a hallmark of this perspective in the Proceedings, in his early book “Communal Landownership” (1875), made a definitive conclusion: “*Communal Landownership, the usual form of land use among the majority of our peasant communes, is regarded as a primitive form, characteristic only of peoples at a low level of development... The form of this land ownership may meet the limited needs of a young, sparsely populated country, but from the moment when the population reaches a size that requires increased agricultural productivity, the “harmful economic consequences of communal landownership” become quite evident.*”⁴⁸ Liberal economists insisted on the necessity of granting peasants the right to freely leave the commune, with land privatization as an essential condition for agricultural progress.

Populist (and related) concept: the commune as the foundation of a special path. Although VEO was not a direct political platform for populists, its openness allowed ideas that idealized the commune to be voiced. Some members of the Society (V.I. Orlov, P.P. Chervinsky, and partly N.N. Kablukov in his early works) saw the commune as a ready-made cell of the future just society (whether socialist or cooperative), embodying principles of collectivism and mutual aid, capable of avoiding the social ills of capitalist development in the West. The commune was interpreted as evidence of the uniqueness of the Russian historical path. These views were reflected in publications, particularly in descriptions of collective labor forms and communal self-governance. Although there were no direct calls for revolution in the academic Proceedings, the interpretation of the commune as a seed of socialism fueled populist ideology.

VEO deliberately sought to avoid bias. Its goal was not to prove any particular point of view, but to present the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the actual state of affairs

In-Depth Study: from Theory to Practice

The years 1880–1890 marked the peak of debates about the commune within VEO. This was due to several factors:

The government’s course towards preserving the commune — exemplified by the laws of 1889 (on district chiefs) and 1893 (on restricting family divisions and complicating the purchase of land parcels and exit from the commune) — directly relied on the protective concept, viewing the commune as a bulwark against revolutionary ideas and social instability.

Deterioration of the peasantry’s economic situation: increasing land scarcity, more frequent crop failures (notably the catastrophic famine of 1891–1892), and rising levels of debt.

Intensification of VEO research: The Society initiated large-scale statistical and economic surveys, providing a wealth of material for analysis.

Discussions among Slavophiles, Westernizers, populists, and statisticians often revolved around theoretical speculations and ideological preferences, lacking reliable empirical data.

The publication of the “Collection of Materials for the Study of the Rural Land Commune”, issued by VEO in 1880 under the editorship of F.L. Barykov, A.V. Polovtsov, and P.A. Sokolovsky, marked a pivotal moment that laid the foundations for the scientific concept of the commune.

The editorial board of the VEO collection — comprising Barykov, a bureaucrat from the Ministry of Internal Affairs; Polovtsov, a scholar and government official; and Sokolovsky, a renowned statistician and researcher of rural communes — set an ambitious goal: to gather, systematize, and objectively present the facts about the Russian rural land commune.

The materials of the collection were meticulously organized into thematic sections:

- The prevalence of communal landownership.
- The structure of the commune (administrative bodies, assembly).
- The rights of the commune and its members.
- Land reallocations (causes, types, periodicity).
- Civil obligations and levies (monetary and in kind).
- Mutual responsibility.
- The commune’s relations with landowners and the state.
- The impact of the commune on peasant welfare.
- Perspectives on the future of the commune.

VEO deliberately sought to avoid bias. Its goal was not to prove any particular point of view, but to present the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the actual state of affairs. The preface emphasized a commitment to facts.

The collection reflected the situation across most regions of European Russia, revealing a vast regional diversity of forms, functions, and practices within the rural communes. It delivered a strong blow to the romanticized notions held by Slavophiles and populists. The data irrefutably demonstrated that the commune:

- was not an ideal embodiment of equality and justice (the redistribution was often unequal, and authority at the village assemblies was seized by “exploiters”).
- did not guarantee peasant well-being (frequently perpetuating outdated farming methods, burdened by heavy levies and mutual responsibility).
- was closely intertwined with the system of state administration and fiscal pressure, serving as its instrument.



The cover of a book published
A Free economic society

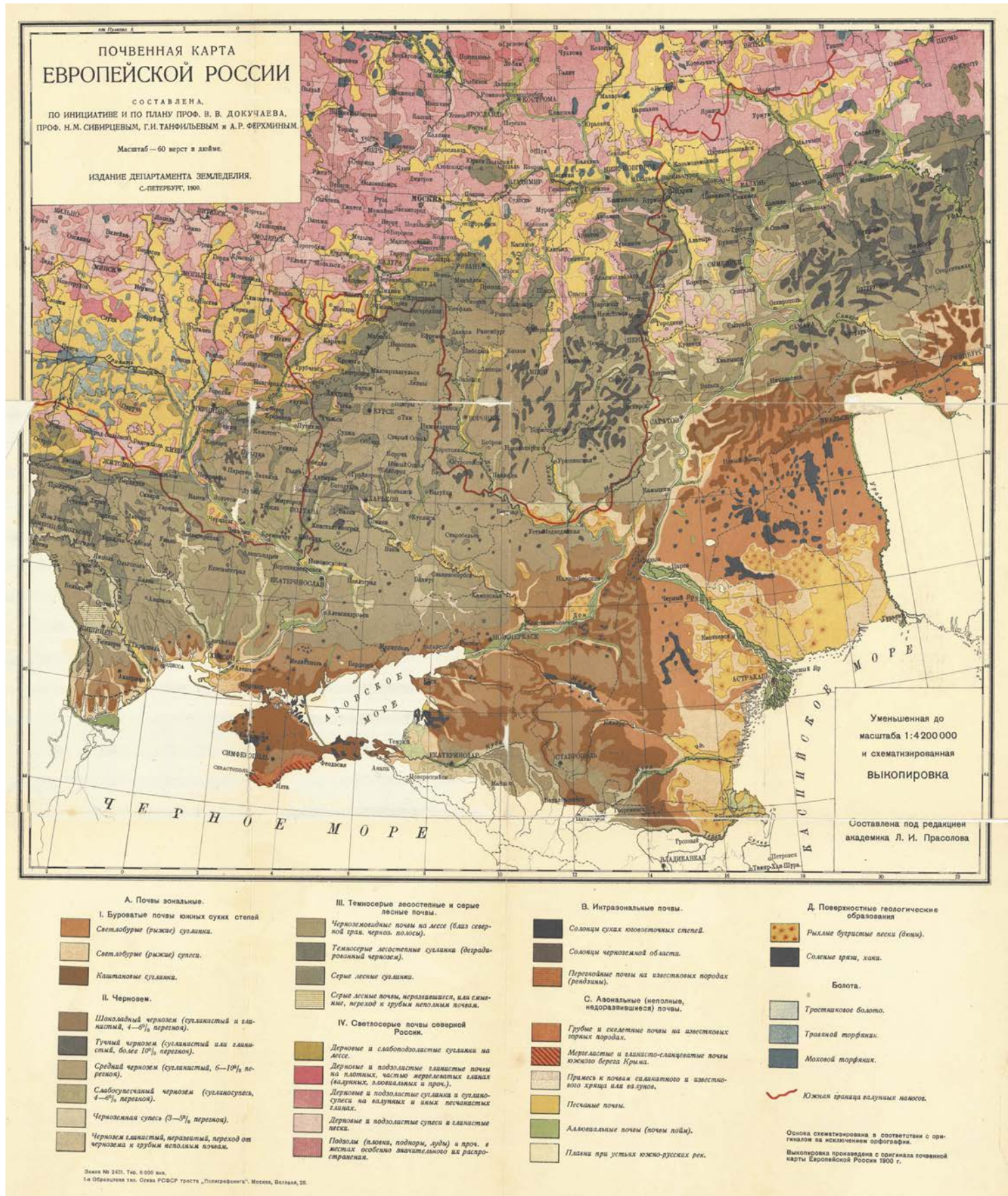
Although VEO positioned this work as a collection of materials rather than a finished theory, the meticulous selection, systematization, and objective presentation of facts laid the foundation for a scientific concept of the peasant land commune as a complex, multifunctional, internally contradictory, and historically evolving institution — one deeply embedded in the social, economic, and political fabric of the Russian Empire.

The activities of the Free Economic Society in studying and understanding the peasant commune represent an outstanding example of a long-lasting, painstaking, and profound scientific and societal dialogue — an endeavor that exerted a colossal influence on the course of Russian history. The significance of this activity is multifaceted:

1. VEO created an unparalleled corpus of empirical data on the actual condition, diversity of forms, and evolution of the commune across the entire Russian Empire. Its questionnaires, programs, publications by local correspondents, and expedition reports remain invaluable sources for historians and economists.
2. Within the walls of VEO, all of the main concepts concerning the commune were carefully formulated, thoroughly argued, and critically examined. The Society became a laboratory for economic and social thought.
3. VEO promoted a comprehensive approach, combining economic analysis, statistics, ethnography, law, and history. It contributed significantly to the development of Russian agrarian economics and agricultural statistics.
4. Discussions and findings within VEO did not remain confined to academic circles. They actively influenced public opinion, shaped the perspectives of officials, and ultimately impacted state policy — from the laws of Alexander III, which codified the commune, to the Stolypin reforms, which aimed at dismantling it. The arguments developed within VEO became tools in the political struggle.

Through the lens of the commune issue, VEO articulated the central dilemmas of Russian modernization: **efficiency vs social justice/stability, individualism vs collectivism, tradition vs innovation, and the role of the state vs local self-governance**. These questions remain relevant today.

Despite the polarity of opinions, VEO ensured the highest level of scientific discourse of its time, grounded in facts and thorough analysis.



FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE HARVEST: VEO ADDRESSED ISSUES RELATED TO LAND RECLAMATION AND SOIL SCIENCE

Throughout its activity, the Society served as the main hub for consolidating scientific ideas and practical initiatives in the field of agriculture. By bringing together leading scientists, practical agronomists, and enlightened landowners, VEO deliberately worked on addressing key issues in Russian agriculture. Among these, land reclamation of unproductive soils, fundamental studies of soil resources, and the development of rational fertilization systems held a priority position.

Land Reclamation: Overcoming Natural Limitations

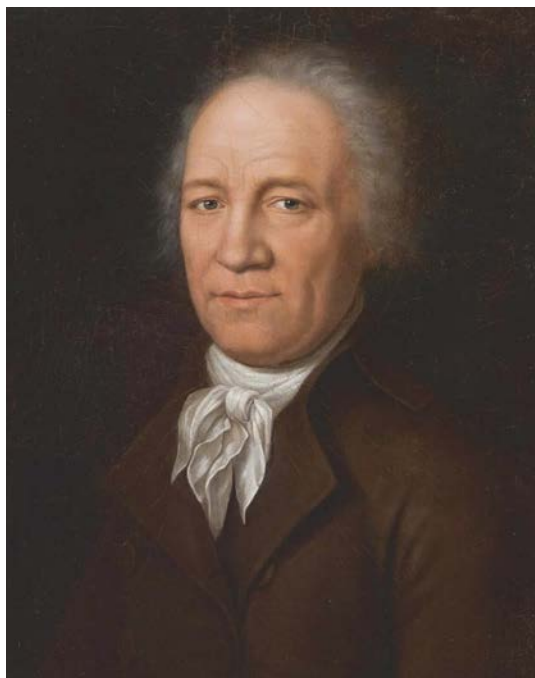
The issue of low soil fertility in vast territories, especially in the non-chernozem belt with its areas of waterlogging, salt-rich soils, and podzolic soils, was one of the first concerns that attracted the Society's attention. The Society became the leading ideologist and organizer of large-scale land reclamation projects.

Combating waterlogging

VEO actively lobbied for the drainage of swamps as a means to expand arable land. Minister of Finance E.F. Kankrin noted this achievement in his 1843 report: *"VEO drew attention to swamp drainage, as the destruction of land due to excess moisture is a great harm to agriculture."*⁴⁹ A practical manifestation of this initiative was the Society's support for the expedition of engineer P.P. Melnikov (1843–1845) to study the possibilities of swamp drainage in the Trans-Volga and Ural regions. The expedition's results formed the basis for the first state hydraulic reclamation projects.

Improvement of soil chemical properties

No less important was the gypsum treatment of saline soils. In 1858, commissioned by VEO, A.N. Engelhardt conducted field experiments on gypsum treatment of soils in the Simbirsk province. The results of Engelhardt's experiments were truly encouraging: *"The experiments conducted by Engelhardt with gypsum treatment of soils... yielded such favorable results that the Society deemed it beneficial to continue them."*⁵⁰ VEO also considered proposals for land reclamation using marl and baked clay, exemplified by Crestling's suggestion in 1830. However, it approached "secret" techniques — like Boehm's method in 1842 — with skepticism, striving to shield rural landowners from the pitfalls of unscrupulous inventors.



Andrey Timofeevich Bolotov

A systematic approach to land management

For VEO, land reclamation was understood not merely as a technical intervention but as an integral component of the rational organization of territories. The Society repeatedly emphasized the importance of crop rotation as a method to maintain soil fertility and combat land depletion. In 1804, a competition was announced on “the advantages of multi-crop practices”, and in 1830, another competition focused on “which crop rotations are most advantageous in the different climates of Russia”. Under the influence of President Mordvinov (1835), who emphasized the need to replace the exhausting three-field rotation system, VEO published and freely distributed the “Guidelines on Crop Rotation”. In 1861, this topic was revisited through a competitive process.

Soil Science: From Empirical Descriptions to Genetic Science

The study of soils — Russia’s chief national wealth — became the Society’s fundamental achievement. The Society promoted both applied research into the properties of soils across various regions and the development of the theoretical foundations of soil science.

Pioneering research and classification

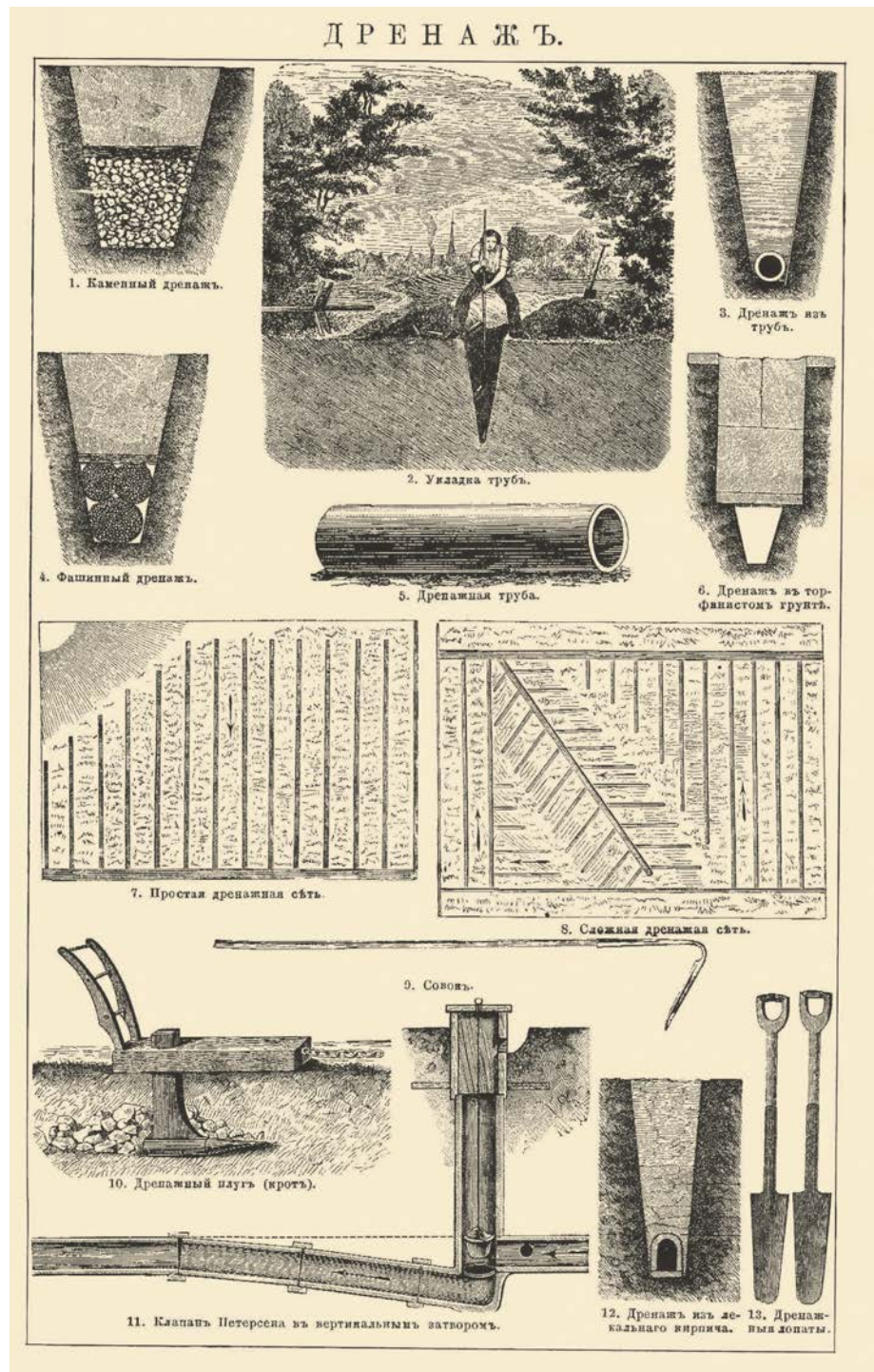
In the early volumes of the Proceeding, foundational works by pioneers of Russian agronomy were published. Among them, A.T. Bolotov, in his article “Description of the Properties and Quality of Lands in the Kashira County...” (1766), provided one of the earliest scientific descriptions of gray forest soils, linking their characteristics to potential crop yields. He emphasized the vital importance of deeply studying the land as the foundation of agriculture: “*The examination of soil properties and qualities, or the investigation and recognition of what each type of land is best suited for*”, he asserted, “constitutes the primary focus of agricultural science⁵¹”. In his comprehensive treatise “On Agriculture” (1788), I.M. Komov systematized existing knowledge about soils, meticulously describing methods for their evaluation: “*Once the properties of the land are understood, the main task of the farmer is to fertilize poor soils and, after improving them, to strive to prevent their fertility from declining.*”⁵² He proposed utilizing morphological indicators such as color and structure, geobotanical signs like vegetation, and even primitive mechanical and chemical methods of analysis — measuring clay, sand, lime, and humus content — to assess soil quality.

Dokuchaev’s scientific revolution

The pinnacle of the Society’s work in soil science was the renowned 1876 competition titled “Study of Chernozem (Black Soil), If Possible, in Its Distribution Zone”. In response, the young V.V. Dokuchaev authored the seminal work “Russian Chernozem” (1883), which laid the vital foundations of genetic soil science — an understanding of the soil as an independent natural organism, constantly forming under the influence of various soil-forming factors. The role of VEO in this breakthrough was key, as Dokuchaev himself acknowledged, “*The proposed work is a response to the question posed by the Imperial Free Economic Society in 1876... By posing such a crucial and challenging question, the Society thereby rendered a great service to Russian soil science.*”⁵³ Dokuchaev’s works and those of his school — published in the Proceedings of VEO, such as “Materials on the Evaluation of Lands in the Nizhny Novgorod Province” (1882–1886) — radically transformed approaches to land assessment and reclamation. The influ-

Vasily Vasilievich Dokuchaev in
1888

ence of VEO on Dokuchaev was long-lasting; he advocated for the creation of university departments of soil science with the support of D.I. Mendeleev. In 1892, upon becoming director of the Novoaleksandriysky Institute, he established the world's first department of genetic soil science.



Drainage device system and tools for this. Drawing from the Encyclopedic Dictionary Brockhaus and Efron

In 1846, VEO, following European trends (the works of Liebig), imported “several sacks” of mineral fertilizer worth 100 rubles in silver to be tested by Society members under various conditions



Alexander Nikolaevich
Engelgardt

Batishchevo, estate
The Engelhardts

Fertilizers: From Manure to Scientifically Advanced Systems

Enhancing soil fertility through fertilizers was also a continual, overarching theme of the Society's work, woven through its meetings, publications in the Proceedings, and the organization of field experiments.

Theoretical foundations and promotion of organics

VEO actively engaged in educational efforts promoting the rational use of manure, combating the common practice of burning it or storing it carelessly. In his treatise "On the Fertilization of Lands" (1775), A.T. Bolotov articulated the principles of plant nutrition and the essence of fertilization: "... the fertilization of lands can consist solely in either increasing the fertile and grain-producing particles within the soil or in removing and destroying the aforementioned obstacles..."⁵⁴ He justified the use of not only manure but also a wide range of local resources — straw, leaves, ash, bones, peat, silt, household waste — foreshadowing an ecological approach. I.M. Komov, acknowledging manure as the best fertilizer, emphasized its economic necessity even on Chernozem soils: "And since the land is rarely so good as not to require manure; though in our southern steppes such soil may be found, yet from sowing crops on it, nothing but wild grass will grow; therefore, it must be taken as a primary rule that without an abundance of manure, great success in agriculture cannot be achieved."⁵⁵ He also highlighted the value of lime, marl, ash, and pond silt as important soil amendments.

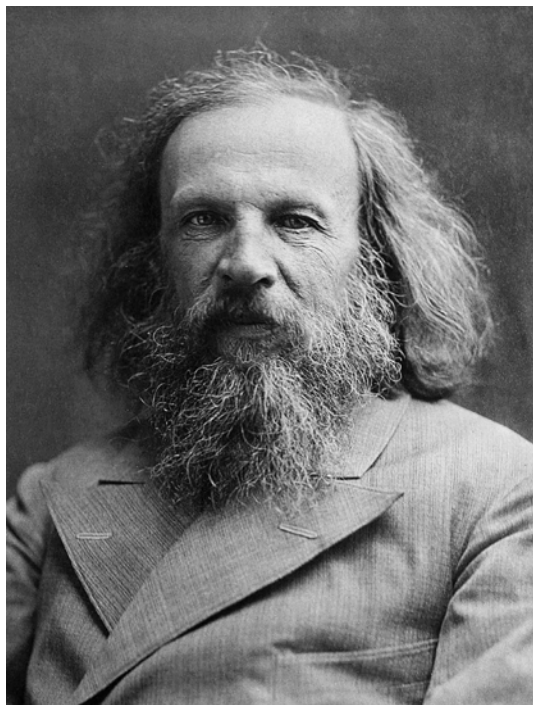
Early interest in mineral fertilizers and systems

VEO became the leading platform in Russia for discussing and implementing mineral fertilizers. In 1769, the Society requested samples of marl from England, and in the same year, it published a translation of Meyer's article on the use of gypsum.

In 1809, VEO published A. Poshman's book "Guidance on the Preparation of Dry and Wet Fertilizers" — one of the first Russian manuals on artificial fertilizers. Poshman clearly understood the vicious cycle of depletion: "Who does not know that even the best arable land, in order to retain its good qualities, must be periodically fertilized; all the more reason to improve and enrich poor and barren soils so that they yield good crops and reward the farmer's hard labor."⁵⁶ He was also among the first to express the idea of the effectiveness of organomineral mixtures: "However, one should not neglect the collection and accumulation of manure, for when mixed with dry matter, it constitutes one of the best means of fertilization". In 1846, VEO, following European trends (the works of Liebig), imported "several sacks" of mineral fertilizer worth 100 rubles in silver to be tested by Society members under various conditions. The Society also critically assessed numerous proposals for "secret" fertilizers (by Bikes, Boutin, and others), aiming to protect farmers from dishonest speculations.

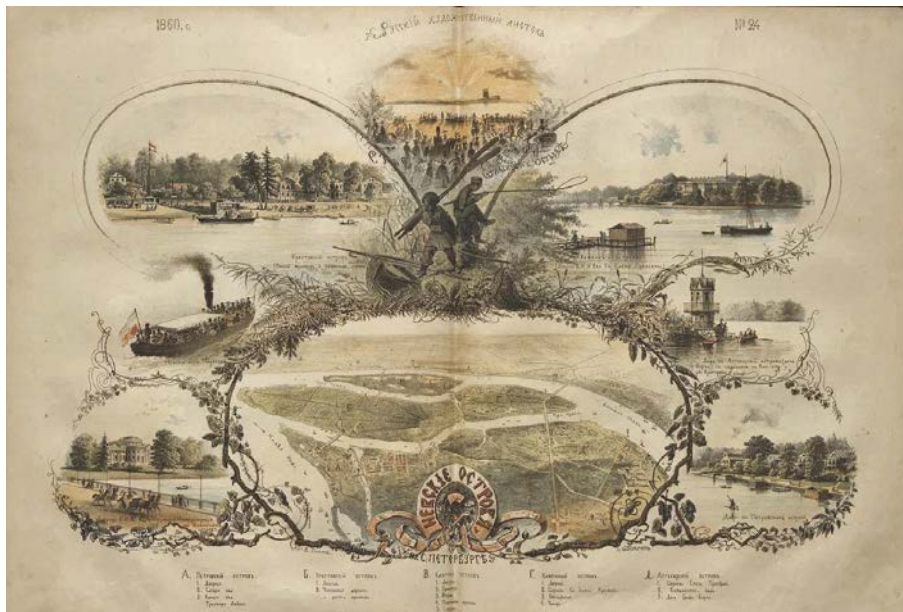
Phosphorites and local resources

In the second half of the 19th century, the Society's work on fertilizers was closely connected with the research of A.N. Engelhardt and P.A. Kostychev. With the support of VEO — including the organization of an experimental station in Batishchevo in 1884 — Engelhardt became the leading advocate for phosphate rock from local deposits (Kursk, Smolensk, Voronezh provinces), demonstrating its high effectiveness on non-chernozem soils. His books "Chemical Basis of Agriculture" (1878) and "Phosphorites and Green Manuring" (1891), became staple references for progressive farm-



Dmitry Ivanovich
Mendeleev

Russian art leaflet
"St. Petersburg Islands", 1860



ers. He insisted, *"In phosphate rock, we have a powerful means to cultivate wastelands, which constitute the majority of arable land in Northern Russia"*. Kostychev, a student of Engelhardt and an employee of the Agricultural Chemistry Station organized under VEO and the Forest Institute (1878), deepened research into the phosphate regime of soils. In 1879, he delivered a report at the Congress of Naturalists titled *"On the Compounds of Phosphoric Acid in Which It Is Preserved in the Soil"*, which attracted Mendeleev's attention.

Experimental Work and a Systematic Approach: The Scientific Foundation of Practice

VEO placed primary emphasis on developing agricultural experimental work as a bridge between theory and practice.

In 1842–1843, at the initiative of VEO, the first systematic field experiments with fertilizers were conducted in Russia, in St. Petersburg. These experiments were primarily demonstration projects and were accompanied by analyses of soils, plants, and fertilizers, laying the methodological basis.

The turning point came with A.P. Lyudogovsky's report titled *"On Artificial Fertilizers"* at the Society's meeting on March 17, 1866. In his speech, he emphasized the need for systematic experiments with fertilizers under various geographical conditions. D.I. Mendeleev, who attended the meeting, *"responded with great interest to this proposal and took upon himself the task of developing a scientific foundation for experimental research."*⁵⁷ On April 3, 1866, he presented VEO with a detailed program and methodology. Between 1867 and 1869, under Mendeleev's leadership, extensive geographical experiments conducted by VEO took place on sod-podzolic soils (in the provinces of Petersburg, Moscow, and Smolensk) and on Chernozem (in the Simbirsk province). The experiments examined the effects of organic, mineral (N, P, K), and indirect (lime, gypsum) fertilizers, their combinations, as well as the influence of soil depth and cultivation methods. Mendeleev emphasized scientific rigor, stating: *"Experiments are necessary to better understand the conditions of Russian agriculture"*, and they will yield *"concrete*

experimental and definite scientific findings". He formulated a key principle: "Fertilization can only achieve its purpose when it compensates for deficiencies in the soil's composition."⁵⁸ Although these experiments were discontinued after two years due to lack of funds, they became a model for future research.

Experimental stations

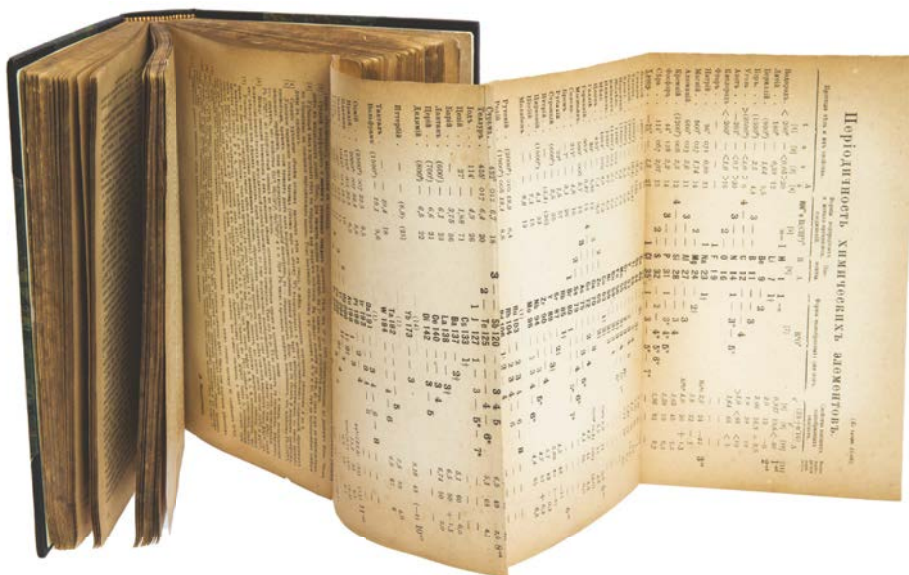
VEO actively supported the establishment of stationary experimental institutions. The most significant development was the organization in 1884, funded by the Society, of the Batishchevo Agricultural Experimental Station in the Smolensk province under the leadership of A.N. Engelgardt. It became a key center for studying the effectiveness of phosphate rock, green manuring, and other methods to enhance the fertility of non-chernozem soils.

Overcoming dogmas

The activities of VEO contributed to myth-busting. For example, the experiments by A.E. Zaikevich, supported by the Society, demonstrated the effectiveness of mineral fertilizers — particularly localized (seedbed) application of superphosphate — even on Chernozem soils. This challenged the prevailing belief (including Dokuchayev's one) that such fertilizers were unnecessary. Based on the results of the experiments conducted by VEO, Mendeleev opposed Malthusian theory of declining fertility, demonstrating the potential for progress in agriculture grounded in scientific principles.

The Legacy of VEO in the Context of Agricultural Modernization

The Free Economic Society became a unique Russian institution that provided a systematic approach to addressing critical agricultural issues. In the field of land reclamation, VEO promoted not only technical solutions (such as drainage and gypsum application) but also organizational and management practices (like the implementation of crop rotation). In soil science, the Society progressed from collecting empirical data (by Bolotov and Komov) to initiating fundamental scientific discoveries. Through competitions, expeditions, publications in the Proceedings, organization of lectures, and dissemination of knowledge, the Society laid a solid foundation for transitioning from traditional empirical farming to science-based agriculture.

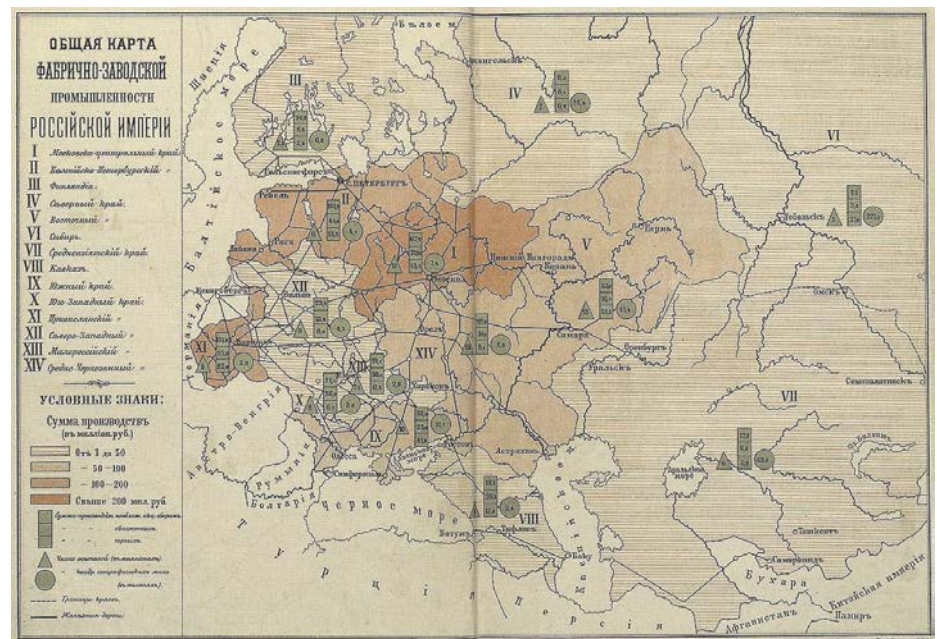


VEO AS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND TARGETED TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

Recognizing the immense diversity of natural and climatic conditions, the level of transportation infrastructure, and the local economic frameworks, VEO, from its very early years, has championed and consistently pursued the idea of differentiated, specialized development of regions. This concept was grounded in the fundamental principle of the need to maximize the effective utilization of each territory's comparative advantages — be it soil fertility, climatic features, availability of labor resources, or traditional crafts. The Society has become the primary platform for studying local conditions, testing and promoting advanced management methods, advocating regional interests, and establishing specialized economic zones.

VEO Methodology: From Study to Implementation

A key tool for developing the targeted development strategy was a comprehensive analysis of local conditions. VEO sent detailed questionnaires to the provinces through its corresponding members — often local landowners, officials, or doctors. These questionnaires covered the state of agriculture, livestock farming, crafts, commodity prices, and sales conditions.



General map of the factory industry The Russian Empire

The collected data were carefully analyzed, published in the Proceedings, and formed the basis for subsequent recommendations. Thus, in 1766, the first questionnaire appeared: "What are the shortcomings in the sphere of our agriculture?.. What lands in Russia are suitable for grain cultivation but remain untilled, and for what reasons?"⁵⁹ Responses received from across the Empire offered the first systematic overview of regional disparities.

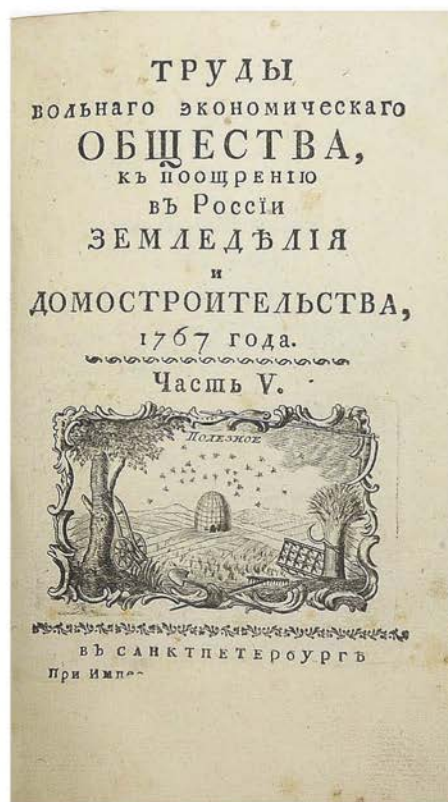
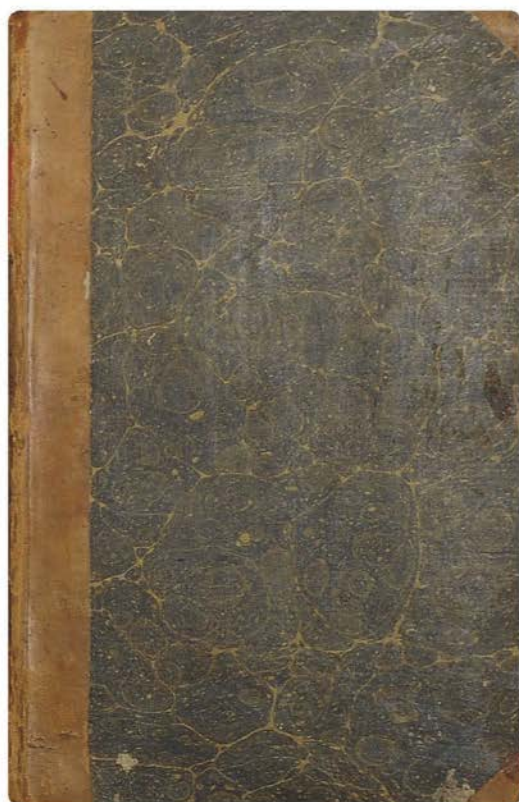
To disseminate knowledge, VEO published not only its own Proceedings but also practical manuals, and translated foreign works on agronomy and technology.

Experimental work was conducted on model farms (for example, in the village of Murino near St. Petersburg) and later expanded to a network of experimental fields and stations, whose establishment VEO actively supported across the provinces. A system of awards and incentives (such as gold and silver medals, monetary prizes) encouraged the adoption of innovations at the local level.

Specialization of the Chernozem (Black Earth) Center and South as Grain-Producing Regions

In the fertile provinces of Kursk, Voronezh, Tambov, Kharkov, and Ekaterinoslav, VEO saw the potential to become the "grain-producing regions of the Empire". The primary efforts here were focused on overcoming the extensive three-field rotation system and increasing the yields of main crops — wheat and rye. The Society persistently promoted the adoption of multi-field crop rotations with grasses and clean fallow, which helped restore soil fertility.

The issue of "Works" of the Free Economic Society, 1767



VEO was not limited to supporting existing trends but also initiated experiments to establish entirely new industries in regions suitable for their climate.

I.M. Komov, whose ideas were actively supported by VEO, said, “*Nature follows a certain order, and farmers imitate this by rotating crops, transferring every type of grain from one field to another. If, for example, wheat was always sown in the same field, nothing would grow due to a lack of nutrients.*”⁶⁰

VEO organized competitions and exhibitions of agricultural tools, encouraging the development and adoption of improved plows (such as Saxe and Ransom-Smoller plows), harrows, and threshers adapted to the heavy black soils.

Great emphasis was placed on the breeding and acclimatization of varieties. Thus, VEO promoted the high-yield Crimean wheat “Beloturka” (durum wheat) in the steppe provinces of Novorossiia, and studied and recommended the best local varieties of rye for the Central region.

The Society also condemned the practice of exploitative kizyak (dry animal dung) burning, advocating for the accumulation and rational use of manure.

The Northwest and Central regions (Non-Chernozem regions): Flax, Potatoes, and Dairy Farming

For provinces with poor podzolic soils (such as Pskov, Smolensk, Tver, Yaroslavl, Vladimir, and others), VEO promoted a strategy of moving away from risky grain monoculture in favor of technical crops, horticulture, dairy farming, and crafts. Flax cultivation became a key specialization.

The Society closely studied each stage — from the cultivation of long-stalked flax to its primary processing (scutching and rippling) and the quality of the yarn. Its competitions and awards stimulated improvements in quality. TVEO promoted the establishment of flax scutching and rippling enterprises (manufactories), aiming to retain added value within the region. For example, a report on the Tver province for 1850 mentions the activities of the local branch of VEO, which aided in the establishment of several flax processing enterprises.



Workers on the construction of a shipyard.
TSGAKFFD SPb G18880

Sugar factory of Count
A.A. Bobrinsky



Equally actively, VEO promoted potato cultivation as an alternative to grain, especially after poor harvests, by distributing tubers and cultivation guidelines. The development of dairy cattle breeding — especially in Yaroslavl, Tver, and Vologda provinces — was also encouraged by VEO through the dissemination of butter and cheese-making practices (including the renowned Vologda butter), as well as the improvement of livestock breeds.

Southwest: The Triumph of the Sugar Beet Industry

The most prominent example of successfully establishing a strong regional industry with active involvement of VEO was the development of the sugar beet industry in the black soil provinces of Right-Bank Ukraine (Kiev, Podolsk, Volyn) and neighboring areas (Kursk, Kharkov).

The Society played a decisive role in the introduction of progressive beet agricultural techniques (crop rotation, deep plowing, proper fertilization) and in the improvement of processing technologies. It studied and published reports on the operations of leading factories (e. g., Count Bobrinsky's sugar refinery), organized sugar exhibitions, and analyzed the industry's economics.

The largest sugar producers were members of VEO and actively utilized its platform. N.A. Tereshchenko said in its letter to VEO: *"Your Imperial Society has greatly contributed to the improvement of sugar beet production in Russia by disseminating valuable information and encouraging manufacturers to make enhancements."*⁶¹

VEO lobbied for the industry's interests before the government, particularly regarding customs tariffs. As a result, the region became the absolute leader in the Empire's sugar production.

Experiments and Lessons: Sericulture and Viticulture

VEO was not limited to supporting existing trends but also initiated experiments to establish entirely new industries in regions suitable for their climate.

The most extensive attempt was the introduction of sericulture in the South (Astrakhan, Kherson, Taurida, Bessarabian provinces).

The Free Economic Society was the leading force in both conceptualizing and practically advancing the idea of rational, targeted development of the provinces.

The Society established awards, published detailed guides (often translations from Italian and French), and distributed silkworm eggs and mulberry tree saplings free of charge. The Proceedings of VEO for 1845 stated that *“in 1843, the silk harvest in the Mennonite colonies reached 16 poods, that is, twice the amount harvested in 1842. The example of the Mennonites and the main encouragement from I.I. Cornies prompted the Nogais to also take an interest in this sector of rural industry. Many of them established mulberry plantations, and some, more active and resourceful, began rearing silkworms.”*⁶²

Similarly, viticulture and winemaking advanced in Crimea and the Caucasus — especially after the annexation of new territories — as well as cotton cultivation in Central Asia. However, these initiatives often faced systemic limitations: a lack of qualified personnel, weak infrastructure, climatic risks, import competition, and so on.

Interaction with the Authorities

The Society’s efforts to profile the provinces took place in a continuous, though not always smooth, dialogue with the government authorities. The Society provided expert evaluations upon government requests — for instance, during the formulation of customs tariffs on bread, flax, and sugar — and presented reports and drafts, such as the draft “Regulations on Rural Grain Shops”). It also lobbied for the interests of specific industries and regions. Many government initiatives in agriculture and statistics — such as P.D. Kiselev’s reform of the rural commune — relied on data and ideas developed within VEO. Although the bureaucratic machine often hampered the Society’s initiatives, its role as an independent center of expertise and a generator of ideas remained decisive and influential. As A.N. Khodnev said, *“The Society always found sympathy and a willingness to support its aims among high-ranking government officials.”*⁶³

Thus, the Free Economic Society was the leading force in both conceptualizing and practically advancing the idea of rational, targeted development of the provinces. Its activities, grounded in in-depth studies of local conditions, enlightenment, experimental work, and the encouragement of private initiative, contributed to the formation of specialized agricultural regions: the grain belt of the Center and South, the flax zone of the Northwest and Center, the beet-sugar center of the Southwest, and hubs of technical crops and specialized livestock farming. VEO laid the foundations of Russian agricultural science, the system of agricultural experimental research, and economic geography. Despite the inevitable setbacks of certain projects and the limited opportunities posed by serfdom and later communal systems, the Society’s contribution to the economic development of the provinces was substantial and long-lasting. It demonstrated the effectiveness of an approach rooted in identifying and harnessing regional advantages, serving as a prototype for future systems of territorial planning and regional economic policy.

VEO AS THE FLAGSHIP OF RUSSIA'S AGRICULTURAL MODERNIZATION

The Free Economic Society of Russia played an important role in the modernization of Russian agriculture during the second half of the 18th and the 19th centuries. Special attention was given to sectors that could deliver quick economic results and improve the country's food security. As Academician N.M. Druzhinin noted, “no institution in Russia during the 18th and 19th centuries had such a systematic impact on all spheres of agriculture as VEO did”.

From the very beginning of its activities, the Society adopted a course aimed at the practical transformation of agriculture. The 1765 Charter explicitly stated: “*The primary goal of the Society is the improvement of agriculture and household management*”. Its implementation was carried out through a comprehensive set of measures:

1. Scientific research;
2. Promotion of advanced farming methods;
3. Organization of experimental farms;
4. Personnel training;
5. Financial incentives for innovations.

The unique class-transcending nature of VEO, where, according to a contemporary, “one could meet a nobleman, a professor, and a simple farmer at the Society's meetings”,⁶⁴ became a key factor in its success. This combination of theoretical knowledge from academic science and extensive practical experience of farmers enabled the Society not merely to declare ideas of modernization but to effectively implement them through targeted work in key sectors of agriculture.

These principles — scientific approach, promotion of advanced methods, practical experiments, personnel training, and financial support — found application across a wide range of sectors. The activities of VEO encompassed a wide range of areas, each requiring specific solutions and exerting a significant impact on the country's economy and food security. Bright examples of this targeted sectoral approach — demonstrating the mechanisms of the Society's work “in the field” — include its efforts in the development of beekeeping, potato farming, cheese-making, crop cultivation, and livestock breeding.

Beekeeping: Overcoming the Crisis and a Scientific Approach

Beekeeping in Russia has been not only an agricultural sector for centuries but also an important part of national culture. VEO played a key role in its development, especially during periods of crises and technological transformations.

By the mid-18th century, traditional Russian forest beekeeping was in decline. A wild hive is an artificially hollowed cavity in a living tree where

Russian Beekeeping leaflet



bees settled. According to a contemporary observer, “Every wild-hive forest was a golden mine for a peasant”. However, widespread deforestation and the subsequent expansion of arable land deprived bees of their natural habitats.

A.T. Bolotov expressed his concern in 1766: “Previously, up to 50,000 wild hives were counted in one Kazan district; now, there are hardly five thousand”. The situation was further worsened by falling prices: at the beginning of the century, a pood of wax cost 10 rubles, but by the 1760s, no more than 2 rubles.

The salvation of VEO was not limited to theoretical research — it achieved the abolition of all taxes and levies on beekeepers through the Imperial Manifesto of 1775. This unprecedented “tax amnesty” allowed the industry to recover.

In 1830, beekeeping entered a new stage of development associated with the adoption of scientific methods. Pyotr Ivanovich Prokopovich (1775–1850), a prominent innovator and member of VEO, enacted a true revolution in the industry. In 1814, he invented the first frame (movable) hive in the world, which allowed beekeepers to inspect bee colonies without destroying the hive. This invention significantly increased the productivity of apiaries and laid the foundation for modern beekeeping.

“Until then, beekeepers were like the blind, unable to see what was happening inside the hive”, said P.I. Prokopovich about his invention in 1814.

Tourists at the apiary.
Photo: K. Bulla, before 1914



Monument to Peter Ivanovich Prokopovich, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine



With the support of VEO, in 1828 Prokopovich opened the first practical beekeeping school in Russia, located in the village of Palchiki (Chernigov province). The school became a center of education, where not only landowners but also peasants were trained — a rarity for that time. The course lasted two years and included both theoretical lessons and practical work in the apiary. Prokopovich's student, N.M. Vitvitsky, recalled: "He taught us not from books, but by the hive, saying, "Experience is the best teacher".

Interestingly, Prokopovich refused to patent his hive, believing that knowledge should be shared freely — this allowed his invention to quickly spread throughout the country.

If Prokopovich laid the practical foundations, then Aleksandr Mikhailovich Butlerov (1828–1886) — a great chemist and passionate beekeeper — developed the theoretical basis of the industry. As head of the Society's Beekeeping Commission, he organized large-scale research aimed at improving beekeeping methods.

Butlerov personally designed a standard hive that became a model for Russian beekeepers. He also conducted public practical sessions at apiaries, demonstrating how a scientific approach increases honey harvests. His book "The Bee, Its Life and the Main Rules of Expert Beekeeping" (1871) remained the principal textbook for beekeepers for many years.

Interestingly, Butlerov experimented with different bee breeds, studying their behavior and resistance to diseases. He was among the first to emphasize the importance of queen bee selection, which later became a standard practice in professional beekeeping.

Thanks to the efforts of VEO, beekeeping in Russia transformed from a cottage industry into a science-based sector of agriculture. By the end of the 19th century, Russia had become a world leader in honey production, and many methods developed with the participation of VEO are still in use today.

The Potato Revolution: How VEO Changed Russia's Dietary Habits

A special place among the Society's contributions to plant cultivation is its role in promoting the widespread cultivation of potatoes. The potato appeared in Russia during the time of Peter I, but for a long time it was met with suspicion by both peasants and landowners. Considerable effort was required before it became the "second bread".

The beginning of potato introduction (1765–1800)

The initiative for the widespread adoption of potatoes in Russia was personally undertaken by Empress Catherine II. As early as 1765, the Senate issued a decree "On the Cultivation of Earth Apples"⁶⁵, and the practical implementation of this task was assigned to VEO. According to the Senate's order, VEO, in collaboration with the Medical College, drafted the "Instruction on the Cultivation of Earth Apples". This instruction contained detailed recommendations on the cultivation and use of the new crop, and along with potato seeds, was distributed to all provinces. The Society developed a comprehensive program that included:

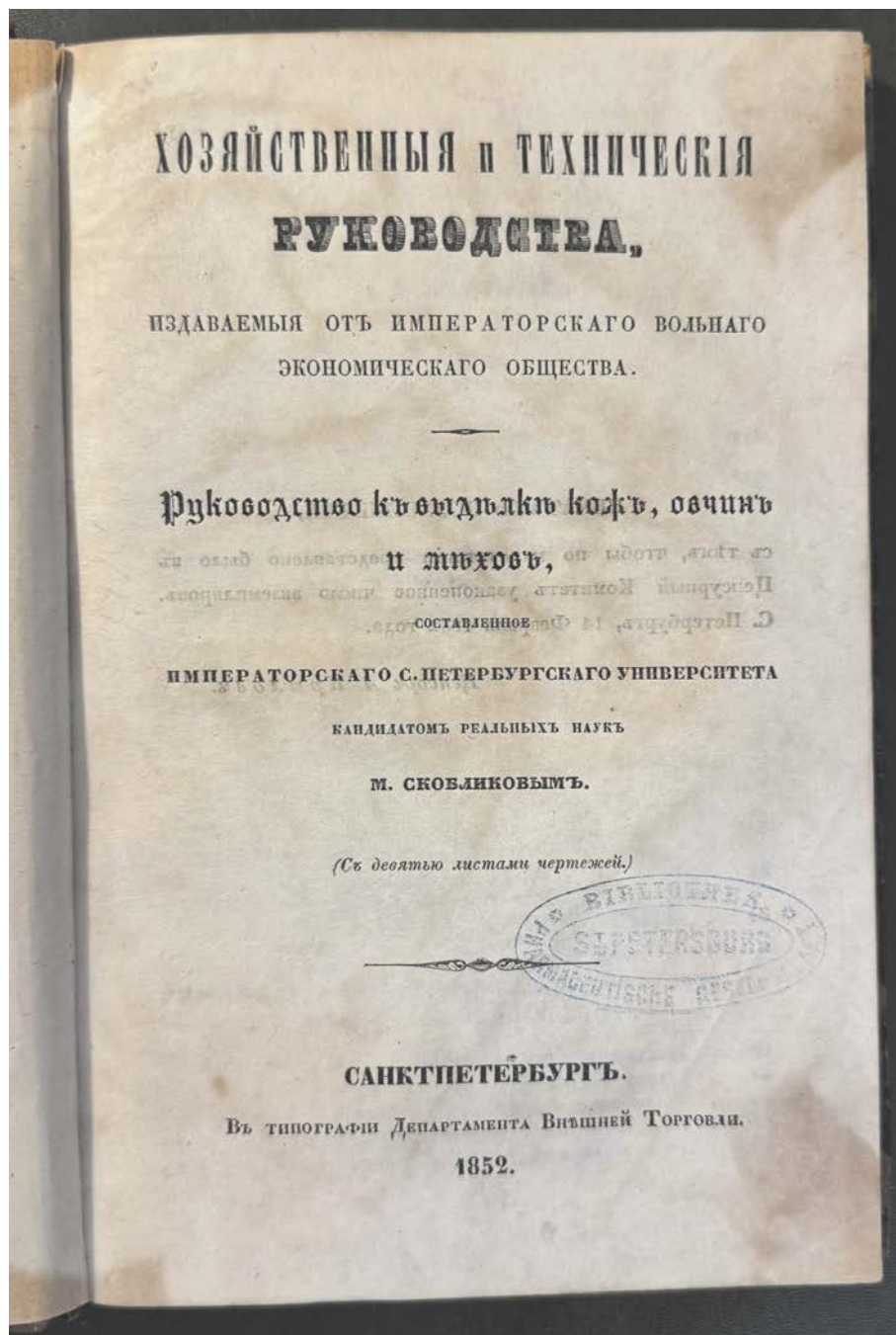
- issuance of instructions on cultivation;
- organization of experimental plots;
- creation of a system of incentives;
- promotion among the population.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. M. Butlers". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the oval portrait.

Alexander Mikhailovich
Butlers

According to the Senate's order, VEO, in collaboration with the Medical College, drafted the "Instruction on the Cultivation of Earth Apples". This instruction contained detailed recommendations on the cultivation and use of the new crop, and along with potato seeds, was distributed to all provinces



However, the initial results were contradictory. The 1767 report of VEO noted: *"In many areas, peasants greeted the new plant with suspicion, considering it harmful to health."*⁶⁶ The correspondence between VEO and the Novgorod landowner A.M. Guriyev is especially illustrative, as he reported: *"My peasants call the potato the devil's apple and refuse to plant it for fear of sin."*⁶⁷

The title page of the book published The Free Economic Society

A scientific approach by A.T. Bolotov

The turning point in the adoption of potatoes is associated with the activities of Andrey Timofeevich Bolotov — the first Russian scientist in agricul-



Potato harvesting

ture. In 1770, he published a fundamental article titled “On the Potato, or Earth Apples” in the Proceedings,⁶⁸ in which he detailed:

- the best varieties suited for the Russian climate;
- optimal soils;
- planting and care methods;
- storage methods;
- culinary uses.

Bolotov did not limit himself to theory. At his estate in Dvoryaninovo, he established an experimental plot where he conducted systematic experiments. In his diary for 1772, he wrote: “This summer I conducted experiments with potatoes on different soils and found that the yield on sandy soil was three times higher than on clay soil.”⁶⁹

“Potatoes replace bread in years of poor harvest... Experiments prove that from a dessiatine they gather up to 150 chetverts, whereas rye yields only 40”, said Andrey Timofeevich Bolotov.



Yakov Efimovich Sievers

A tremendous contribution to the spread of potatoes was made by members of the Society — Novgorod Governor Yakov Efimovich Sievers and Andrey Timofeevich Bolotov — who can rightfully be called the “fathers of Russian potato cultivation”

A significant role in the spread of potatoes was played by Yakov Efimovich Sievers, the governor of Novgorod (1764–1776). As a practical administrator and member of the Free Economic Society, he actively promoted potato cultivation in the Novgorod province, seeing it as a salvation from bad harvests. He:

- organized the free distribution of seed potatoes to peasants along with instructions for cultivation;
- encouraged landowners to grow potatoes using his administrative resources;
- reported on the results to VEO, helping to spread successful practices to other regions.

Thus, a tremendous contribution to the spread of potatoes was made by members of the Society — Novgorod Governor Yakov Efimovich Sievers and Andrey Timofeevich Bolotov — who can rightfully be called the “fathers of Russian potato cultivation”.

State support and results

By 1800, thanks to the systematic work of VEO, potatoes were cultivated in 42 provinces. By the mid-19th century, the potato had become a strategic crop. According to the Ministry of State Property, in 1844, 800,000 dessiatines were sown with potatoes, yielding 40 million poods⁷⁰.

Cheese Making: How VEO Established a New Industry

In the second half of the 19th century, Russia faced the complex challenge of integrating the freed peasantry into the market economy. The Free Economic Society played a key role in solving this problem by acting as a catalyst for the creation of a new industry for the country: cooperative cheese making. The initiator of this breakthrough was retired naval officer Nikolay Vasilievich Vereshchagin, whose project, supported by VEO, laid the foundation for a successful dairy industry in Russia.

Background: unsuccessful attempts

By the 1860s, cheese making in Russia was not an entirely new phenomenon. As early as the late 18th century, Prince I.S. Meshchersky invited Swiss cheesemaker Johann Müller to organize the first cheese dairies in Russia.

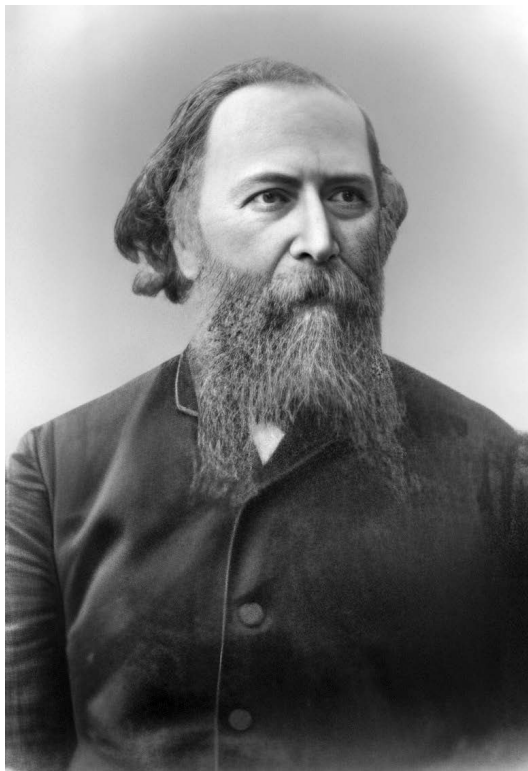
Manorial cheese dairies existed in the Vologda and Smolensk provinces, and the Appanage Department trained peasant cheesemakers. Additionally, the products of E.I. Lebedev were even supplied to the royal court.

However, all these initiatives remained localized and did not give rise to a mass industry. Their limited scope was due to semi-feudal relations, a narrow social base (primarily targeting manor estates), and a lack of a systematic approach to industry development.

Vereshchagin’s breakthrough and the decisive role of VEO

N.V. Vereshchagin’s project, presented to VEO in 1865, was fundamentally different from its predecessors due to its social orientation. Inspired by Swiss experience with artisanal associations, Vereshchagin saw joint milk processing as a way to overcome peasant poverty, increase the profitability of their farms, and develop cooperative principles. His goal was not merely cheese production but the creation of a new, efficient form of farming for private peasant households.

VEO became the main driving force and organizer of the project’s success, providing multifaceted support:



Nikolai Vasilyevich
Vereshchagin

Financial support:

Despite initial doubts among some members — the first vote on October 7, 1865, did not reach the required majority—VEO at an extraordinary meeting on October 21, 1865, unanimously granted Vereshchagin an interest-free loan of 1,000 rubles from the “Yakovlev capital”⁷¹ under strict reporting conditions. This amount became the startup capital for the first cooperative. In the following years, funding continued (including remuneration for Vereshchagin and funds for training apprentices), totaling over 11,000 rubles in the first six years. VEO also initiated and attracted funding from local self-government bodies, with the Tver zemstvo allocating 3,000 rubles in 1866⁷².

Expert evaluation and legitimization:

VEO engaged the best scientific minds to evaluate the project. D.I. Mendeleev played a key role. On behalf of the Society, he made two inspection visits (December 1868 and March 1869): he verified Vereshchagin’s sensational data on cow productivity in the farm of peasant Serov and personally inspected the cooperative cheese dairies, even postponing preparation of his report on the Periodic Law. His positive conclusions, presented at VEO meetings, were invaluable for the project’s reputation. The Society also involved Professor A.V. Sovetov and I.N. Shatilov, President of the Moscow Society of Agriculture.

Information and organizational support:

VEO published Vereshchagin’s articles in its Proceedings, including an in-depth account of Swiss cooperative practices from 1865–1866. These publications helped ignite interest and popularize the idea of cooperative cheese making among landowners, officials, and the broader society. The Society played a crucial role in forging connections with the government — it petitioned the Ministry of State Property — and permitted the use of its coat of arms on cooperative products (1867), which became a mark of quality and trust. VEO also petitioned for Vereshchagin’s decoration — Order of St. Anna, 3rd class, in 1869 — in 1870 elected him as an honorary member and awarded him a Gold Medal.

Strategic alignment:

Vereshchagin’s project seamlessly aligned with the new mission of VEO following the abolition of serfdom — to assist in shaping the economic life of the peasantry. The Society saw in it a practical tool for addressing this large-scale task.

A systematic approach and success

Under the auspices of VEO, Vereshchagin implemented not merely the creation of cheese dairies, but a **system for developing the industry**:

1. Training personnel: organization of the Dairy Farming School in Edimonovo (1871), training approximately 1,000 craftsmen.
2. Supply and sales: establishment of warehouses in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other cities; a workshop for manufacturing specialized utensils and equipment (1869).
3. Pedigree work and technology: support for breeding farms, exhibitions, trials to increase yields; introduction of advanced cheese-making and butter-producing technologies.
4. Funding: participation in founding savings and loan societies (from 1871).



At the cheese factory

Promotion of the experience: publishing articles and specialized newspapers (“Cattle Breeding”, “Herald of Russian Agriculture”).

The results were impressive: between 1866 and 1870, 13 cooperative cheese dairies appeared in several provinces at Vereshchagin’s initiative. From a craft industry, cheese-making evolved into a significant sector aimed at export and the domestic market, as vividly evidenced by Vereshchagin’s own data in his letter to Nicholas II (1904), describing the growth in product volumes and variety.

The success story of this project is a tale of effective partnership between an initiative-driven leader (Vereshchagin), a reputable civil society institution (VEO), local self-government (zemstvo), and the state. VEO served as an indispensable catalyst and organizer, providing the project with funding, expertise, connections, and legitimacy.

Crop Farming: From Clover to Sugar Beet

Since its establishment, VEO has prioritized the “continuous effort to cultivate useful plants”, initiating a systematic body of work tied to the key achievements of Russian agronomy in the 18th–19th centuries. “Major achievements associated with the Society’s activity in this sphere include the dissemination of key crops, grass sowing, organization of crop rotation farms, and the publication of numerous practical guidelines and manuals on crop production. This activity constituted a comprehensive mechanism for the introduction, adaptation, and diffusion of agronomic innovations, which had a profound impact on the economy of the empire.

Core of the System: Large-Scale Seed Distribution

At the heart of the Society’s strategy was an unprecedented, for its time, centralized seed distribution system. As early as the beginning of 1766, practically immediately after its foundation, the Society began considering the acquisition of sowing material. The first steps involved requests for wheat seeds from Siberia and flax seeds from Pskov. Subsequently, the sources of seeds expanded significantly:

Domestic expeditions: The Society sent members and correspondents on agricultural trips throughout the country to collect samples.

International supplies: VEO “began obtaining new crops from virtually all parts of the world”, securing from the government the right to import seeds and agricultural equipment duty-free from abroad.

Distribution was carried out “free of charge or at low cost” to VEO members and “practically to all Russian provinces”, always accompanied by cultivation instructions. This continuous activity was mainly financed from the Society’s own funds — about 50 rubles annually — as well as private donations — since 1778 the Society received 300 rubles yearly from the Kursk merchant Golikov, 50 of which were allocated for foreign seeds.

Forage Grasses: The Foundation of Crop Rotation and Clover as a Symbol of Progress

A special place in the Society’s activities was occupied by the introduction of grass sowing and crop rotation systems to replace the exhausting three-field rotation system. The Society actively promoted perennial forage grasses, viewing them as the key to increasing soil fertility and

Title of the price list
of N.V. Vereshchagin dairy farm



The central figure of this “grass revolution” was clover. VEO distributed its seeds, published detailed “Instructions on Clover Cultivation” in its Proceedings, and awarded medals to landowners who achieved success in its cultivation

developing animal husbandry. The central figure of this “grass revolution” was clover. VEO distributed its seeds, published detailed “Instructions on Clover Cultivation” in its Proceedings, and awarded medals to landowners who achieved success in its cultivation. Clover, along with timothy grass and alfalfa, was regarded as a crop capable of “providing good feed for livestock and strength for the soil”, which was economically more advantageous than fallow. Its wide adoption, thanks to the Society’s efforts, became the practical foundation for transitioning to a more intensive and productive crop rotation system, increasing the profitability of estates and supplying a fodder base for the growing livestock industry.

In 1824, VEO published a study titled “On the Benefits of Clover Crop Rotation”⁷³, which, using the example of Count Rumyantsev’s estate in the Kaluga province, demonstrated the following:

The three-field rotation system yielded 45 poods of rye per dessiatine, whereas the clover crop rotation produced 72 poods, while simultaneously improving livestock feed quality”.

By 1830, clover had firmly established itself in crop rotations across the central provinces. According to zemstvo statistics, in the Tver province, for example, the area cultivated with clover was:

- in 1825 — 5% of the arable land;
- in 1840 — 18% of the arable land⁷⁴.

Sugar Beet: Import Substitution and a New Industry

In an effort to reduce dependence on expensive imported cane sugar, VEO, from the early 19th century, actively promoted the cultivation of sugar beet. The Society also distributed its seeds, especially in chernozem (black earth) provinces, and published research on its cultivation and processing. A total of 20 poods of seeds were distributed along with detailed instructions across various provinces⁷⁵. The report for 1802 stated:

“In the Kiev province, estate owner Tereshchenko obtained 4% sugar from the beet, which corresponds to the average German standards.”⁷⁶

Articles frequently appeared in the Proceedings, describing European experience and economic calculations that demonstrated the profitability of beet sugar production for Russia. As noted in one of the Society’s reports, the widespread cultivation of sugar beets promised “significant benefits for the state by reducing the export of gold abroad”. However, mass adoption of sugar beet cultivation began only in 1820.

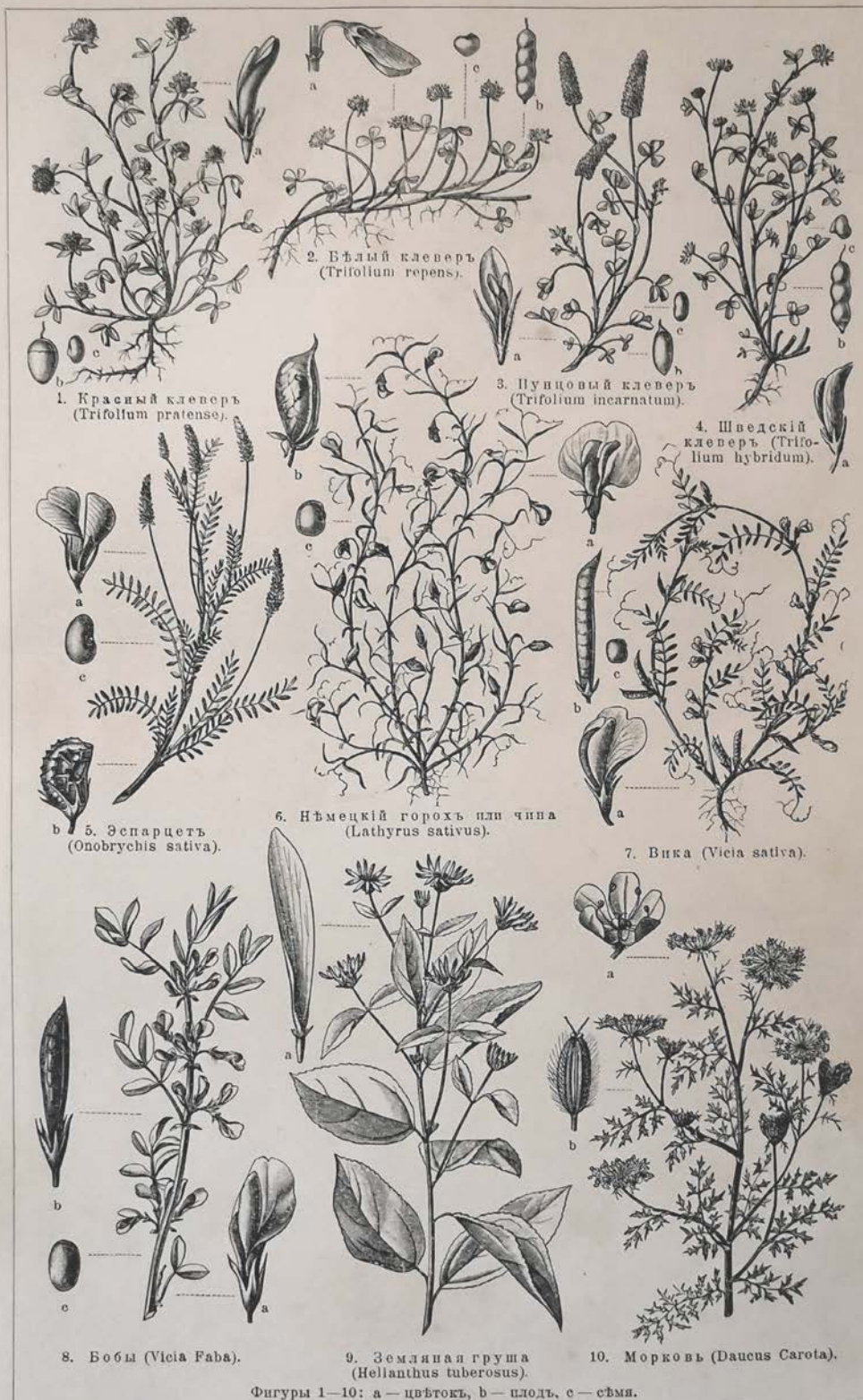
The activities of VEO played a significant role in laying the groundwork for the true “sugar beet boom” in Russia during the 1830s–1840s, when the construction of the first large-scale factories commenced, marking the beginning of a new strategic sector of domestic industry. It is worth mentioning that by 1840, there were already 15 sugar beet factories operating in Russia, with a total production capacity of 50,000 poods of sugar per year⁷⁷.

Economic Impact: From Seeds to Industries

This system provided a powerful impetus for agricultural diversification and the development of processing industries. It contributed to the spread of many useful crops in regions where they had previously been neglected or unknown. The most striking example is sunflower:

“In 1829, a Voronezh peasant received some sunflower seeds and planted them in his garden, thus initiating a new industry. Before him, almost nothing was known about this oil-bearing plant in the Voronezh

Кормовыя растенія I.



The gate and the signboard of the experimental seed station of the trading office on Myasnitskaya Street (Sushchevsky val). Photo: M. Pariysky, 1900s.

To deepen knowledge, VEO developed an experimental direction. Initially, experiments were conducted by Society members on their own estates



province, but within twenty years, it spread rapidly, and its cultivation became an exclusive activity of entire settlements in the black earth regions and the Volga region.

The rapid transformation of sunflower into a key industrial crop, which stimulated the construction of processing plants — potash factories in Saratov — vividly demonstrates the economic effectiveness of seed distribution. An important element of the system was feedback: recipients of seeds sent reports on successes and failures, allowing VEO to identify promising crops and methods for different regions and to reward successful practitioners with medals. This information was widely published in the Proceedings.

Scientific Foundation: Experimental Activities

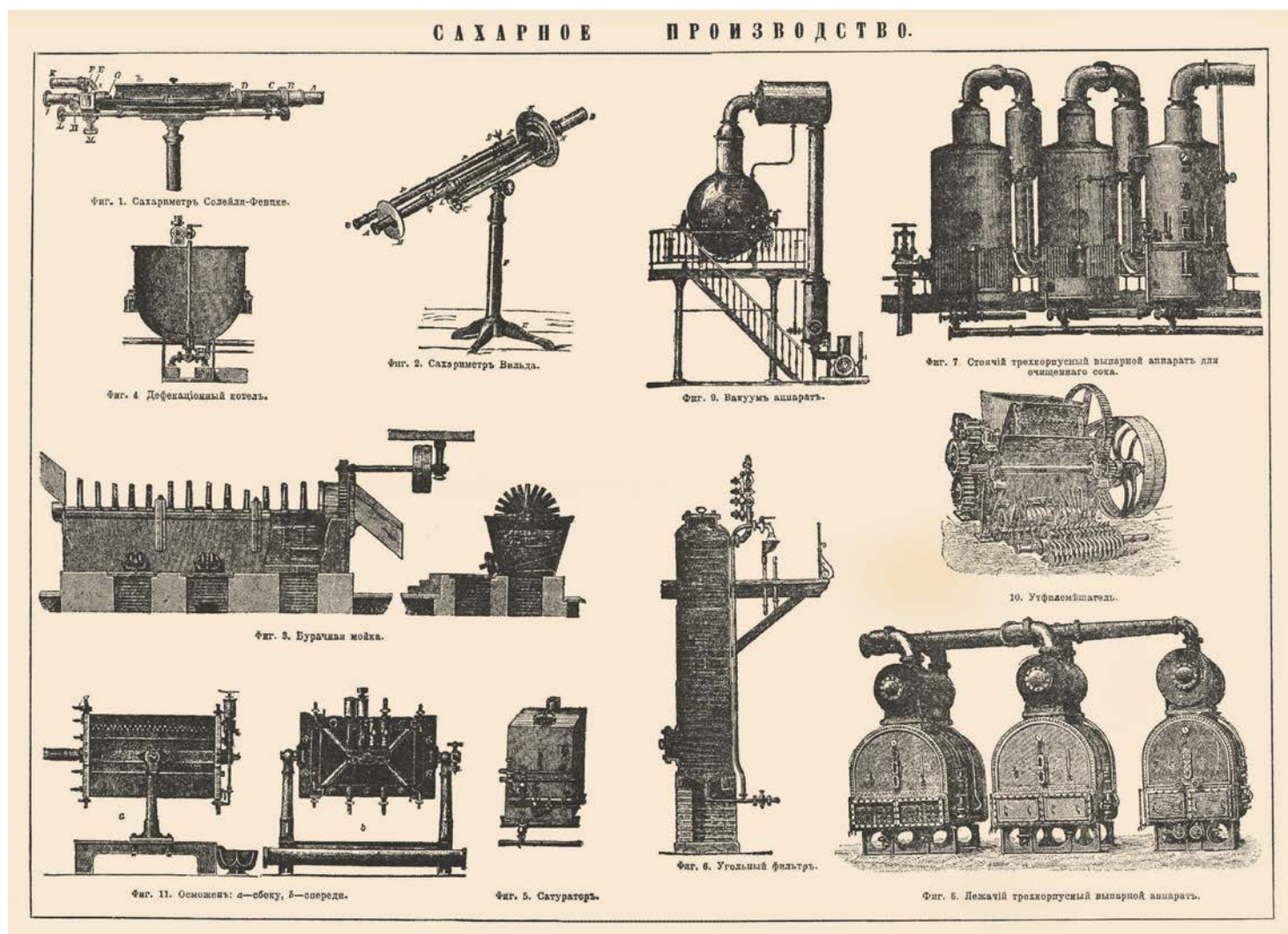
To deepen knowledge, VEO developed an experimental direction. Initially, experiments were conducted by Society members on their own estates. A significant breakthrough occurred in 1801, when, by the Imperial Order, VEO was granted management of an experimental plot on Petrovsky Island, which included a garden, a vegetable plot, and a greenhouse. A special commission worked there on the cultivation of forage grasses, fruit trees, testing fertilizers — ash, gypsum, peat — and the introduction of exotic crops — by 1803, their number exceeded 300. Although the plot was lost after 1836, this activity laid the foundations of applied agronomic science in Russia. The Society also made attempts to cultivate rice, maize, grapes, cotton, sugar cane, coffee, tea, American tobacco, and valuable timber species, about which it continually informed the public through its Proceedings.

Stimulating Industry: Fiber Plants and Technologies

VEO paid particular attention to plants used in the textile industry. In addition to flax and hemp (hemp stalks), the Society sought ways to improve their quality and expand their use. For example, a competitive task was announced with the challenge: “to find a way to make fibers of hemp soft and fine enough so that the resulting threads and cloth are not thicker or more expensive than linen”. VEO also actively supported technological innovations. In 1771, a medal was awarded to mechanic R. Glinkov for the invention of the first in Russia carding and multi-roving spinning machines for flax, driven by water power. It was noted that “Glinkov’s model, operated by two workers, replaced the labor of 30 people”. The description of the machine was published in the 18th issue of the Proceedings, and the Society contributed to its dissemination across Russia, monitoring and publishing all innovations in the processing of fiber plants.

Illustration of sugar production equipment from the Encyclopedic Dictionary Brockhaus and Efron

The systematic activities of VEO in breeding and distributing useful plants created a unique national innovative ecosystem in the agricultural sector for its time. The combination of large-scale seed distribution with instruc-



tional guidance, scientific and experimental work on Petrovsky Island, collection and analysis of practical experience through feedback, competitions, awards, and wide publication of results in the Proceedings allowed to:

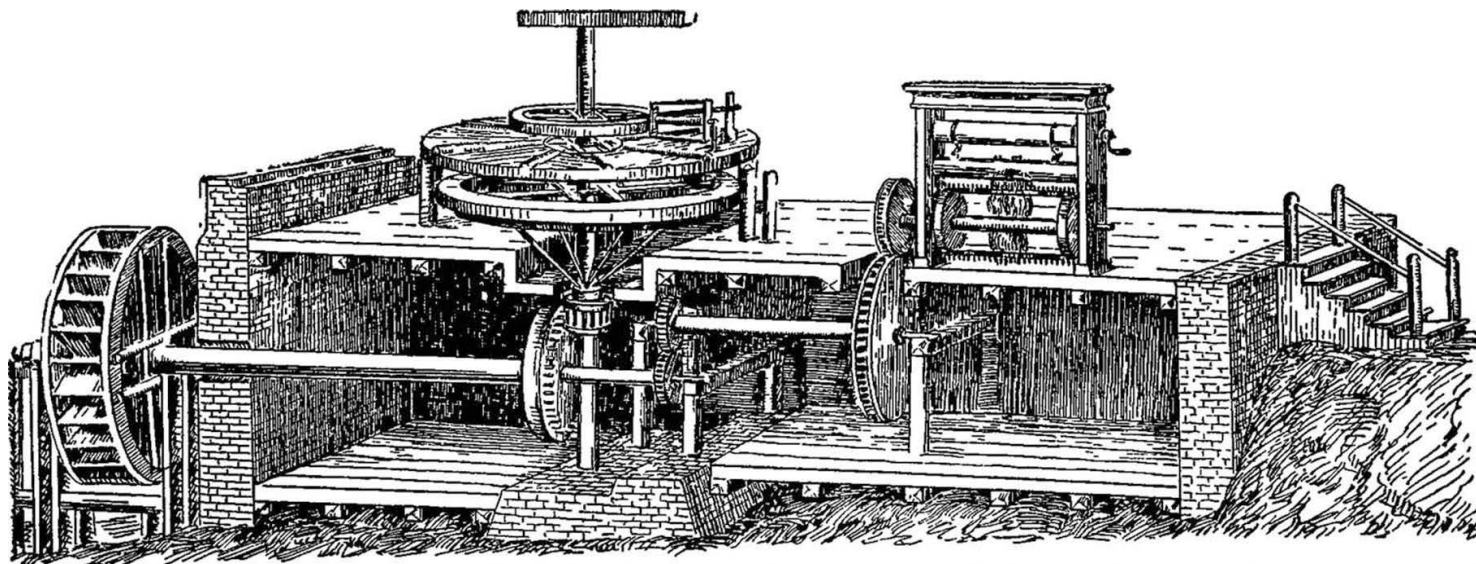
- **Significantly accelerate** the introduction and adaptation of new crops — sunflower, forage grasses, technical plants — compared to spontaneous dissemination.
- **Diversify** agriculture and increase its resilience to poor harvests by creating raw material bases for processing industries (oil presses, textiles, dyeing).
- **Lay the foundations** of a scientifically justified approach to farming in Russia.
- **Demonstrate the effectiveness** of partnership between enlightened public initiative (VEO), government support (free import, land allocation), and private philanthropy (donations) in addressing strategic economic challenges.

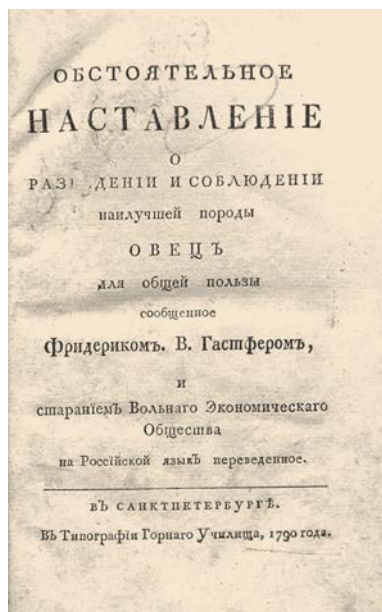
The persistent attention of VEO to useful plants became not just an agronomic practice but an effective mechanism of economic modernization, whose influence was felt for decades. The Society's experience remains a timeless example of a systematic approach to the dissemination of agricultural innovations — an enduring model of strategic progress.

Animal Husbandry: From Exhibitions to Industrial Farming

Continuously dedicated to improving Russian agriculture, VEO paid considerable attention to the closely related field of animal husbandry. In addition to articles, competitions, and medals, the Society published and distributed individual books on animal husbandry, and organized public free lectures. Great importance was also placed on developing methods for preventing and treating livestock diseases.

Mechanical Spinning machine
of Glinkova





The title of the book on breeding, published by the Free Economic Society in 1790.

The Society published and distributed individual books on animal husbandry, and organized public free lectures

Combating Epizootics: Scientific Approaches and Veterinary Education

The economic damage caused by mass livestock die-offs — such as plague and anthrax — was colossal, threatening food security and household incomes. VEO recognized the urgent economic need to combat these diseases.

As early as 1769, VEO entrusted I.I. Taubert with developing measures against “livestock deaths”, and in 1770 announced a competition for the best methods of prevention and treatment. A landmark event was the publication in 1784 of Dr. G. Orraeus’s work entitled “Experiments and Observations on Cattle Mortality”. His study, based on observations, contained revolutionary practical recommendations for its time — for example, continuing to milk sick cows to alleviate the course of the illness and prevent mastitis — and proposed specific treatment methods (solutions of sulfuric acid and copper sulfate), emphasizing the importance of early intervention and prevention. The support of his conclusions by the respected German scientist Johann Gleditsch lent additional weight to the work.

VEO actively disseminated knowledge through articles in its Proceedings, organization of public lectures, and distribution of special books and guides on veterinary medicine. This was of critical importance in a time of severe shortage of qualified specialists.

Recognizing the limitations of sporadic efforts, VEO initiated a fundamental shift — by 1839, with its active support, systematic training of veterinary professionals was launched, laying the foundation for the future national veterinary service.

Sheep Breeding: A Revolution in Wool Quality and Import Substitution

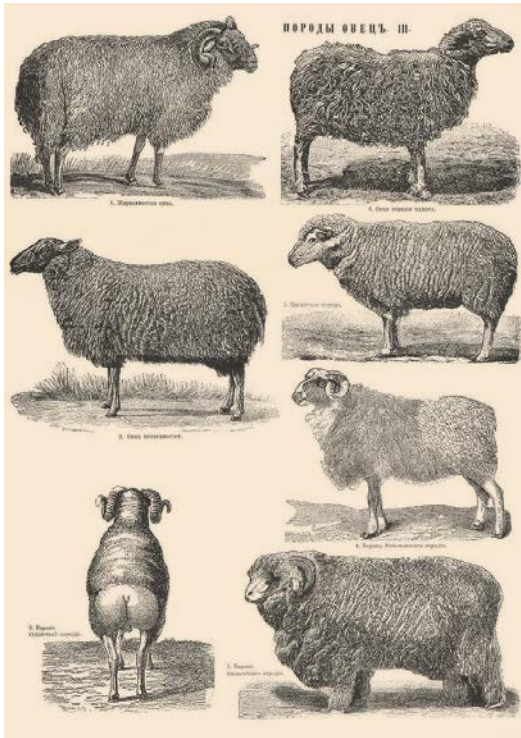
In the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, sheep breeding held great economic importance. Wool served as the primary raw material for clothing and footwear (felt boots, coats, tarpaulins). However, the low quality of coarse-wool breeds, which predominated in Russia, necessitated the import of expensive fine woolen fabrics, negatively impacting the trade balance.

VEO focused on improving sheep breeds. In 1774, VEO announced a competition: “Why is the wool from Russian sheep coarse, and how can it be improved?” Subsequent competitions (1788, 1792) aimed at obtaining longer and finer wool and at breeding fine-wool sheep.

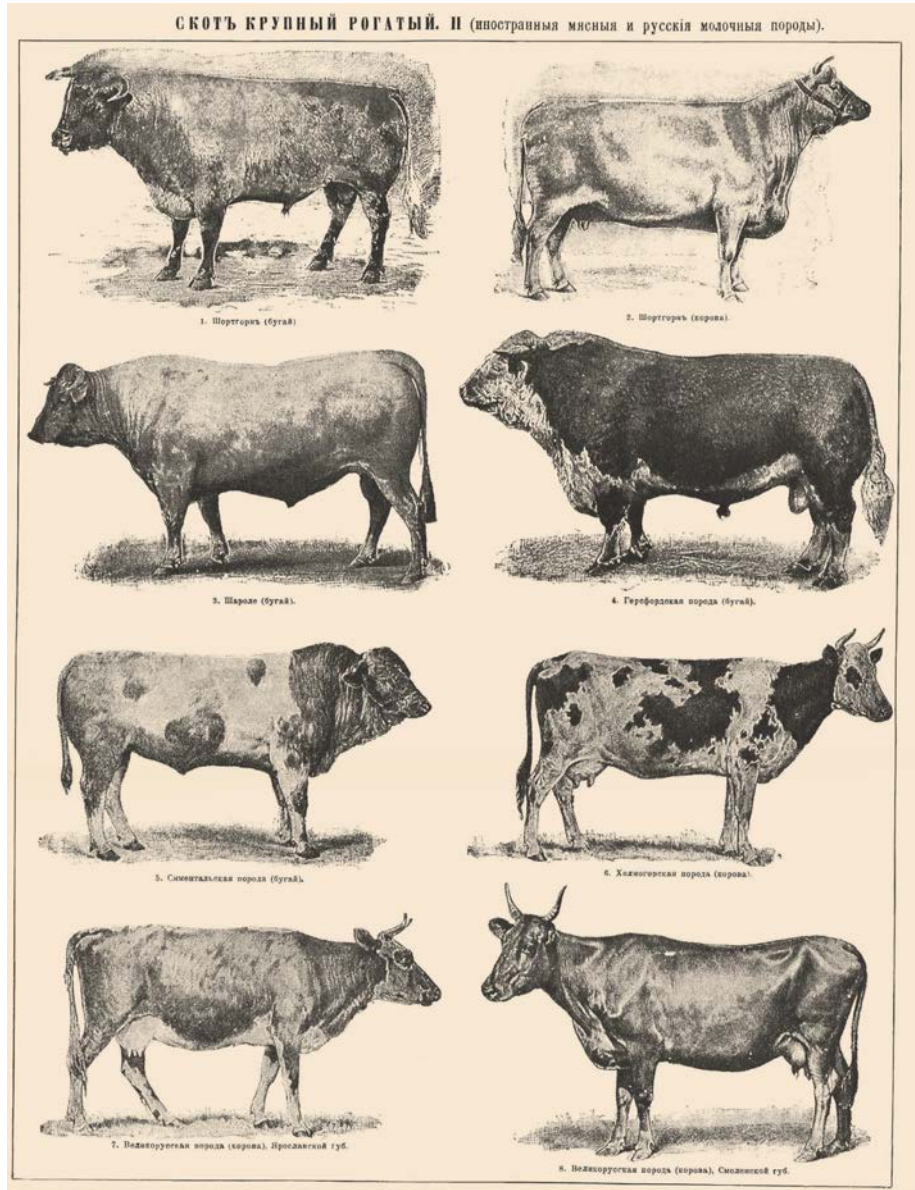
The awarding of a 35-chervonets medal to Mogilev merchant Y. Girsch in 1783 for his description of his sheep farm and for the sent samples of various woolen products became a notable example. Girsch purchased Spanish sheep rams in Pomerania and, through a miraculous stroke of luck — despite a law at the time prohibiting the export of this breed of sheep from the country under penalty of death — managed to bring them into Russia. By employing the method of absorptive crossing — successively crossing local ewes with purebred rams — he achieved a significant improvement in the quality of the wool in his offspring. His report became a valuable practical guide.

“The first lamb born from a Russian ewe mated with a foreign ram has good wool only on its neck and back; the second generation is incomparably better, and the third, as already noted, differs very little from the foreign breeds”, he wrote in his report prepared for the Society.

VEO published numerous articles comparing sheep breeds and husbandry methods. Among the most significant events were the translation and publication in 1790 of the foundational work by the Swedish sheep breeder, Baron F. Gastfer, “Detailed Instructions on Breeding and Main-



Illustrations of sheep and cattle breeds from the Encyclopedic Dictionary Brockhaus and Efron



taining the Best Sheep”, and the publication in 1791 of I.P. Osokin’s work, “Notes for Improving the Quality of Various Russian Wool Types”. Relying on experience, Osokin confirmed the superiority of imported breeds — the Spanish sheep yielded four times more high-quality wool — and proposed measures to improve local breeds and expand the best among them, such as the Kazan breed.

To accelerate progress, in 1802, VEO directly ordered from Sweden two pairs of Spanish sheep for breeding in the northern provinces. These efforts contributed to the gradual shift toward fine-wool sheep farming, reducing dependence on imports.

Cattle: Breed Improvement and Processing Development

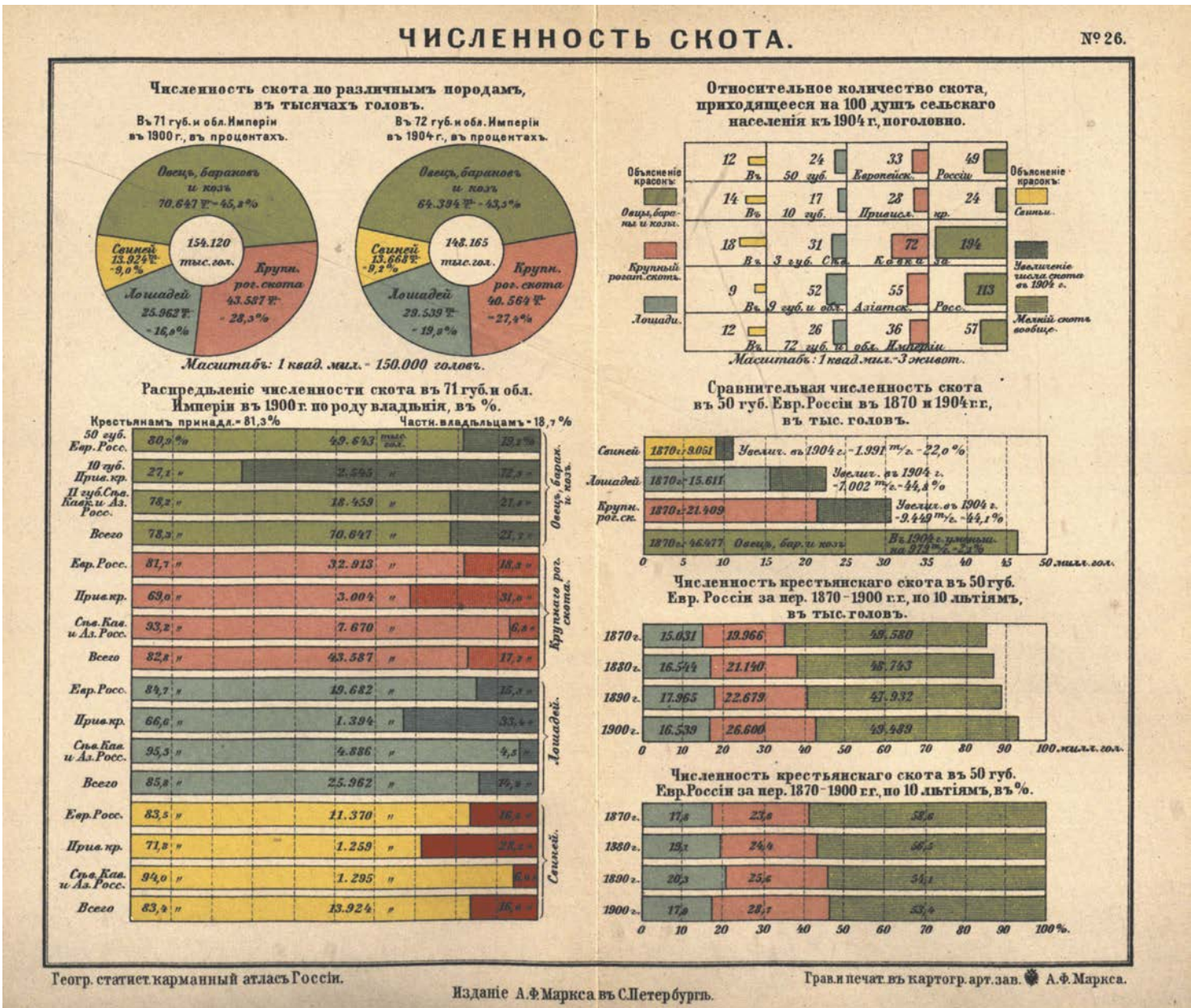
Unlike sheep breeding, VEO focused less on importing breeds for cattle and more on improving the productive qualities of local livestock and developing related industries.

A key tool in this effort was agricultural exhibitions. The first cattle exhibition in Russia, organized by VEO in St. Petersburg in 1849, became a powerful stimulus for the exchange of experience, showcasing the best specimens, and popularizing breeding methods. Subsequent exhibitions reinforced this effect.

The Society's activities contributed to the growth of dairy farming, butter production, and cheese making, increasing the profitability of peasant farms and creating new commercial sectors.

Thus, VEO played the role of a key catalyst in the modernization of agriculture in Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries, significantly influencing its development.

Statistical data on the number of livestock in the Russian Empire



Геогр. статист. карманн. атласъ Россіи.

Изданіе А. Ф. Маркса въ С. Петербургъ.

Грави. печат. въ картогр. арт. зав. А. Ф. Маркса.

As the Chairman of VEO, Count N.S. Mordvinov, noted in 1846:

“The work of our Society is measured not by volumes of literature, but by thousands of dessiatines of cultivated land, millions of poods of agricultural produce, and the emergence of new industrial sectors”.

By the mid-19th century, thanks to VEO:

- Potatoes became the second most important crop.
- Cheese making evolved into an export industry.
- The system of agriculture was modernized.
- High-yield livestock farming was established.

This experience demonstrates how a scientific approach, combining theory with practice, can create and transform entire sectors of the economy.

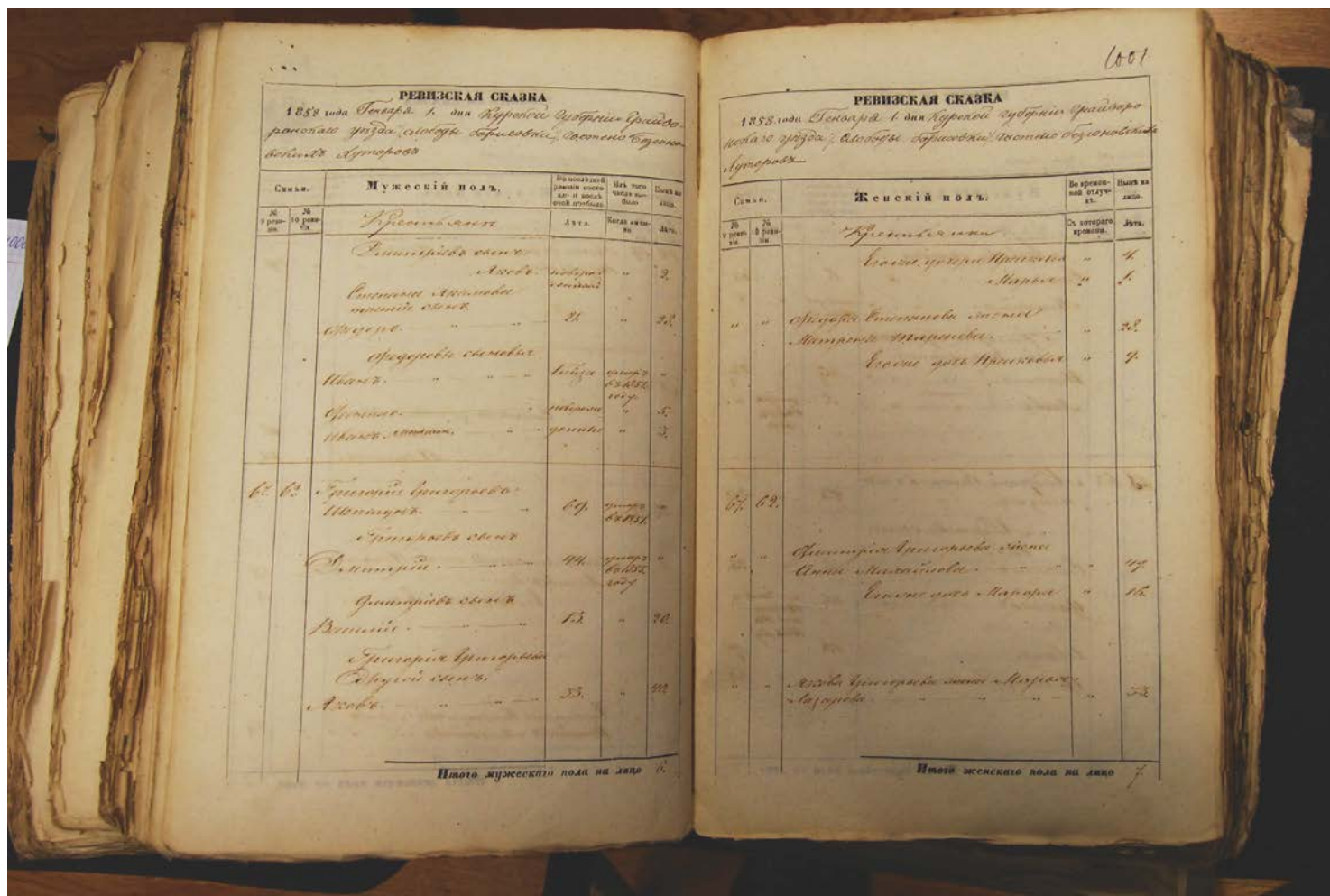
Veterinary training



SCIENTIFIC STATISTICS IN RUSSIA OWES ITS ORIGINS TO THE EFFORTS OF VEO

The last third of the 18th century in Russia was marked by the Age of Enlightenment. Empress Catherine II, captivated by the ideas of rationalism and progress, understood the necessity of a deep understanding of the resources and condition of the vast empire to implement effective policies. However, the existing system of data collection at that time was purely utilitarian and administrative in nature—“census records” for the poll tax and “statements” for the governors’ reports — focused mainly on fiscal indicators such as taxes and levies.

The Revisionist tale



Topographic map Rechansk
Viceroyalty

This system lacked a scientific foundation and systematic methodology. It was during this period that the Free Economic Society became a catalyst and a leading platform for the formation of statistics as an independent scientific discipline in Russia. The Society's efforts in collecting, systematizing, and analyzing data on the national economy laid the foundation for domestic statistical science, elevating it beyond mere clerical record keeping.

Statistics before VEO: the “Servant of the State”

Before the emergence of VEO, data collection in Russia had a centuries-old history, but it lacked a scientific approach.

- **Scribal and census books:** Land holdings and population figures (primarily dues-paying) were recorded mainly for tax purposes. These records were descriptive and unstructured, without systematic methodology.
- **Revisions (from 1718):** Periodic censuses of tax-paying population—“census records” — were conducted for poll taxes. The data covered only certain social estates and often contained inaccuracies due to accounting evasion.
- **Statements of governors and collegiums:** Reports on the state of affairs in provinces and various administrative sectors. The information was fragmented, often subjective, and lacked a unified methodological framework.
- **Absence of theory:** There were no concepts of statistical populations, sampling methods, averages, or measures of variability. Data collection was not aimed at deep scientific analysis to discern patterns and laws.

Statistics, at that stage, served as an administrative tool rather than a means of understanding. VEO became a bridge between this practice and scientific inquiry.



Andrey Andreevich Nartov

VEO: A Field for Experimentation and Systematization (1760–1800)

VEO, as Russia's first public organization, possessed unique opportunities:

- **Access to power:** Patronage by the Empress and high-ranking officials.
- **Connection with the provinces:** An extensive network of corresponding members across the empire.
- **International context:** Interest in European scientific advancements and correspondence with foreign scholars.
- **Questionnaires: The genesis of empirical data collection and methodological development.**

The Free Economic Society (VEO) became a pioneer in the development of statistical science in Russia, achieving a significant breakthrough in methods of collecting and analyzing economic data. As early as 1766, the Society launched a large-scale program of empirical research, which fundamentally differed from the practices of government institutions. While official agencies confined themselves to recording tax and fiscal indicators, VEO aimed to create a more comprehensive accounting system that included both quantitative and qualitative parameters of economic development.

A particular scientific value was attributed to the questionnaire methodology introduced by the Society. The surveys sent to the provinces contained not only standard items on sown areas and yields but also called for detailed descriptions of local agricultural practices, traditional land-use methods, and market mechanisms. This approach enabled the collection of a multidimensional picture of the country's economic life. For example, one of the survey questionnaires from 1790 focused on analyzing crop rotation practices in relation to local soil and climate conditions.

In 1766, VEO sent out its first survey form consisting of 65 questions, covering topics such as agriculture, settlements, daily life, and trade. It included a call for responses from governors, officials, and private individuals, among them agronomist Andrey Timofeevich Bolotov, who described the Kashirsky district. The responses were published in the early volumes of the Proceedings between 1766 and 1772.

The first VEO questionnaire titled "What questions should be answered when describing a province for the author of Russian Geography?" (compiled by A.A. Nartov) was not fully implemented but laid the foundation for the principle of systematic territorial description.

The **Topographical Descriptions**, initiated by VEO in the 1760s and 1770s, required members and correspondents to compile regional descriptions of provinces according to a unified plan — covering geography, population, economy, and crafts. These efforts resulted in the creation of the first extensive collection of comparative regional data.

"The Society, wishing to acquire accurate information about the state of agriculture and domestic construction in different regions of Russia, undertook to gather topographical descriptions of the provinces... These descriptions constitute a solid foundation for the statistics of the Russian state", stated the VEO report for 1766–1767.⁷⁸

VEO also organized surveys focused on specific issues: livestock breeding (1779), silk production (1780), bread prices (the 1790s), and others.



Peter Petrovich Semenov-
Tyan-Shansky

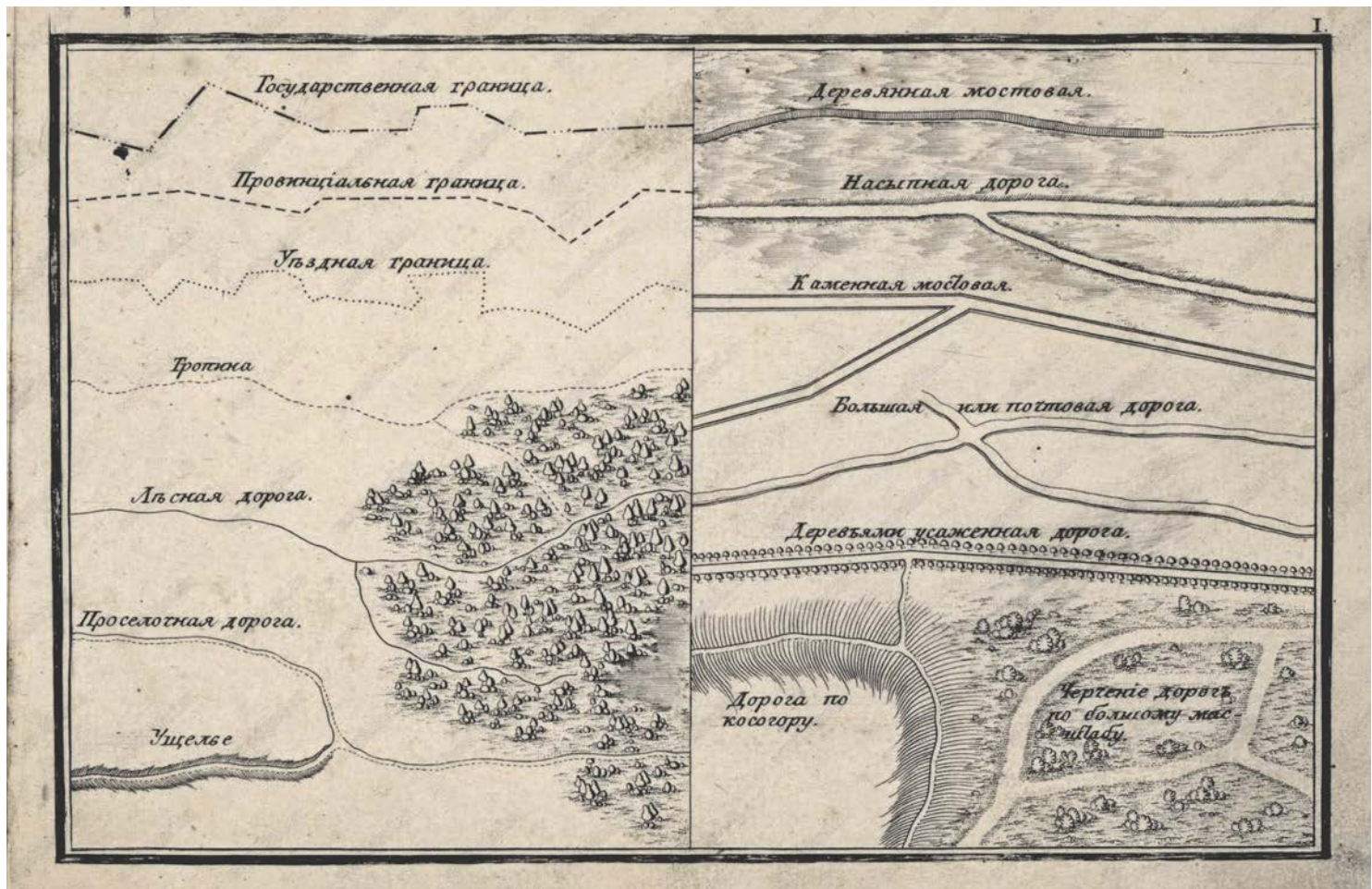
Topographic signs

This marked the development of targeted data collection practices. Scholars distinguish three major waves of VEO questionnaires:

- 1766–1784: covering agriculture, crafts, and trade;
- 1790–1815: a more in-depth analysis of agriculture, with emphasis on agricultural techniques and natural conditions;
- 1845–1853: including social aspects such as health, education, and daily life⁷⁹.

To overcome the limitations of the questionnaire method, VEO later organized **statistical expeditions** (in 1849, 1862, 1866, 1880, and 1884), for example, under the leadership of P.P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, aimed at directly studying and verifying data in various regions such as Kharkov and Chernigov provinces and others.

Key innovations: VEO developed fundamentally new standards for statistical accounting, marking the first systematic application in Russia of analyzing trends — comparing data across different years — and correlations between economic parameters. A classic example was the analysis of the relationship between grain yield and a set of factors such as plowing depth, types of fertilizers used (manure, ash), weather anomalies (“droughts, floods”), and the level of agricultural knowledge among peasants. The results were published in the Proceedings along with detailed tables.



VEO has developed fundamentally new statistical accounting standards, for the first time in Russia systematically applying dynamics analysis

An important innovation was the economic zoning of the country, introduced in the Society's publications. Instead of administrative divisions, the following zones were distinguished:

- grain-producing zones (Chernozem region),
- livestock farming areas (steppe provinces),
- fishing and hunting regions (non-Chernozem, northern provinces)⁸⁰.

This approach enabled comparative analysis of the efficiency of land use systems. The primary data came not only from official sources but also from information provided by a network of volunteer correspondents — by 1850, numbering hundreds of individuals including landowners, estate managers, literate peasants, and priests — reducing the risks of data distortion.

Competitions and Awards: Incentives for Research and Theory

VEO announced competitions for the best research on pressing economic and statistical topics. These competitions attracted top scholars and stimulated the development of methodologies:

- **Problems of crop yields, pricing, and farm efficiency**, which required data collection and analysis. The works of the winners (A.Y. Polenov, I.A. Tret'yakov, A.N. Radishchev) incorporated elements of statistical analysis.
- **A renowned competition in 1789 aimed to develop the "Draft for Informing the Russian State"** — essentially a project for a comprehensive census and systematic collection of statistical data. Although P.I. Chelishchev's project was never realized, it became a remarkable monument of statistical thought, foreshadowing future censuses.

"The purpose of this draft is to inform the Russian state... so that everyone may be aware of the condition of the state in all its parts... for a better understanding of the state's strengths and the means to increase them", said P.I. Chelishchev. The project "Draft..."⁸¹

Development of the Theoretical Foundations and Institutionalization (1800–1850)

The 19th century brought new challenges and an intensification of the Society's statistical work.

"Statistical Journal" (1806–1808) and K.F. Hermann

The creation of Russia's first specialized Statistical Journal, edited by academician Karl Fedorovich Hermann, was a landmark event. Hermann, the first professor of statistics in Russia — Pedagogical Institute, 1804 — was a key figure in the scientific establishment of the discipline.

The journal published:

- **Theoretical articles** defining statistics as the science of the state, based on mass observations and numerical data.

"Statistics is the science that provides knowledge about the condition of a state at a given time... Its subject comprises the powers of the state and the means to increase them". (K.F. Hermann, "A Brief Guide to the General Theory of Statistics"⁸²



Dmitry Petrovich Zhuravsky

- **Empirical studies**, including results from VEO questionnaires, topographical descriptions, and analyses of data on population, economy, and prices.
- **Critiques of sources**, emphasizing the importance of data reliability and a critical approach to information.

The journal consolidated the statistical community, set scientific standards, and established statistics as a recognized science.

Field Research and “Peasant Statistics”

VEO initiated extensive projects to study the condition of the peasantry — the main productive force and one of the most challenging groups to account for in population surveys.

One of the largest questionnaires was the 1847 survey on “rural improvement”, which contained hundreds of questions regarding land use, duties, income, crafts, and peasant life. Analysis of the responses allowed for a more realistic portrayal of village life on the eve of the abolition of serfdom.

“The collection of information according to this program... will present valuable data for assessing the current state of rural life in Russia”, as stated in the Report of the Society’s Agricultural Committee for 1847⁸³.

The practical focus of VEO research was vividly demonstrated in the development of methodologies **for household budget surveys of peasant farms**. The Society created a detailed accounting scheme, which included both tangible receipts and consumption. This approach allowed for the first time to identify the income structure of peasant households — mainly agricultural produce (60–70%) and crafts (20–30%) — as well as their expenses, such as taxes (up to 25%) and food (50–60%). Additionally, the surveys highlighted the role of in-kind exchange and the burden of duties⁸⁴.

Between 1840 and 1850, VEO pioneered research into **small-scale rural loan**. The analysis revealed that the availability of loans (at an annual interest rate of 6–12%) directly correlated with the increase in the marketability of farms (by 15–20%), the adoption of iron plows (by 30–40% in financed farms), and improvements in agricultural techniques⁸⁵. These findings laid the groundwork for the first rural credit cooperatives.

D.P. Zhuravsky, the future head of the Central Statistical Committee and an active member of VEO, developed methodologies for analyzing budget data and criticized the accuracy of official statistics.

“The true state of peasant farms... can only be understood through household descriptions based on precise land measurement and assessment of land holdings”, said D.P. Zhuravsky⁸⁶

The Influence of VEO on Government Statistics

The Society’s work did not remain in an academic vacuum; it had a direct impact on the development of the state statistical service.

- Many figures of official statistics — such as K.F. Hermann, D.P. Zhuravsky, P.I. Keppen, and K.I. Arsenyev — were active members of VEO.
- The Society’s experience in designing questionnaires, drafting descriptive programs, and processing data was used in establishing the Cen-

Pre-revolutionary infographics
on per capita income
in different countries



VEO initiated extensive projects to study the condition of the peasantry — the main productive force and one of the most challenging groups to account for in population surveys

tral Statistical Committee (CSC) in 1858 and in conducting the first scientific censuses — such as the urban census of 1863, led by P.P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, who was also a member of VEO.

- VEO often critically highlighted shortcomings in official accounting, pushing authorities toward reforms.

“The lack of uniformity in the methods of collecting information across provinces deprives their data of any comparative reliability”, stated the report of a VEO member to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the state of governors' reports for 1840⁸⁷.

Prominent VEO Statisticians and Their Contributions

- **K.F. Hermann (1767–1838):** Known as the “Father of Russian Statistics”. A theorist and founder of the Statistical Journal, he was a proponent of scientific methods. Notable works include “Universal Theory of Statistics” (1809) and “Statistical Description of the Yaroslavl Province” (1808).
- **E.F. Zyblovsky (1764–1846):** Author of popular statistics textbooks such as “Statistical Description of the Russian Empire...” (1808) and a systematic organizer of data. His works remained key sources of information about Russia for a long time.
- **P.I. Keppen (1793–1864):** Ethnographer and statistician. He organized data collection about the peoples, languages, and religions of Russia under VEO. He initiated and participated in developing census methodologies. He compiled the first scientific “Ethnographic Map of European Russia” (1851).
- **K.I. Arsenyev (1789–1865):** Geographer, statistician, and academician. He developed the idea of regional division of Russia based on statistical and economic indicators (“Outline of the Statistics of the Russian State”, 1818–1819). He emphasized the importance of statistics in identifying regional particularities.
- **D.P. Zhuravsky (1810–1856):** Expert in data analysis and critic of official statistics. His work “On the Sources and Use of Statistical Data” (1846) exemplifies a deep methodological approach. His data analysis of the Kiev province in the 1850s became a model.
- **V.P. Bezobrazov (1828–1889):** Economist and statistician. He conducted detailed studies of peasant budgets and the financial conditions of various social estates through the Society’s prism. Author of fundamental works on the economy of Russia.

By the mid-19th century, thanks to the efforts of VEO, statistics in Russia transformed from a collection of scattered administrative data into a recognized scientific discipline

Difficulties and Contradictions

The Society's path in the development of statistics was not smooth.

- **The issue of reliability:** Responses to questionnaires depended on the conscientiousness and competence of the respondents, who were often landowners or officials uninterested in providing accurate data on peasants and their incomes.
- **Bureaucratic resistance:** Provincial authorities often saw the Society's questionnaires as an unnecessary burden, responding perfunctorily or not at all.

“Governor N., in response to the Society's inquiry about bread prices, stated that this information had already been submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and therefore he did not find it convenient to collect it again”, as evidenced by the correspondence between VEO and provincial authorities, 1830⁸⁸.

Censorship and political context: Research, especially on the situation of the peasantry, often faced opposition from authorities. For example, D.P. Zhuravsky's work on the Kiev province provoked dissatisfaction among the local administration.

Limited resources: VEO depended on membership dues and donations. Large-scale projects, such as universal censuses, were beyond its capabilities without government support.

Theoretical debates: There was ongoing discussion about the subject of statistics — between the descriptive school (“political science”) and the “statistical method” school (analysis of mass phenomena).

The VEO Legacy: The Foundation Laid

The methodological contribution of VEO was based on two key principles:

- **Reliability and verification:** cross-comparison of data obtained from questionnaires, expeditions, correspondents, and experts; random spot-checks.
- **Comprehensiveness (systematic approach):** studying the economy in conjunction with social factors (“everyday life, customs”), natural conditions (“soils, climate”), and cultural aspects (“traditions, knowledge”).

This methodology became the foundation of zemstvo statistics.

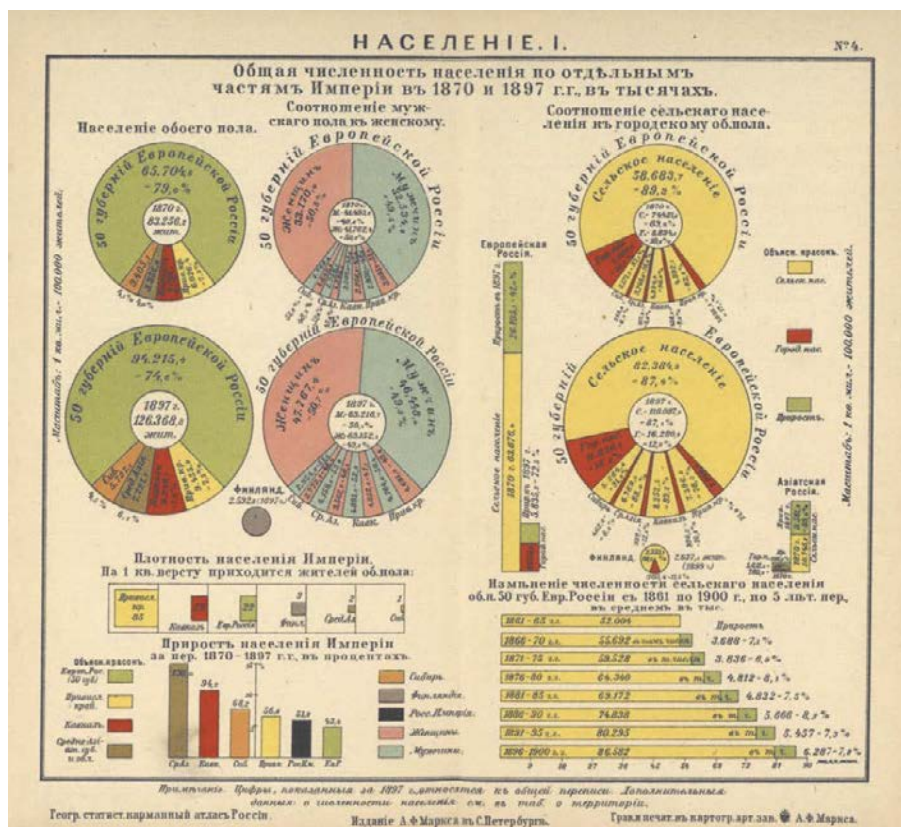
By the mid-19th century, thanks to the efforts of VEO, statistics in Russia transformed from a collection of scattered administrative data into a recognized scientific discipline:

- **Formation of a scientific paradigm:** Statistics became a science that studies mass phenomena of social life through quantitative methods aimed at uncovering patterns and laws.
- **Development of fundamental methods:** Techniques such as surveys, data systematization, grouping, calculation of averages, and elements of trend series analysis and spatial comparisons. Foundations were laid for demography, economic, and social statistics.
- **Creation of an empirical data corpus:** An enormous volume of information on the population, agriculture, crafts, prices, and budgets was collected over decades.
- **Training of personnel:** VEO became a breeding ground for the first state statistical service personnel (Central Statistical Committee).

- **Institutional foundations:** Scientific journals (“Statistical Journal”, “Proceedings”), competitions, and internal committees within VEO (Statistical Department) served as prototypes for future scientific communities.
- **Impact on society and authorities:** The Society’s activities promoted the spread of “statistical thinking”, emphasizing the importance of accurate data for governance and societal progress, especially on the eve of the Great Reforms.

VEO: The Cradle of Scientific Knowledge

The activities of the Free Economic Society in creating and developing statistics in Russia serve as a vivid example of how public initiative can become the driving force of scientific progress. VEO did not merely collect data — it developed methodology, theory, and infrastructure for a new science. Overcoming bureaucratic resistance, skepticism from contemporaries, and resource limitations, the Society transformed statistics from a “servant of the state” into a tool for understanding complex social and economic processes. It proved that understanding the country was impossible without precise measurement of its condition. The works of Hermann, Keppen, Zhuravsky, Bezobrazov, and many other figures of VEO, along with their perseverance in seeking truth through numbers and facts, laid an unshakeable foundation on which the entire edifice of Russian statistical science and practice in later centuries was built. The experience of VEO is a lesson demonstrating how public demand for knowledge, supported by scientific rigor and organizational will, can give rise to an entirely new sphere of understanding the world.



Statistical data on the total population, according to the census in 1870 and 1897

SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS OF VEO: PRACTICAL ANALYTICS IN SERVICE OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

The Society's activities extended far beyond the confines of meeting rooms and the publication of theoretical works. One of the cornerstones of its practical analytics was the expeditions — organized journeys undertaken by scholars, agronomists, and enthusiasts to directly explore the economic life, natural conditions, and farming practices on the ground. These field studies, initiated either by the Society itself or conducted under its auspices, transformed abstract economic concepts into tangible analytical material, serving as the foundation for recommendations, reforms, and the dissemination of innovative practices. The evolution of this activity within VEO reflects the emergence of a verifiable, evidence-based approach to economic research in Russia.

Expert Evaluation and Support for State Projects

From its earliest years, VEO positioned itself as a center of applied knowledge, actively participating in the study of the empire's resources. As A.I. Khodnev noted, *"From its very inception, the Society was invited to take part in scientific expeditions or to assist them."*⁸⁹ A special role in this was played by the Society's President, Count Vladimir Grigorievich Orlov, who simultaneously headed the Imperial Academy of Sciences. He personally initiated the joint efforts of VEO and the Academy in the search for mineral resources — particularly alum ores — within the framework of large-scale academic expeditions. An example of such coordination was the initial stage of the expeditionary detachments led by Peter Simon Pallas and Ivan Ivanovich Lepyokhin (1768–1774). Their research began precisely on the holdings of the Orlov brothers at the Samarskaya Luka — an extensive, yet-to-be-divided estate of the five brothers. Subsequently, thanks to their outstanding contributions to the study of Russia's resources, Pallas and Lepyokhin were elected members of VEO, highlighting the close ties between the two scholarly centers.

A vivid example of operational analytics was in 1768, when VEO, at the request of the Academy of Sciences, collected *"observations from its members to be sent to the expeditions conducted under the Academy's auspices"*. Notably, A.V. Olsufyev presented his *"necessary remarks"* directly at a VEO meeting.

Academician I. Lepekhin
and his travel notes



Practical examination of samples became the second most significant form of early analytics. In 1770, the President of VEO, Count V.G. Orlov — who was simultaneously heading the Imperial Academy of Sciences — handed over materials from the Orenburg province to the Society. *These included various clays, gagate, earth pigments, as well as salts and alum of different kinds, along with “salt extracted from saline herbs.”*⁹⁰ Professor E.G. Laxman examined the alum and confirmed its practical value: *“The alum discovered by Professor Pallas in the Orenburg province is not inferior in quality to foreign alum in any respect.”*⁹¹ On behalf of VEO, he compiled *“a comprehensive description... for publication in the Proceedings, so that this valuable invention might be made known to the public.”*⁹² In its early years, the Society’s work followed a distinct analytical cycle: investigation → validation of economic significance → publication for implementation.

It is notable that, largely due to the active stance of V.G. Orlov and close collaboration with the Imperial expeditions (led by Pallas, Lep-yokhin, and others), VEO assembled the largest mineralogical collection of that time — over 3,800 specimens within seven years. This achievement was made possible through systematic collection efforts by its members, governors (such as A.A. Volkov and I.B. Treskin), mountaineering expeditions, and enthusiastic amateurs (including Nartov, Kachka, and Shterich).

*“Thus, within a short period, the Society assembled... a vast mineral collection... composed entirely of voluntary donations.”*⁹³

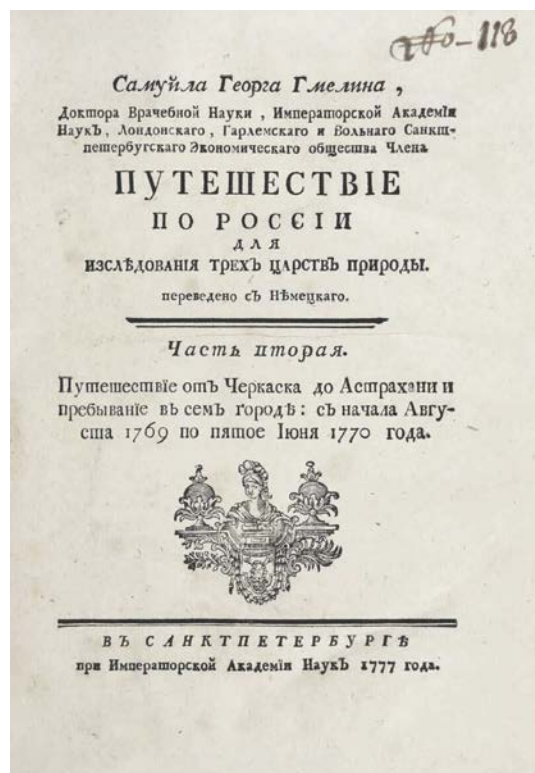
This collection served as a foundational resource for applied studies of Russia’s resource potential.

Methodological Shift: From Analysis to Expeditions

By the mid-19th century, VEO had accumulated enough experience to recognize the limitations of the questionnaire-competition method for studying the complex economic realities of Russia. In 1849, the Society organized **an expedition** led by P.P. Semyonov (the future Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky) and N.Ya. Danilevsky to conduct a comprehensive study of the black earth region *“in its agricultural, industrial, and local aspects”* (an idea that originated in 1842). However, due to *“some misunderstanding”*, the expedition was not completed.

On the eve of its centennial anniversary (1865), a debate unfolded within VEO regarding methods for studying the Russian economy. While Prince V.I. Vasilchikov proposed repeating the 1765 competition, the new President, E.P. Kovalevsky, drawing on experience, reached a fundamental conclusion: *“Given... that worthy works in response to such competitions very rarely appear... [he] proposed to achieve... this goal by a different, more reliable means, namely: to appoint expeditions from the Society composed of capable and knowledgeable individuals, who would engage in the research and description of Russia in economic terms over several years.”*⁹⁴ This proposition became a programmatic statement and marked a methodological turning point: *“The proposal was received by the Society with great sympathy”*. The central question of the jubilee congress of VEO was: *“What measures should be taken to study Russia in economic terms, and what role can the Free Economic Society as well as other scientific societies play in this endeavor?”*⁹⁵ VEO officially adopted expeditions as its primary analytical method.

The title of a book about a trip
to Russia by one of the members
The Free Economic Society



Ivan Fomich Borkovsky



The Grain Expedition of 1866–1873 as a Model of a Systematic Approach

A direct consequence of this methodological shift was the largest joint expedition undertaken by VEO and the Russian Geographical Society (RGS) to study grain trade and productivity (1866–1873). Its organization exemplifies the maturity of their analytical method:

- The coordinating committee divided Russia into eight economic regions (Oka basin, Upper Volga, Lower Volga, Ural and Kama, Northern Dvina, Western Dvina/Neman, Southwest, Don/Sea of Azov) and developed a comprehensive research program.

The results of the expedition were published in the Proceedings, becoming a model of applied economic analytics

- Leading scientists and statisticians participated in the work, including J.E. Janson, P.P. Chubinsky, V.P. Bezobrazov, V.I. Chaslavsky, and others.

The results of the expedition were published in the Proceedings, becoming a model of applied economic analytics:

- **I.F. Borkovsky** conducted a detailed analysis of the routes for delivering grain from Volga to St. Petersburg, price movements, and the efficiency of the Volga-Mariinsky route (*“Routes and Methods of Cargo Transport...”*, 1868; *“Trade Movement along the Volga-Mariinsky Waterway”*, 1874). His works included maps, price charts, and statistical tables on cargo flows.
- **P.P. Chubinsky** studied flax cultivation and grain trade in the North (*“Report on Flax Cultivation...”*, 1869; *“On the State of Grain Trade... in the Northern Region”*, 1870), offering *“practical recommendations”* for the development of local industries.
- **J.E. Janson** presented an encyclopedic study of grain trade in the Southwest, including monographs on Pinsk, Volyn, the Odessa region, and Crimea (1869–1870). The *Statistical Study of Grain Trade in the Odessa Region* — containing 75 statistical tables, an analysis of the influence of stock exchange rates on wheat prices (1860–1867), the dynamics of freight costs and bread exports abroad, and a map of the grain region — held particular significance. This work was awarded the Small Gold Medal by the Russian Geographical Society. Parallely, Janson conducted research on beet sugar industry, demonstrating the comprehensive nature of his approach.
- **V.I. Chaslavsky** (*“Grain Trade in the Central Region of Russia”*, 1873, 1875) skillfully utilized a variety of sources: data from railroads (the primary freight flow), long-term information on navigation along the Oka River, surveys of grain merchants, landowners, distillery owners, materials from zemstvo and municipal administrations, commissariat, and archives of previous researchers of the region (Tarachkov, Treskin). This comprehensive approach enabled him to analyze the transformation of the market following the advent of railroads, the influence of ports (Riga, St. Petersburg) on prices, and the development of large-scale cereal production.

The expedition motivated local research efforts: the Arkhangelsk and Irkutsk statistical committees, as well as the Nizhny Novgorod zemstvo administration, who voluntarily provided additional materials to VEO. The success of the project *“sparked discussions on investigating... various branches of agriculture through the organization of expeditions”*⁹⁶. In 1871, Vice President Mukhortov developed a program *“for the study of estates in terms of agriculture”*, laying the groundwork for future local studies by VEO, such as investigations into peasant landownership.

Black Earth Region Studies: The Expeditions of V.V. Dokuchaev

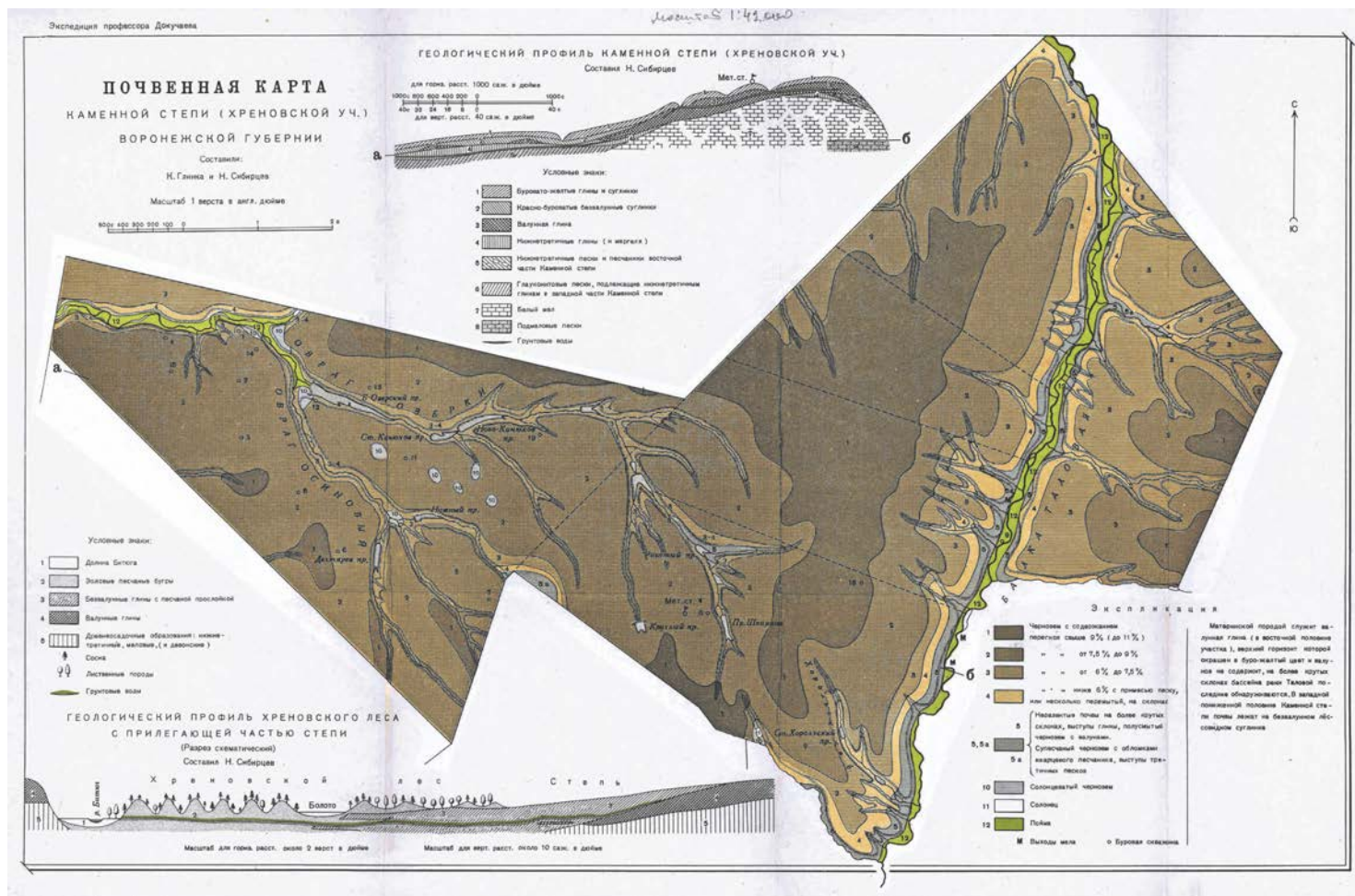
VEO consistently developed the direction of soil and agronomic research. After the failure of the 1849 expedition, it returned to the problem of studying chernozem — a strategic resource of the empire. The expeditions of **V.V. Dokuchaev** played a crucial role in this effort. His research, initiated under the auspices of VEO, represented a qualitatively new level of systematization and scientific depth.

- Dokuchaev did not merely describe soils; he studied the chernozem zone as a holistic natural and economic complex, examining the interrelations of soil cover, geological structure, relief, hydrology, climate, and vegetation. This was the world's first experience of such comprehensive natural zoning.
- His expeditions (1877–1881) were distinguished by a methodological rigor unprecedented for that time: the establishment of thousands of soil pits, detailed descriptions of soil profiles, extensive chemical analyses of samples, and precise geographic referencing of datasets. Dokuchaev introduced the concept of soil as a distinct natural body with its own developmental history.
- The primary goal was not merely scientific understanding but the development of measures to preserve and enhance the fertility of chernozem — the foundation of Russian agriculture. The causes of soil degradation (erosion, exhaustion) were investigated, and methods of rational cultivation, forest belts, and drought control were developed.

Professor Vasily Vasilyevich Dokuchaev and Alexander Vasilyevich Soviets with their students, participants of Dokuchaev's Poltava expedition, 1882–1883

The Society not only supported Dokuchaev's initiatives but also established a special *Soil Commission*, which became the organizational center and served as a continuation of his expeditions. VEO ensured the publication of the results, their discussion, and the dissemination of recommendations.





Soil map of the students Dokuchaeva, 1894

View of Yekaterinburg. From the album A trip through the Urals A.P. Kupfer



The outcomes were characterized as unprecedented. Dokuchaev's expedition and his school (including N.M. Sibirtsev, P.A. Kostychev, and others), under the auspices of VEO, had tremendous significance:

- **Scientific:** The creation of a classical doctrine on soil and zonation, and the laying of the foundations for genetic soil science.
- **Practical-analytical:** A comprehensive assessment of the state of chernozems was provided, threats to their degradation identified, and scientifically substantiated methods of rational agriculture developed for different zones.
- **Organizational:** Similar studies by zemstvos and private individuals were encouraged; a school of Russian soil scientists was established. Dokuchaev's expeditions became a model for future comprehensive natural and economic research.

The Role of the VEO Expeditions in Industrialization: From Alum to Coal

The Free Economic Society of Russia played a key role in import substitution. In 1804, Alexander Kupfer's expedition discovered alunite deposits in the Urals, reducing alunite imports by 80%. In 1840, geologist Grigory Helmersen mapped the Donbass region, demonstrating the value of its coal. By 1860, the region was producing, according to various estimates,

about half of the empire's coal, becoming the foundation of industrialization.

VEO proved to be an outstanding organizer and integrator. It mobilized scientific personnel, attracted funding from the state and private individuals, and established collaborations with other societies (such as RGS), ministries, and local authorities (zemstvos, statistical committees). The practical analysis of its expeditions, embodied in detailed reports, monographs, and recommendations, provided **an evidentiary basis for decision-making** in key areas such as transportation logistics, agricultural policy, trade development, and sustainable resource management. The Society's expeditions became a training ground for field-based analytical skills for generations of Russian scientists and laid the foundation for applied economic and agroecological research in Russia.



A map of the physical and geographical regions of European Russia. "Proceedings of the VEO", 1897

VEO AND ENLIGHTENMENT: EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AS THE FOUNDATION OF RUSSIA'S ECONOMIC PROGRESS

In the second half of the 18th century, as the Russian Empire entered the Era of the Enlightenment, the Society faced a pressing question: the urgent need to disseminate practical knowledge capable of transforming the lagging rural agriculture and manufacturing industry. Under these circumstances, the Free Economic Society undertook the mission of both intellectual and practical enlightenment for various segments of the population — from government officials to serfs. As the chief intellectual forum of the Enlightenment Era, the Society recognized that without broader education among the populace — especially among landowners and peasants — meaningful reforms in agriculture and industry would remain unattainable. The Society's activities in the field of education became a bridge between theoretical knowledge and its practical application, laying the foundation for future reforms.

The Enlightenment Mission of VEO: From Theory to Practice

Since its founding in 1765, VEO has assumed the role of an advocate for enlightenment, striving to convey to society the ideas of rational management and economic conduct.

The Society's educational activities were grounded in several fundamental principles, articulated by its founders and further developed by successive generations of members:

- The principle of practical utility — all knowledge must be grounded in reality
- The principle of accessibility — knowledge should be adapted for comprehension by various social strata
- The principle of systematic approach — education must encompass all aspects of economic activity
- The principle of empirical validation — all recommendations should be substantiated through experience

These principles were reflected in the Society's Charter, where it was particularly emphasized: *"The aim of this assembly is the dissemination within our Fatherland of knowledge beneficial for agriculture and estate management"*.



The building of the Moscow
Agricultural School

One of the earliest enlightenment initiatives was the publication of the Proceedings of the Free Economic Society. This collection featured not only scientific articles but also practical recommendations on farming, livestock breeding, and crafts. The Proceedings were circulated among landowners, officials, and even literate peasants, serving as instructional manuals for those seeking to improve their methods of management.

“The goal of the Society is not only to gather useful knowledge but also to promote its dissemination for practical use... so that each individual, taking into account local conditions, can derive the greatest benefit”, as stated in the report of VEO for 1768.

The Society paid particular attention to the translation and adaptation of foreign literature. Between 1760 and 1780, works by European agronomists such as Albrecht Thaer and Arthur Jung were translated and published, enabling Russian landowners to familiarize themselves with cutting-edge methods of agriculture. These editions were accompanied by commentary explanations on how to apply foreign expertise within Russian conditions.

Schools and Courses: Education for Peasants and Managers

In addition to publications, VEO actively engaged in organizing educational institutions.

Among its many educational initiatives, a particularly notable achievement was the establishment of the Tsarskoselskaya Agricultural School — the first specialized agricultural educational institution in Russia. Opened in 1779 by the personal decree of Catherine II, the school embodied the practical realization of the Society’s enlightenment ideals.

The school was organized according to a fundamentally new model for Russia:

- The duration of study was three years.
- Enrollment was conducted among peasant children aged 12 to 14.
- Education was free of charge, with pupils’ maintenance financed by the Society.

The program comprised four core components:

1. Theoretical basis of agriculture (20% of the time).
2. Practical training in the field and on the farm (60%).
3. Craftsmanship training (15%).
4. General subjects (5%).

A distinctive feature of the school was its integration of traditional knowledge with the latest agricultural techniques. The curriculum included:

- Soil science and principles of crop rotation.
- Fundamentals of livestock management and veterinary science.
- Designing and utilizing agricultural tools and equipment.
- Basics of land reclamation.
- Elements of accounting and farm management.

Our chief task is to demonstrate that agriculture is a science, requiring not only hands but also intelligence”, as stated in the school’s teacher instructions, 1781⁹⁷

To support the educational process, VEO established:

- An experimental field spanning 15 dessiatines with various soil types.
- A model farm with exemplary livestock.



The cover of the book of the Free Economic Society for Education

- Workshops for manufacturing agricultural tools.
- A meteorological station, one of the first in Russia.

The teaching staff of the school was comprised of members of the Free Economic Society (for example, A.T. Bolotov delivered a course on horticulture), invited foreign specialists, and graduates of the initial classes of the school.

As Ivan Komov, the school's director, noted in his report, "Students acquire knowledge about tools and methods that will become widely adopted in 5–10 years".

"In addition to reading and writing, students are trained to cultivate the land, care for livestock, and produce simple tools, so that in the future they can become useful members of society", as stated in the 1774 report of the Committee for Rural Schools of the Free Economic Society⁹⁸.

The Tsarskoselskaya School established by the Society became a model for agricultural education in Russia.

In 1790, the network of such schools expanded to provincial centers. By 1825, under the patronage of the Society, there were 12 agricultural schools that graduated over 800 specialists.

Zemstvo school



In an effort to promote educational activities, the Free Economic Society regularly announced competitions for the best instructional manuals and guides on farm management

Another prominent example of the Society's activities was the opening of the School of Agriculture, Mining, and Forest Sciences in St. Petersburg in 1796 (also known as the School of Agriculture and Mining Sciences). It was founded by Countess Sofia Vladimirovna Trubetskaya (born Golitsyna) with active support and co-financing from the Free Economic Society. The school's unique program combined advanced agriculture, forestry, and basic mining sciences (geology, mineralogy), addressing the needs of managing extensive industrial-agricultural complexes. The Society undertook the responsibility of covering the students' expenses and established two special scholarships for orphans, demonstrating its commitment to social and educational missions.

The Society also paid particular attention to teaching methodology. In 1783, it published the "Instruction for Teachers of Agricultural Schools" — the first specialized methodological manual on agricultural pedagogy in Russia.

The Free Economic Society became the first institution in Russia to initiate systematic training of agricultural specialists. From 1780, a system of internships was established, whereby the most capable students were sent to the leading farms for practical training for 1–2 years.

At the same time, the Society performed the functions of an assessment center. In 1798, it introduced the practice of issuing "Certificates of Agricultural Knowledge", which effectively became the first diplomas for agronomists in Russia.

Competitions and Awards: Incentives for Knowledge Dissemination

In an effort to promote educational activities, the Free Economic Society regularly announced competitions for the best instructional manuals and guides on farm management. For example, in 1792, a competition was held to create a "Brief Guide to Agriculture for Peasants". The winner was agronomist Ivan Komov. His work, written in simple and accessible language, was distributed across dozens of provinces and was even used in parochial schools.

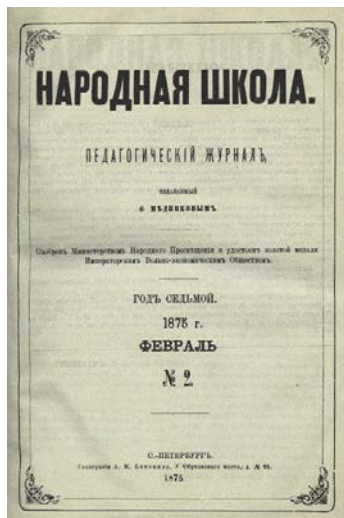
"This essay should be free from excessive scientific jargon, so that even an illiterate peasant can understand it and apply it in his farming", as stated in the terms of the 1792 VEO competition.

Popular Science Lectures and Public Readings

Public events organized by VEO became a special form of educational activity:

- Weekly Economic Talks (since 1770)
- Provincial Readings (since 1785)
- Village Gatherings with Demonstrations of New Tools (since 1792)

These events were held in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other major cities, attracting not only aristocrats but also merchants, townspeople, and even peasants. The topics of the lectures ranged from the latest methods of soil cultivation to fundamentals of economics and trade. The events enjoyed great popularity. As a contemporary observer noted, "On Thursdays, the hall of the Free Economic Society would fill with so many people that some had to stand in the corridors, listening to speeches about new methods of flax cultivation or livestock management".



The title of the "Pedagogical Journal", which was awarded the gold medal of the Free Economic Society

Free National Library in the village of Berskoe



A particularly significant phenomenon was the series of outreach lectures conducted by members of the Society. Professor Vasily Severgin, between 1803 and 1812, made 15 trips to the central provinces, delivering 87 public lectures on mineralogy and its applications in agriculture.

These lectures became an important tool for popularizing scientific knowledge and fostering public interest in economic issues.

Interaction with Government Structures

The educational activities of the Free Economic Society were not limited to public initiatives. The Society actively collaborated with government institutions:

- Development of curricula for agricultural schools (1803)
- Creation of methodological manuals for military settlements (1817–1825)
- Expertise on textbooks in natural sciences (since 1828)

Especially fruitful was the cooperation with the Ministry of State Property in the 1830s and '40s, when Society members participated in establishing the system of state agricultural schools.

"Without fundamental knowledge of agriculture and economics, it is impossible to raise a generation capable of transforming the national economy", as stated in the 1836 report by the Society to the Ministry of Education.

Scientific and Methodological Work

The theoretical foundation of the educational activities of the Free Economic Society was built on fundamental research in pedagogy. In 1804, a special commission of the Society developed the "Guidelines on Teaching Agriculture", where for the first time in Russia, the principles of professional agricultural education were formulated:

- Integration of theory and practice
- Consideration of local conditions
- Gradual increase in complexity of material
- Use of visual aids in teaching
- Continuity of education

These principles became the basis of the entire system of Russian agricultural education in the 19th century.

The Literacy Committee at the Free Economic Society: A Driver of Public Education

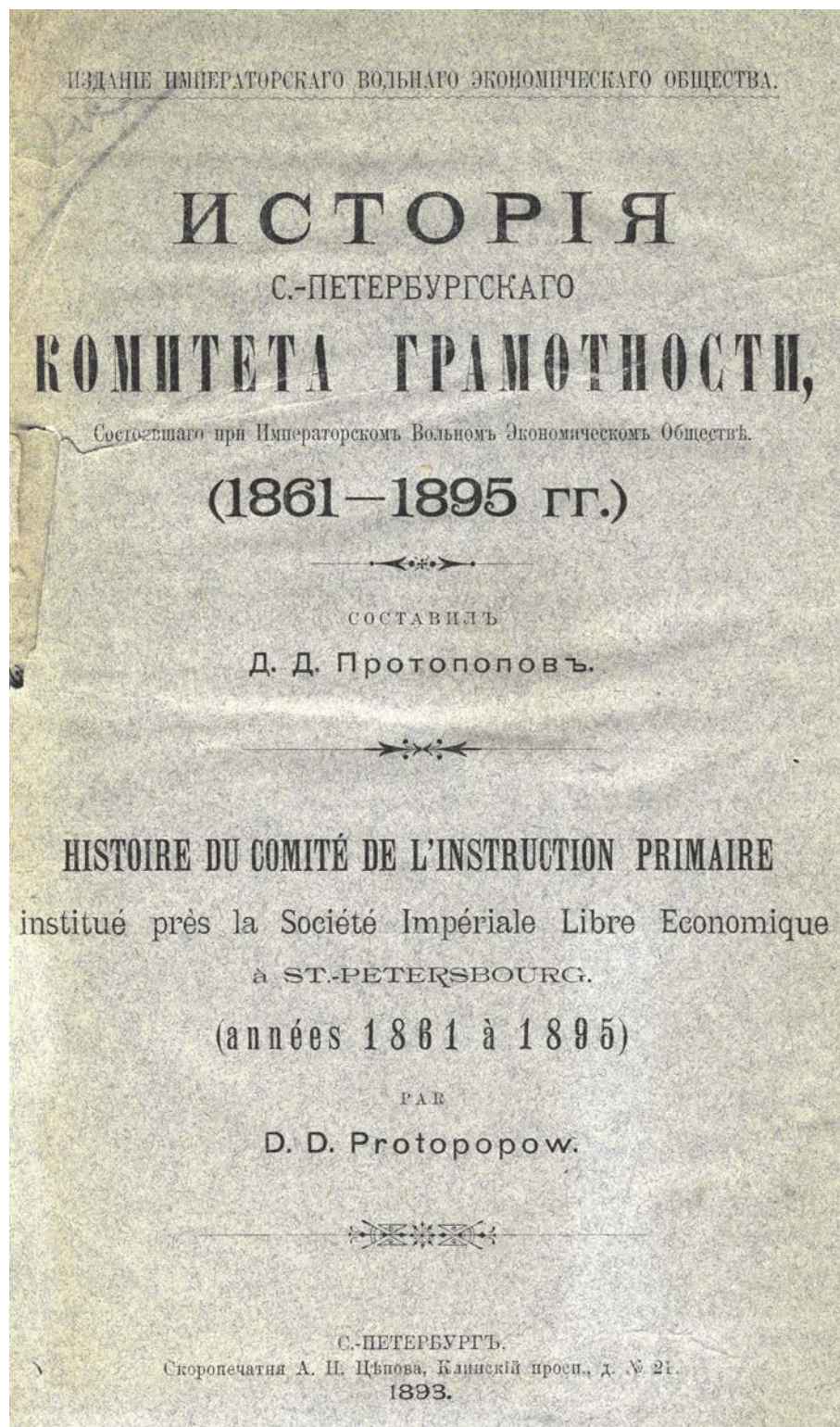
The abolishment of serfdom in 1861 radically changed Russia's socio-economic landscape. Freed peasants faced the need to adapt to market relations, which required basic knowledge and skills. The existing network of primary schools was catastrophically insufficient. Recognizing this need as crucial for economic progress, the Society established the Literacy Committee in the same year. Its primary mission was to assist provincial figures in developing elementary popular education.

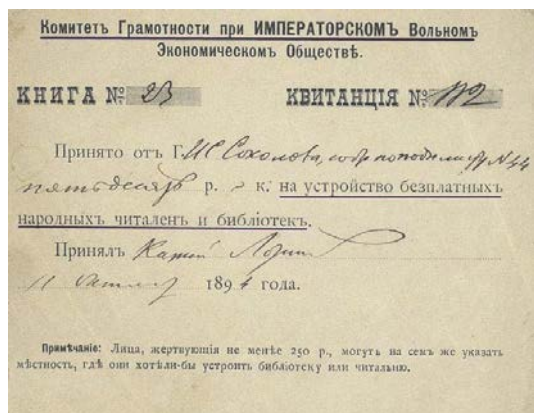
The activities of the Committee were diverse and had a distinctly practical orientation, extending well beyond simple literacy instruction:

- **Mass publishing and literature distribution:** This became a hallmark of the Committee's work. It purposefully published inexpensive, acces-

The title of the book about the history of the Committee literacy, created under the Free Economic Society

The existing network of primary schools was catastrophically insufficient. Recognizing this need as key to economic progress, VEO in 1861, it established the Literacy Committee





Receipt from the Literacy Committee for accepting donations for the establishment of free public reading rooms and libraries

sible books for popular reading— primers, textbooks, popular brochures on agriculture, hygiene, natural sciences, history, as well as adapted fiction. The scale was remarkable: during the decade of 1880–1890 alone, the Committee published 650,000 books and distributed — free of charge or at a nominal price — one million copies. Over its 35 years of activity (until its closure in 1895), the Committee published over two million copies of educational literature, reaching the population through parochial schools, craft schools, and charitable institutions.

- **Establishment of a library network:** Recognizing that literacy without access to books loses its meaning, the Committee became a pioneer in organizing rural libraries for adults. It actively encouraged zemstvo administrations to establish such libraries and supplied them with literature. This was an investment in continuous self-education and the dissemination of useful knowledge.
- **Training pedagogical personnel:** The Committee understood the critical importance of qualified teachers. It initiated specialized training for rural female teachers. In 1863, the first women’s teacher school was opened in St. Petersburg under the Committee’s auspices (unfortunately closed by authorities in 1866). This initiative reflected a desire to address the staffing problem “locally”.
- **Humanitarian and social mission:** The Committee’s activities were not limited to enlightenment during peacetime. During the catastrophic famines of 1891–1892 and 1893–1894, it actively organized the collection and delivery of funds, grain, and other humanitarian aid to affected provinces, demonstrating its connection to the needs of the people and its capacity to mobilize community resources.
- **Development of education strategy:** The Committee engaged not only in current work but also in strategic planning. In 1890, it actively worked on questions of introducing universal primary education in Russia. A practical step in this direction was the organization of the first Nationwide Census of Primary Schools in 1895 — a large-scale survey aimed at providing an objective picture of the state of popular education for future reforms.

The Literacy Committee under the Free Economic Society became a unique phenomenon in post-reform Russia — a public organization that transformed the educational idea into a powerful practical force. Its activities, rooted in a deep understanding of the link between education and economic progress, encompassed publishing, infrastructure development (libraries), personnel training, humanitarian aid, and strategic planning. The millions of books published, thousands of schools and libraries supported, represent a tangible contribution to the formation of the nation’s human capital. The closure of the Committee in 1895 was not only a blow to public education but also a reflection of the limited possibilities for public initiative under autocratic rule. Nevertheless, its historical significance lies in the recognition that investments in basic education form the foundation of economic modernization and social development.

The Emergence of Commercial Education in Russia

One of the key areas of activity for the Free Economic Society, especially relevant during the late 18th and 19th centuries amid the growth of trade and industry, was the development of commercial education. The Society understood that successful economic progress was impos-



Prince Peter Georgievich
Oldenburg

The building of the Moscow
Commercial College



sible without professionally trained personnel in trade, finance, and enterprise management. A prime example of this was its active participation in the creation of the Moscow Commercial School, which became a notable achievement in this sphere.

The Society consistently advocated for the necessity of specialized educational institutions to prepare business people.

A decisive moment was in 1772, when the renowned industrialist and philanthropist Prokofiy Akinfievich Demidov addressed the Empress with a proposal to establish a school in Moscow funded by his own means (a sum of 205,000 rubles — a colossal amount for the time) to educate the children of merchants and middle-class citizens.

Thus began the history of the Moscow Commercial College. The President of the Free Economic Society, Count I. Chernyshev, played an active role in the work of the commission that approved the plan for establishing the college, and he personally participated in developing the college's first Charter⁹⁹. The curriculum, formed with active involvement from the Society, combined general education subjects (mathematics, geography, history) with strictly practical disciplines: commercial arithmetic and accounting, commercial correspondence, commercial law, and commodity science. Particular attention was given to the study of foreign languages, primarily German and French, as tools of international trade.

A fortunate event for the College was the appointment in 1840 of Prince Peter Georgievich Oldenburgsky, President of the Society, as the chief director. One year later, on June 28, 1841, a new Charter for the College¹⁰⁰ was approved. Like the 1799 Charter, the College was to remain not only a specialized institution but also a class-specific institution. It was meant to “educate merchant youth, and partly middle-class youth, for all kinds of commerce and to prepare knowledgeable and skilled accountants, controllers, and clerks for trading houses, factories, and industrial enterprises” (Article 14 of the Charter).

The role of the Society in this process cannot be overstated. The Society was not merely an advocate for commercial education; it actively participated in the creation of the first specialized educational institution of this profile in Russia.

The educational activities of the Free Economic Society laid the foundation for the development of the entire system of vocational education in Russia. Many principles developed by the Society, such as:



Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy
at a children's school

- the connection between education and practice;
- continuous learning;
- consideration of regional characteristics;
- and the combination of various forms of education

remain relevant in modern pedagogy. The Society's experience demonstrates that genuine transformations in the economy are only possible when accompanied by parallel development of the educational system, which takes into account both global achievements and national traditions.

The Society's work in the field of education is a unique example of successful collaboration among the scientific community, government authorities, and civil society for the progress of the entire country. As Vice President of the Society, Nikolay Mordvinov, wrote in 1840, *"Enlightenment is the very foundation upon which a stable economic prosperity of the state can be established"*.

VEO: ON THE FRONT LINES OF FAMINE

One of the first major crop failures that drew the Society's attention occurred in 1833–1834. During this time, the Society organized fundraising efforts for the starving and issued recommendations for local food reserves

Throughout its entire activity, the Imperial Free Economic Society played a key role in the development of agriculture and in combating famines, which periodically affected various provinces of the Russian Empire.

As early as the first decades of its existence, the Free Economic Society drew attention to the problems of poor harvests and famine. In 1780, the Society actively promoted the introduction of potatoes as a crop capable of reducing peasants' dependence on grain. Despite resistance from traditional agriculture, by the mid-19th century, potatoes had become an essential part of the diet, helping to mitigate the effects of crop failures.

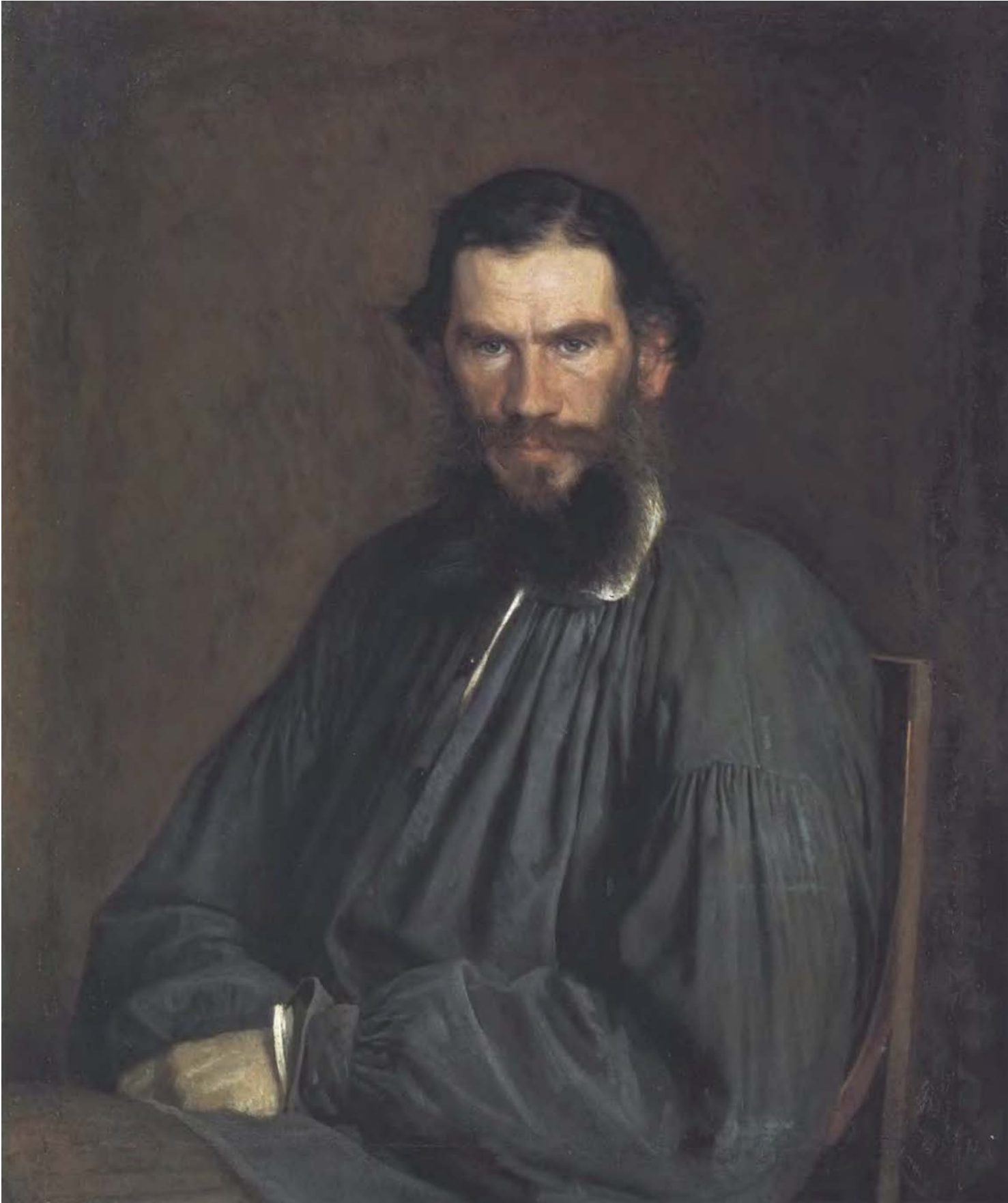
In the 19th century, famine became a frequent occurrence due to the imperfections of the agrarian system, climatic fluctuations, and socio-economic problems.

One of the first major crop failures that drew the Society's attention occurred in 1833–1834. During this time, the Society organized fundraising efforts for the starving and issued recommendations for local food reserves. Articles on methods of grain preservation and alternative sources of nutrition were published in the Society's Proceedings¹⁰².

Starting from 1870, devastating droughts and dry spells repeatedly destroyed peasant crops across the Russian Empire, leading to catastrophic grain harvest failures — grain being the main food product and export at the time. Combined with the economic backwardness of peasant households, the imperfection of communal agriculture, and other economic factors, these crop failures often resulted in severe famine in the affected regions.

“Due to a three-year crop failure, the harvest has decreased and, as it shrinks, it has fallen to half of what it was before; and nothing has grown on this half, so the peasant has no bread of his own and almost no earnings, and for what he does earn, he is paid at the old prices — such as for reaping, which previously averaged 10 rubles per dessiatine, but this year was paid at 1 ruble 20 kopecks. As a result, the peasant produces only 7 to 10 kopecks per day. The current year, already not only a poor harvest but also a famine year, will bring previously wealthy peasants to need, and nearly nine-tenths of the entire population will be driven into poverty and hunger”, said Leo Tolstoy in his article on the famine in Samara in 1873.

The Imperial Free Economic Society (IVEO) was unrivaled in the country in portraying the full picture of grain production and, equally important, the movement of grain from producing provinces to consuming regions and further for export abroad. In the late 1860s and between 1871 and 1874, the Society's special expeditions, guided by Baron P.L. Korff, examined the grain industry in the Volga region and the Urals from an economic perspective. As a result of these expeditions, agricultural statistics based on rigorous scientific methods began to be organized nationwide from 1873 to 1875¹⁰³. Thus, the Society had the clearest and most in-depth understanding not only of the causes of food crises but also of the degree of local populations' need during crop failures, and consequently, of the volumes and nature of the assistance required for affected provinces. Later, economic studies on the causes of famine, such as the works of Professor



On the left: portrait
of a Lion Nikolaevich Tolstoy.
By I.N. Kramskoy, 1873

The national canteen,
arranged by S.S. Veshnyakova
in the village of Novaya Sloboda
of Lukoyanovsky district

A.I. Skvortsov, laid the foundation for the development of the famous Stolypin reforms.

During the large-scale famine of 1891–1892, which affected a significant portion of the empire, a broad charitable movement for helping affected peasants emerged in the country. All social strata, including the imperial family, participated in this aid effort. The effectiveness and popularity of charitable societies assisting the starving were based on their ability to quickly open food stations in the affected provinces using collected funds, bypassing the inevitable bureaucratic procedures of the government apparatus.

“A characteristic feature of the rural population, which makes up about 80% of the total population, is “periodic official famines... and constant, silent malnutrition”. Major crop failures and famines, affecting a quarter, a third, or even half of European Russia, were observed in the years 1885, 1889, 1891, 1892, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1901 (and 1905). Over the past 20 years, European Russia has experienced more or less serious famines nine times, that is, approximately once every two years. In other words, the average Russian citizen is only full every other day,” said A.A. Volsky, member of the Council of Congresses of Industry and Commerce, report “Productive Forces and Economic-Financial Policy of Russia” (1909).

As mentioned earlier, because IVEO collected detailed statistical data from local sources, the Society’s Board had a thorough understanding of both the overall picture of famine-related disasters and the specifics of how charitable organizations operated in the regions affected by crop failures. From this, it seems likely that the Society’s strategy for charitable aid was formed — to abandon sending large missions of its own and instead to provide serious, and most importantly, stable financial assistance to organizations capable of establishing effective systems for distributing aid and food locally. Thus, the Society avoided creating confusion in the distribution and assignment of regions to various organizational missions, did not overload the administrative apparatus of the provinces with unneces-





Folk canteen in the village
Pralevka



People's canteen in the Pochinki

sary bureaucratic work, and, on the contrary, by continuously monitoring the situation and making swift, substantial financial injections, significantly increased the efficiency of existing charitable units and missions. To assist local organizations and various inspections, IVEO typically involved members of its local branches, which also resulted in considerable savings on travel expenses.

In the early 20th century, the most severe crop failures that led to famine occurred in 1905–1906 and in 1911. The epicenters of these calamities were the extensive Kazan and Samara provinces.

The crop failure of 1905–1906, which triggered a new famine in the Volga provinces, was exacerbated by the fact that it coincided with the First Russian Revolution a year earlier. During 1906, when these provinces were engulfed in uprisings, rebellions, and banditry, the entry of various societies and organizations was restricted. Once relative order was restored toward the end of the year, a major campaign to assist the starving was launched. The picture of the famine itself was very grim. As M.M. Gran, an official of the Samara Society for Helping the Famine Victims, wrote, *“The crop failure of 1906, following the partial failure and famine of 1905–1906, plunges the population of the Samara province into terrible hardship. Its scale is colossal, regardless of all available data.”*¹⁰⁴ The village priest of Stepanovka in the Buzuluk district described the summer days of 1906 as follows: *“The situation is hopeless; people are eating only once a day, and some peasants have abandoned their children and left the village; others are subsisting on sour milk without bread.”*¹⁰⁵

Due to the extremely difficult conditions in the affected provinces, IVEO established its own Famine Relief Committee, which was responsible for collecting information on the famine and economic indicators, as well as funding local charitable organizations.

As early as November 1905, on the initiative of the Kazan noblewoman Natalya Petrovna Kupriyanova, a Committee for Public Assistance to the Starving was organized. On January 8, 1906, Kupriyanova’s organization was transformed into the Kazan branch of the Famine Relief Committee under the Imperial Free Economic Society¹⁰⁶.

In November 1906, the Kazan branch of the Committee included the “University Ladies’ Circle, organizers of canteens and bakeries for the starving populations of the Kazan province”. This group was organized by the wives of professors of the Kazan Imperial University¹⁰⁷. Additionally,

VEO established its own Famine Relief Committee, which was responsible for collecting information on the famine and economic indicators, as well as funding local charitable organizations

the Muslim Famine Relief Committee, led by the prominent Kazan public figure, Mullah A. Apanaev¹⁰⁸, became part of the branch.

The first canteen was opened by the Committee for Public Assistance to the Starving on November 25 in the Tetyushsky district, followed by two more on December 10, 1905. With the beginning of financial support from IVEO by spring 1906, there was a sharp increase in the number of open canteens and the population being fed. The total number of people that the branch planned to provide with food aid using funds from the Imperial Free Economic Society was 5,662 people. This figure is slightly lower than the number of those fed in May and June — 5,739 people (3,366 and 2,373 respectively), possibly because the remaining recipients were fed through other sources of funding. By June 5, the number of beneficiaries had increased to 10,000 people¹⁰⁸.

Table. Assistance provided by the Kazan branch of the Famine Relief Committee under the Imperial Free Economic Society in the Tetyushsky district of the Kazan Province (November 1905 — August 1906)

Month	Distribution of food rations	
	Number of settlements	Number of people
November 1905	2	96
December 1905	3	196
January 1906	6	607
February	7	677
March	5	304
April	18	3,792
May	32	9,328
June	47	13,615
July	64	19,716
August	2	1,000
Canteens	Number of canteens	Number of people
Adults	6	401
Children	3	206
Total	9	607

Compiled on the basis of: The Proceedings of the Imperial Free Economic Society, 1906, Nos. 4–5 (July–October), Vol. 2, p. 11.

The peak of food aid occurred in July of that year. Officially, all organizations providing aid to the starving — governmental, zemstvo, and public — were supposed to cease their activities by July 15, 1906, as a new harvest of spring crops was expected. Therefore, aid to the needy residents of the Tetyushsky district in August of the same year appears insignificant¹¹⁰.

Despite the anticipated spring harvest, at a general meeting of the IVEO members on September 13, 1906, it was decided to continue assistance into the following food year. By early November 1906, up to 5,800 people in the Kazan province were receiving aid daily in canteens and bakeries. By the end of that month, aid had expanded to nearly 9,000 peasants across 7 districts of the province¹¹¹.

Additionally, women who came from villages to the city were provided with employment assistance. This involved organizing sewing of clothing, which was distributed to needy peasants. A total of 1,255 items were sewn. The work took place in July–August 1906. Women working on these sewing projects were issued 2,019 lunches and 4,038 portions of tea with bread¹¹².

In the Samara province, a Samara Committee for Public Assistance to the Starving was established in 1906. Due to a severe shortage of funds, the committee appealed for aid to the Moscow Pogorovsky Society of Doctors and IVEO. The city-based societies took the Samara Committee under their full patronage, resulting in it being referred to in documents as the Samara branch of the Pogorovsky and Free Economic Societies.

The committee began its work in September 1906. Despite attracting many private donations, the receipt of funds was unstable, which prevented the establishment of a network of canteens and the consistent provision of proper nutrition to the starving. Under these circumstances, IVEO started transferring large sums of money to the committee's accounts on a monthly basis, which could reach up to 55% of all collections. This timely assistance allowed the committee to focus immediately on its core activities and by October to organize food aid in the affected districts. The contributions from IVEO were as follows:

- October 1906: 3,000 rubles, with total collections of 5,587.82 rubles;
- November 1906: 2,000 rubles, with total collections of 15,112.15 rubles;
- December 1906: 3,000 rubles, with total collections of 19,116.18 rubles;
- January 1907: 5,000 rubles, with total collections of 21,800.65 rubles.

By February 16, the total amount received on the Committee's accounts since the start of the campaign was 74,934.71 rubles, of which 17,000 rubles were transferred from IVEO and 6,000 rubles from the Pogorovsky Society of Doctors¹¹³.

With these funds, canteens and public kitchens were opened in 59 villages across six districts of the Samara province. By February 16, 1907, 10,817 people were receiving daily meals. By March 1, the number of beneficiaries had increased to 14,000. Notably, most of the kitchens and canteens were set up in the northern parts of the province, where the indigenous non-Russian peoples lived. Among those receiving aid from the Committee, Russians comprised 41%, Tatars 38.5%, Bashkirs 13.5%, Little Russians 3.5%, Mordovians 3%, and Chuvash people 0.5%¹¹⁴.

Additionally, nursery-orphanages with feeding points were organized for children left behind by their peasant families in the Samara, Nikolaev, Buzuluk and Bugulma districts. A total of 1,489 children found shelter and nourishment in these nursery-orphanages¹¹⁵.

During the famine of 1911–1912, which affected three Volga Provinces (Kazan, Samara, and Saratov), IVEO also participated in relief efforts for the victims of the crop failure. Its involvement was indirect, through the most active and effective local charitable organizations.

Although the 1911 crop failure affected “only” three provinces, it turned out to be more severe than the well-known famine of 1891–1892, which shook the entire empire. The crop failure was not limited to bread; wild grasses also failed to grow, leaving working livestock and draft transport without fodder. The average harvest per dessiatine was as follows: rye — 10 poods, wheat — 7.5 poods, oats — 4.5 poods, and millet — 11 poods. In some districts, only about a pood of harvest was collected per dessiatine. The Volzhskoye Slovo newspaper described the disaster in the affected districts as follows: “We are starving, literally starving. Livestock is dying...

The funds of the VEO were primarily used for the organization and maintenance of canteens



Distribution of charity bread to peasants



Famine in the countryside

People are awaiting death with hopeless despair." "Until recently, all edible resources were consumed, but now there is nothing left to eat." "Exhausted horses and cows are no longer able to stand; they are suspended by ropes. Many peasants have begun selling their land plots". "Diseases like scurvy have started, and typhus fever cases are increasing". "The population is tearfully begging priests to permit them to eat horse meat". "By the beginning of 1912, in just five districts, 7,631 householders had sold their land within half a year."¹¹⁶

In the Samara province, a local branch of the Society for the Preservation of Public Health (PPH) became involved in relief efforts in 1911. The joint work of IVEO and the PPH merged into a unified effort, especially in the early stages of food aid activities, when the Samara society's funds were consistently supplemented by financial support from the city-based society.

The funds from IVEO were primarily allocated for organizing and maintaining canteens. The money was transferred through the representative of the Free Economic Society, Prince V.A. Kugushov, who was elected chairman of the Samara PPH¹¹⁷.

In the prevailing situation, the Samara provincial assembly issued a decree to "ask the Red Cross and other institutions to open canteens in areas in need of aid". On October 31, 1911, the PPH Society assembly issued an appeal for donations and entered into an agreement with Prince Kugushov regarding joint activities with IVEO.

By the end of January 1912, when the famine had reached its most acute phase, the PPH accounts had received 14,500 rubles and a wagon of flour from various sources. These funds allowed for the prompt opening of canteens serving 4,030 eaters, as well as the weekly distribution of flour to Bashkir and Tatar populations in the Imelievskaya volost of Nikolaev district, comprising around 500 people¹¹⁸. However, by that time, the interest of the reading public in Moscow — which had contributed the majority of donations — had waned, and the flow of funds to aid the starving began to weaken. At this critical moment, the financial assistance from IVEO proved especially valuable.

According to the plan outlined in the appeals, the PPH Society aimed to open 130 canteens across the Samara province. For the operation of these canteens until summer, an estimated 60,000 rubles was needed, calculated at 5 kopecks per meal for one starving person per day.

A village in the Nizhny Novgorod province



By June 1912, the PPH Society was able to open a total of 141 canteens. The funds initially collected on enthusiasm alone enabled the opening of 21.5% of the planned canteens by December 1911. However, in January 1912, these indicators sharply declined to 1.3%. It was during this period that the inflow of funds from IVEO began to increase, which allowed in February to open 3.4% of canteens, and in March — 8.4%¹¹⁹. Overall, the Free Economic Society transferred 11,354 rubles to the accounts of the Samara organization, making it its largest donor.

Subsequently, the PPH Society managed to increase its donations, reaching a total of 107,607 rubles and 91 kopecks, also with the help of IVEO. Under the direct support of the its Board, a campaign called “Ears of Rye” was conducted in St. Petersburg — special collectors visited various, mostly secular, events with a collecting mug, attaching a special badge to each donor’s lapel and distributing a grain of rye. The “Ears of Rye” days attracted the highest social classes to the famine issue. Actions held in St. Petersburg, Kiev, and Samara collected 110,679 rubles, accounting for 64.91% of all donations¹²⁰.

From November 10 (the opening of the first canteen) to July 31 (the end of the aid campaign), the PPH Society issued a total of 2,687,999 portions worth 129,558 rubles and 08 kopecks. The cost of one portion, including overhead expenses, averaged 4.82 kopecks¹²¹. Each portion necessarily included meat soup or pea soup on fasting days, millet porridge, and bread. At the peak of its activity in May 1912, the PPH Society was providing daily meals to 24,854 people¹²².

In the Kazan province, charitable assistance was organized at the highest level, both through the efforts of N.P. Kupriyanova, who by that time had become a member of the local branch of IVEO, and through the local zemstvo. It was in Kazan that IVEO received its largest allocations. Throughout the entire charity campaign, the Kazan zemstvo received installments totaling 20,000 rubles¹²³, which contributed to the overall expenses of organizing canteens and feeding people in the districts.

Thanks to the intensive work of the local branch of VEO through peasant authorized representatives, during 1911, canteens were opened in 76 villages across five districts of the Kazan province, serving a total of 8,900 people

The local branch of IVEO, headed by N.P. Kupriyanova, adopted a fundamentally different and highly effective approach. Here is how Natalia Petrovna described the new methods of working with the starving, an experience which was actively adopted during the famine of 1921:

"...In the village, peasants elect 3–4 trusted persons (that's what the peasants call them) during a rural gathering — these trusted persons keep the food — and a list of householders is compiled with their help, including rich and poor. The list contains: 1) the name and surname of the householder, 2) the number of family members, 3) the number of workers, 4) whether they have a horse, 5) a cow, 6) small livestock, 7) how many people are to be registered for the canteen. Then, a canteen is opened, where the amount of each type of product to be put into the cauldron and the bread to be baked is announced. From each household receiving a meal, one woman is periodically appointed to serve as a duty volunteer in the canteen to ensure that everything is being stored and cooked properly, as it should be. These duty visits are not burdensome: if 20 households receive meals, then the duty shifts every 20 days; if 50 households are served, then every 50 days. Unfortunately, this system of duty visits is not always successfully implemented, as sometimes peasants refuse — it is shameful to check whether they can really steal a piece of food from a hungry person.¹²⁴"

Thanks to the intensive work of the local branch of IVEO through peasant authorized representatives, during 1911, canteens were opened in 76 villages across five districts of the Kazan province, serving a total of 8,900 people¹²⁵.

It can be said that all these people received aid thanks to funding from IVEO. From January 1, 1911, to December 31, 1911, IVEO allocated 26,700 rubles from the harvest failure relief fund to N.P. Kupriyanova for Kazan, and from September 15, 1911 to September 15, 1912, an additional 81,095 rubles¹²⁶.

Thus, we can draw the following conclusions about the Society's assistance to starving peasants in 1906 and 1911:

- IVEO primarily focused on providing financial support to organizations operating directly in the affected areas;
- The Society's aid was delivered promptly, bypassing bureaucratic hurdles, to the most active charitable organizations, significantly increasing their effectiveness during the most critical periods of hunger;
- although the number of people receiving food in canteens, bakeries, or through food supplies was relatively small compared to the population of the Kazan and Samara provinces, aid was carefully targeted to those most in need during the most acute phases of the famine.

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The medal "Set an example by myself" was minted in honor of the anniversary of the smallpox vaccination Catherine II and Tsarevich Pavel



Since the early 19th century, VEO became the center for the dissemination of smallpox vaccination in Russia.

Early Initiatives: Famine, Epidemics, and “Public Health”

Among the founders and presidents of VEO were medical officials, academicians, doctors of medicine, and pharmacists: the chief pharmacist of St. Petersburg, academician I.G. Model; President of the Medical College A.I. Cherkasov; member of the Medical College H. Peken; professor of natural history, doctor of medicine, and academician A.I. Gùldenstädt; and others. Many notable medical professionals were members of VEO, including D.S. Samoylovich, N.M. Maksimovich-Ambodik, J. Gruber, G.M. Orræus, A.A. Arendt, K.I. Grum-Grzhimailo, A.P. Nelyubin, Ya.A. Chistovich, among others¹²⁷.

The first references to medical issues in the works of VEO were related to the analysis of the consequences of crop failures and epidemics. As early as 1767, in responses to a questionnaire about the state of the Kashira district, it was noted that famine and associated diseases had a catastrophic impact on economic life. In the 1780s, competitive papers on the efficiency of agriculture inevitably touched upon issues of peasant nutrition and its influence on work capacity. The awarding of a prize in 1787 to a work analyzing the causes of rural mortality was an acknowledgment of the importance of “public health” for the economy.

“Famine and the widespread diseases that follow bread shortage not only claim many lives but also weaken the remaining population for a long time, bringing villages to extreme ruin and reducing their contributions to the treasury,” as noted by a member of VEO in the Proceedings of VEO (1789).

Smallpox Vaccination: From the Imperial Court to Peasant Homesteads

One of the most prominent and well-documented examples in this field is the revolutionary role of VEO in the fight against smallpox.

A notable figure in the Society’s history was one of its founders and the first director of the Medical College, A.I. Cherkasov. In 1768, he invited an Englishman, T. Dimsdell, to Russia, who vaccinated Empress Catherine II and Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich against smallpox, thereby initiating the practice of vaccination against the disease in our country.

“Smallpox, this scourge of the people, annually claims the lives of thousands of peasant children, depriving the state of future workers and taxpayers. The inoculation of protective material, being a simple and safe



Splint paintings about the benefits of smallpox prevention. Illustrations from V.O. Hubert's book "Smallpox and vaccination", 1896

procedure, only requires good will and minimal effort from landowners and authorities", as stated in the Society's report.

Since the early 19th century, VEO became the center for the dissemination of smallpox vaccination in Russia. The Society undertook the complex logistics and educational efforts required at the time: purchasing and distributing necessary instruments (glass slides, lancets) to the provinces, and printing and distributing educational materials and visual leaflets that explained the benefits of vaccination and dispelled superstitions. It also facilitated the training of vaccination specialists. For example, in 1801, the Society's secretary, V. Severgin, organized the printing of 600 copies of the scientific manual "Theory and Practice of Cowpox Inoculation" at the Synodal Printing House, providing regions with a reliable source of knowledge.

In 1825, the Ministry of Finance allocated 25,000 rubles to VEO for the promotion of smallpox vaccination. The Society also established a special vaccination fund, consisting of funds allocated from the treasury, annual contributions from public establishments, and private donations¹²⁸.

Regarding the organization of smallpox committees in the provinces: these committees were established in 1811 but only began active work from 1824. The Society oversaw their activities, allocated 500 rubles to each, and supplied them free of charge with instruments, inoculation materials, and instructions on smallpox vaccination. Starting in 1824, the Society annually awarded medals — gold and silver — to outstanding vaccinators¹²⁹.

The practical orientation of VEO was also evident in its swift responses to threats: in 1830, when an outbreak of smallpox occurred in Georgia, the Society's president, N. Mordvinov, personally petitioned the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for urgent dispatch of "smallpox material" (vaccine) to the affected region.

From 1840 onward, the Society sent a special guide on smallpox vaccination to each province, prepared by K.I. Grum-Grzhimailo. The number of these educational materials was significant for that period: in 1841, it was 5,870 copies; in 1843, 6,846 copies. In 1845, the Society distributed: 38,485 instructions in Russian, 800 in Polish, 500 in Zyrian, 1,200 in Tatar, 800 in Kalmyk, 800 in Mongolian, 700 in Georgian, and 900 in Armenian. It is noteworthy that from 1824 to 1847, the number of vaccinated infants reached 23 million, and the number of vaccinators exceeded 15,000¹³⁰.

Between 1851 and 1853, three smallpox vaccination points were established in St. Petersburg, operated by Society members. Training courses for vaccinators were also organized there. VEO conducted experiments on vaccination methods (I.F. Ruehl, 1833) and revaccination (A.M. Bulmerincq, 1865).

Due to the threat of smallpox spread, in 1871, the Society's activities expanded significantly. The supervision of vaccination was entrusted to K.I. Grum-Grzhimailo. To ensure the production of smallpox vaccine, the Society set up a calf farm where calves were kept and detritus was produced. Additionally, at the Smallpox Institute of VEO, organized around this production, 2,105 vaccinators were trained from 1881 to 1896¹³¹.

In 1887, at the Hygiene Exhibition in Warsaw, the Society's work in vaccination — covering both vaccine production and personnel training — received the prestigious 1st class diploma.

In summary, the Society's efforts in smallpox vaccination made a tangible contribution to epidemic control. Its long-term, persistent activities laid the foundation for subsequent successes in Russian epidemiology.



Fyodor Fedorovich Erisman

Systematization of Knowledge and Early Programs

The 19th century marked a transition for VEO toward focused study of medical and sanitary conditions. A landmark event was the Society's 1805 competition on the theme: "Measures Against Famine and Associated Diseases". The winning works (notably, the research of Dr.I.E. Gruzinov) not only proposed measures to combat epidemics (plague, scurvy, "fever") but also emphasized the importance of improving nutrition, water quality, and housing conditions as fundamental preventive measures.

VEO repeatedly initiated collection and systematization of information through questionnaires, such as:

Distribution of Epidemic Diseases (1807, 1830): linked to road conditions, sanitary state of fairs, and population density.

National Nutrition (1820): data was gathered on typical regional diets, revealing correlations between avitaminosis (scurvy) and the dominance of grain crops alongside a lack of vegetables and fruits.

Quality of Water Sources (1840): for the first time, the quality of drinking water was addressed as a factor in intestinal diseases.

Social Evil: The Study of Alcoholism and Collaboration with Temperance Societies

VEO was among the first in Russia to draw attention to the economic and medical-sanitary consequences of widespread alcohol consumption, particularly within peasant communities. In 1840, surveys conducted by the Society's Statistical Department began including questions about peasants' expenditures on wine and beer, revealing that these costs could account for up to 10–15% of their household budgets.



A poster about the dangers of drunkenness

In 1824, a dedicated Fifth Division of the Society was established, “entrusted with the care of human and domestic animal health”

Drunk in the basements of Moscow. 1900s.



Research conducted by V.P. Bezborodov and other members of VEO scientifically established a direct link between drunkenness, poverty, declining health, and reduced labor productivity. It was emphasized that “tavern money” was diverted from improving nutrition, housing, and the acquisition of livestock and equipment, leading to exhaustion and disease — such as cirrhosis, nervous disorders, and injuries — and ultimately devastating families.

In the second half of the 19th century, with the rise of the temperance movement among the populace, the Society actively engaged in this struggle. The Society published works on the physiological and social harms of alcoholism (notably by F.F. Erismann and A.L. Mendelssohn), supported cooperation with both ecclesiastical and secular temperance organizations, and organized lectures and discussions.

By 1890, the Medical Committee of VEO participated in developing programs for anti-alcohol societies, emphasizing the need to combine prohibitive measures with education and the creation of alternative leisure activities.

“Intemperance is the greatest obstacle to the well-being of the nation. It devours income, destroys health, weakens the will to work, multiplies poverty and disease, impoverishes families, and ultimately leads to the degeneration of the population”, as stated in the report of the VEO commission studying the consequences of alcoholism (1898).

The Medical Committee of VEO and the Flourishing of Research

In 1824, a dedicated Fifth Division of the Society was established, “entrusted with the care of human and domestic animal health” (renamed the Medical Committee in 1859). This division comprised scholars and practicing physicians from various medical specialties, medical officials, pharmacists, and veterinarians, ensuring a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to the issues at hand. Among its members were distinguished figures such as S.F. Volsky, chief physician of the St. Petersburg Department of Public Assistance; K.I. Grum-Grzhimailo, editor of the Friend of Health newspaper; F.F. Depp, chief physician of the Saint Petersburg orphanage; A.N. Nikitin, physician of the same institution; and others. The Committee became a vital nexus for uniting doctors, statisticians, and economists devoted to the study of public health. Its key initiatives included:

“Peasant Sanitation”: the 1847 survey on Rural Improvement, circulated jointly with the Statistical Department, featured specialized sections addressing:

- The prevalence and causes of diseases such as “fevers”, smallpox, syphilis, and “eye ailments”.
- Accessibility of medical care, including distances to doctors or hospitals.
- Sanitary conditions of housing, encompassing ventilation, heating, and cleanliness.
- Traditional hygiene practices and prevailing superstitions.

The analysis of the responses, published in the Proceedings, revealed appalling overcrowding within peasant huts, a glaring absence of basic hygiene, widespread malnutrition, and an almost complete lack of qualified medical assistance in the countryside.

The Study of Occupational Diseases and Working Conditions:

- Surveys conducted in 1850 on the health of factory workers marked pioneering efforts in the field of industrial hygiene in Russia.



Nikolai Ivanovich Pirogov



Sergey Petrovich Botkin

- In 1863, investigations examined the impact of dust in weaving workshops on respiratory health.
- Later, in 1868, data were collected on workplace injuries at mining plants in the Ural region.

The food issue and the physiology of nutrition: The work of V.P. Bezborodov, a member of VEO, analyzing peasant household budgets from the 1860s to 1870s, provided the first scientific evidence of a direct correlation between the calorie content and nutritional balance of diets, the physical development of peasants, and their labor productivity. Calculations demonstrated that families with more varied diets — including potatoes, vegetables, and milk — achieved 20 to 30% higher income from their plots.

Statistics of morbidity and mortality: VEO actively promoted the advancement of zemstvo medical statistics. Society members such as D.P. Zhuravsky and P.P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky advised local self-governments on organizing data collection regarding diseases and causes of death, a crucial step for effective healthcare planning. The Proceedings published the results of the first zemstvo sanitary-statistical studies, for example, those conducted in the Moscow Governorate in 1878.

V.M. Tylinsky, MD, gives an anti — plague vaccine — Khavkin's lymph — to a paramedic to Alexander Katkov.
Photo: K. Bulla, 1910



VEO continued to utilize competitions as a tool for research and public education

Scientific Competitions and the Promotion of Hygienic Knowledge

VEO continued to utilize competitions as a tool for research and public education:

- **1859:** A competition titled “Measures to Improve Public Health in Rural Life”. The winning projects focused on solutions such as building baths, improving wells, and promoting hygiene education.
- **1872:** A competition was held for the best popular pamphlet on hygiene targeted at peasants. Publishing and distributing such pamphlets became a significant activity of the Society.
- **1880:** Competitions were organized to combat epidemics of cholera and anthrax among livestock — highlighting the economic impact of these diseases.

Key Figures of VEO in the Field of Healthcare

- **F.F. Erismann (1842–1915):** A prominent hygienist and active member of VEO from the 1870s onward. His foundational research on the sanitary conditions of factories in the Moscow province (1879–1885), supported and published through the Society, formed the basis for the first Russian factory sanitary legislation. Erismann used the VEO platform to advocate for the principles of public health.
- **S.P. Botkin (1832–1889):** Renowned internist and honorary member of VEO. He contributed to the development of surveys assessing urban sanitary conditions and delivered reports within the Society highlighting the correlation between labor conditions and workers’ health.
- **N.I. Pirogov (1810–1881):** Surgeon and educator. Although less directly involved in the Society’s activities, his ideas on the social determinants of health, expressed notably in “Questions of Life” (1856), resonated in the Society’s discussions.

Difficulties and Limitations

The activities of VEO in healthcare faced several obstacles:

- **“The Problem of Departmental Disunity:** Healthcare matters were under the jurisdiction of the Medical Department of the Ministry of Internal Af-

Despite the difficulties faced, the Society's contribution to public health in Russia is fundamentally significant

fairs, which often viewed the initiatives of public organizations with suspicion. Collecting certain data — especially concerning socially sensitive diseases like syphilis or mortality rates in the army — met with resistance from officials.

- *“The VEO Committee, when requesting information on the number of patients in provincial hospitals, was denied on the grounds that such data are the prerogative of the Medical Council and are not subject to disclosure”,* as stated in the Minutes of the VEO Medical Committee meeting in 1853.
- **Lack of qualified personnel on the ground:** Gathering reliable medical data in rural areas was hindered by the near absence of doctors and feldshers.
- **Limited resources:** Large-scale sanitary projects, such as building hospitals or organizing water supply systems, required state funding that VEO was unable to secure.

Legacy of VEO: A Bridge to Zemstvo Medicine

Despite the difficulties faced, the Society's contribution to public health in Russia is fundamentally significant:

- **Conceptual:** VEO proved the thesis that the health of the population is the most important economic resource of the state. Diseases and high mortality rates were recognized as factors undermining the productive forces of the nation.
- **Methodological:** The methods applied by VEO — including questionnaires, budget surveys, and statistical analysis of the relationship between living conditions and morbidity — became the gold standard for zemstvo sanitary statistics and laid the foundation for Russian social hygiene.
- **Practical:** The findings of the Society's studies on peasant life, nutrition, and factory working conditions were directly utilized by zemstvos in organizing medical stations, feldsher posts, sanitary supervision, and health education efforts. Recommendations for epidemic control, water supply improvement, and nutrition had practical applications.
- **Personnel:** VEO became a platform for collaboration among leading physicians (such as Erismann and Botkin), economists, and statisticians (like Zhuravsky, Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, and Bezborodov), shaping the core of specialists in public health.

The activities of the Free Economic Society in the field of healthcare, initially driven by economic pragmatism, evolved into a large-scale program for studying the social foundations of the nation's health. Overcoming bureaucratic resistance and limited resources, VEO created a unique body of data on the medical and sanitary conditions of 19th-century Russia and developed scientific approaches to its analysis. The work of its Medical Committee, along with statistical research, competitions, and publications, laid the theoretical and methodological foundation for zemstvo medicine — a system that became a source of pride in Russian public life during the second half of the 19th century. The experience of VEO demonstrated that addressing health problems is impossible without considering their deep roots in the socio-economic conditions of the population's life. This lesson remains relevant to this day.

Its main periodical publication — the Proceedings of the Free Economic Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Household Management in Russia

VEO SERVED AS A MOUTHPIECE OF SCIENCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

The publishing activities of VEO represent a unique and enduring phenomenon in the history of Russian economic thought and education. Throughout its entire existence, despite radical transformations in political regimes and economic structures, the Society's publishing endeavors remained the primary means of fulfilling its statutory goal: "the dissemination among the people of useful information for agriculture and industry". This work served as a powerful catalyst for the modernization of the Russian economy, a vital channel for spreading knowledge, and a forum for intellectual discourse among Russia's educated elite.

Enlightenment through the Press

From the very first years of its existence, VEO recognized the printed word as a key tool for achieving its aims.

Its main periodical publication — the Proceedings of the Free Economic Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Household Management in Russia — became the first economic and agricultural journal in Russia. The responsibility for its publication was established by the Society's inaugural charter, dated June 15, 1765.

The first issue of the Proceedings (1766) was a sensation. As the distinguished agronomist A.T. Bolotov recalled, having purchased it by chance in Moscow shortly after its release, the edition was for him an eye-opening experience and a source of great joy. It signified the emergence in Russia of a society akin to the well-known Western economic associations and was under the auspices of the Empress. This "encounter" largely predetermined Bolotov's own scientific path. In his memoirs, he recounted how the first issue of the Proceedings accidentally caught his eye:

"By a benevolent fate, it happened that one day, while walking through the square between the rows in Moscow, I happened upon a man who was carrying it [the book] for sale. He had probably received it from someone to whom it was entirely distasteful and unnecessary. Out of curiosity and my love of books, I glanced at it, immediately took a liking to it, considered it very necessary for myself, and at that very moment bargained for and bought it.

Now, I have no doubt that you are very curious to know what kind of book this was, which I still keep as an important monument to this day. It was an economic book — the first part of the Proceedings of our Free Economic Society — just published and freshly printed in St. Petersburg.

I still cannot cease to marvel at how quickly it was sent to Moscow, appeared for sale, and fell into my hands. It had been printed only that same year, and before even the first month of the year had ended, I had already bought it. At that time, we had no slightest rumor, knowledge, or understanding, neither of the book itself nor of the establishment of the economic society.

On the right: the first sheet of the minutes of the meeting of the Free Economic Society, at which it was decided to publish the Proceedings

ЖУРНАЛЪ

Вольнаго Экономическаго Общества,
Дня 1-го, 1765 года.

Собрание было в доли у его Превосходительства Адама
Васильевича Олсуфьева, и началось в 4 часа.

1.

Считано было предложеніе гдѣна вице-Президента
Фонв Клинштета съ приобщеніемъ пунктовъ о при-
ступленіи къ печатанію сочиненій вольнаго Эконо-
мическаго Общества, на которыхъ были слѣдующія
рѣшенія. 1. Сноль великой быть должно издавае-
мой трудовъ нашихъ въ каждой трети нинетъ? *Ст*
Положено быть по тому количеству наоборомъ отъ двена-
дцати до пятнадцати листовъ смотря по матери-
яли наизъ оныя помѣстятся, дабы болѣе пятнадца-
ти листовъ не превосходило. 2. Снольно эземпля-
ровъ издаваемыхъ нинетъ печатать должно? Опреде-
лено напечатать тысяча двести эземпляровъ, изъ
того числа на Александриской пятьдесятъ, на Люб-
ской сто пятьдесятъ, а тысячу на напечатанной
бумагахъ. 3. Сноль великимъ тѣмъ нинетъ быть
должно и наизъ порядкомъ оныя издавать? Въ
осъмушнхъ по представленной отъ гдѣна Статскаго Со-
ветника Шауберта формѣ, и съ тѣмъ девизомъ,
наимъ оныя предложены. 4. Какимъ образомъ съ та-
кими напечатанными эземплярами поступать?
Вольное Экономическое Общество постановило, что по
напечатаніи первой томъ трудовъ нашихъ отъ всего
Общества поднесъ Президентъ одинъ эземпляръ



But however, that may be, this book and even its title alone stirred in me great curiosity. Many others would not have known what an economic society was, and this book might have seemed like gibberish to them. But I, having already read enough foreign economic treatises, was familiar with the concept. And since I already had a good understanding of economic societies in other lands and all their statutes, seeing from this book that such a society had also been established in our country — an eminent one, moreover, taken under the special patronage of the Empress herself — I almost jumped for joy and with great eagerness and attention began to read everything printed therein...¹³²

Initially, the Proceedings were published in parts — 30 parts between 1765 and 1775 — then in volumes, with 19 volumes issued from 1779 to 1794. They resumed as parts again in 1795, 1796, and 1798. After a break from 1798 to 1801, publication restarted with volumes beginning at issue number 53 (counting the previous 52 parts), with an additional 20 volumes published between 1801 and 1820. Following another hiatus, the publication struggled to resume with volumes appearing in 1833 and 1835, and



only from 1842 onward was a regular issuance established, which continued (with minor interruptions) until 1915.

At first, the materials for the Proceedings were contributed by a small circle of the Society's founders, and the topics were somewhat scattered. However, the authorship soon expanded to include members of the Academy of Sciences and universities, government officials, as well as a unique group for that time — correspondents from the provinces: landlords, district officials, teachers, peasants, and rural clergy, who sent in observations and practical findings.

The Proceedings became a practical manual for farm management. They published solutions to pressing issues, such as designs for drying barns and grain-drying ovens (e. g., I.S. Zakharov's article in volume 61), recommendations on searching for and utilizing minerals, construction of basic manufacturing facilities, introduction of new agricultural crops, and more. A significant portion of the publication was devoted to contest problems and the best responses to them, often accompanied by drawings and diagrams.

The journal fulfilled an educational mission by acquainting landowners and government officials with the progressive ideas of the Physiocrats and early classical economists, thereby promoting the rationalization of agriculture. It became a vital source of economic information and debate in the Russian Empire.

For international exchange, the Proceedings were also published in German during the periods 1767–1775, 1790–1798, and later from 1844 to 1865 (under the editorship of J.I. Jonson).

The Flourishing and Institutionalization of Publishing Activities

The 19th century became the “golden age” of the Society's publishing activities, reflecting the growth of its authority and the expansion of its interests.

In addition to the Proceedings, VEO began publishing other works: “Notes of Activities” (often as a section within the Proceedings or separately), “Weekly News” (1788–1789), “The Agricultural Chronicle” (1805), and “Agricultural Notes” (1812–1815).

The Proceedings, 1880



A special role in the Society's publishing was held by separate editions — books written by members of VEO that essentially served as practical guides to the most pressing issues of agricultural modernization. The list is impressive:

- Fighting epidemics: “A Preventive Remedy against Cattle Death” (1773), and “Instructions on Vaccination Against Smallpox” (1824).
- Standardization and technologies: “On Weights and Measures” (1779), “Description of a Simple Threshing Machine” (1831), “Notice on Cultivation and Preparation of Fine Flax” (1790), and “Instructions on the Preparation of Dry and Wet Fertilizers” (1809).
- New crops and industries: “On Breeding the Best Sheep” (1790), “Instructions on Tobacco Cultivation and Processing” (1812), “Calculation of the Benefits of Growing Sugar Beet and Producing Sugar in Russia” (1829), and “On the Benefits of Combining Agriculture with Manufacturing and Factory Industry” (1828).
- Scientific foundations and reference books: “Mineralogical Dictionary” (1790), “Botanical Dictionary” (1795), “Guide to the Easier Understanding of Chemical Books” (1814), “New Agriculture...” (1794), and “Guide to Farming” (1792).
- Land reclamation and development: “Systematic Exposition of Methods for Draining Wet and Swampy Soil” (1827), and “Method for Establishing Good Agriculture in the Steppe” (1801).
- Regional economics: “Economic Description of the Astrakhan and Caucasus Provinces” (1809), and “Economic Description of the Perm Province” (1811, 1813 volumes).

Mass-produced, inexpensive brochures, leaflets, and “people's readings” with practical advice on agriculture, horticulture, beekeeping, hygiene, and pest control were also published. This was a **direct transmission of scientific knowledge to the peasantry**.

A distinctive feature of all VEO publications — whether articles in the Proceedings or standalone monographs — was the mandatory economic assessment of the proposed innovations. Whether it concerned a new farming system, a method of draining wetlands, or sugar beet cultivation technology, the authors invariably included calculations demonstrating greater profitability and practical benefits compared to traditional methods. Many books resulted from the work of special VEO commissions, summarizing expert opinions (for example, “Summary of Opinions on the Average Prices of Grain”) or the outcomes of large regional studies.

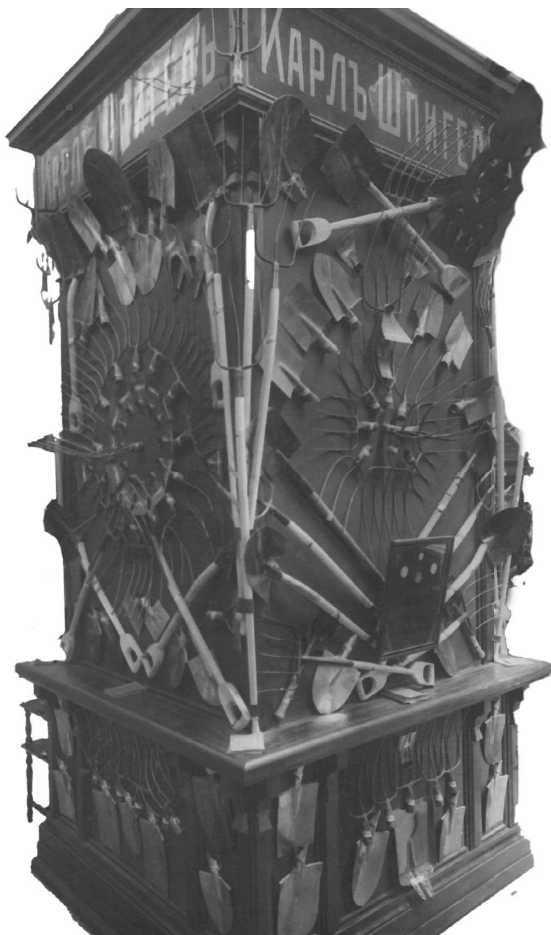
In addition, VEO established one of the best economic libraries in the country and organized the sale of its own publications, as well as other useful editions, at affordable prices throughout Russia.

The publishing activity of VEO, from the very first Proceedings — which instantly became a handbook for enthusiasts like Bolotov — to the most detailed practical guides covering all sectors of the economy with mandatory economic calculations, served as a purposeful tool for spreading knowledge that brought tangible economic benefits.

A unique feature of the VEO publications was the inseparable connection between technological recommendations and their economic justification, making them a powerful lever for the rationalization and increased profitability of Russian agriculture and industry.

VEO AND THE EMERGENCE OF EXHIBITION CULTURE IN RUSSIA: AN EDUCATIONAL PLATFORM FOR PROGRESS

Products of the Karl Spiegel
shovel and fork-rolling mill
(St. Petersburg) at the exhibition
stand. Art and craft exhibition.
Photo: K. Bull, 1899



The Free Economic Society gained renown not only as the cradle of domestic statistics and agricultural thought but also as a pioneer of exhibition activities within the Russian Empire. While surveys and statistical studies conducted by the Society provided a theoretical and numerical understanding of the national economy, exhibitions transformed this knowledge into vivid, visual representations and became a powerful tool for disseminating best practices. VEO elevated exhibitions from mere cabinet curiosities to large-scale public phenomena, designed to overcome the rigidity of traditional customs and to accelerate the modernization of agriculture and industry.

Early Experiments: From “Samples” to Systematic Exhibitions

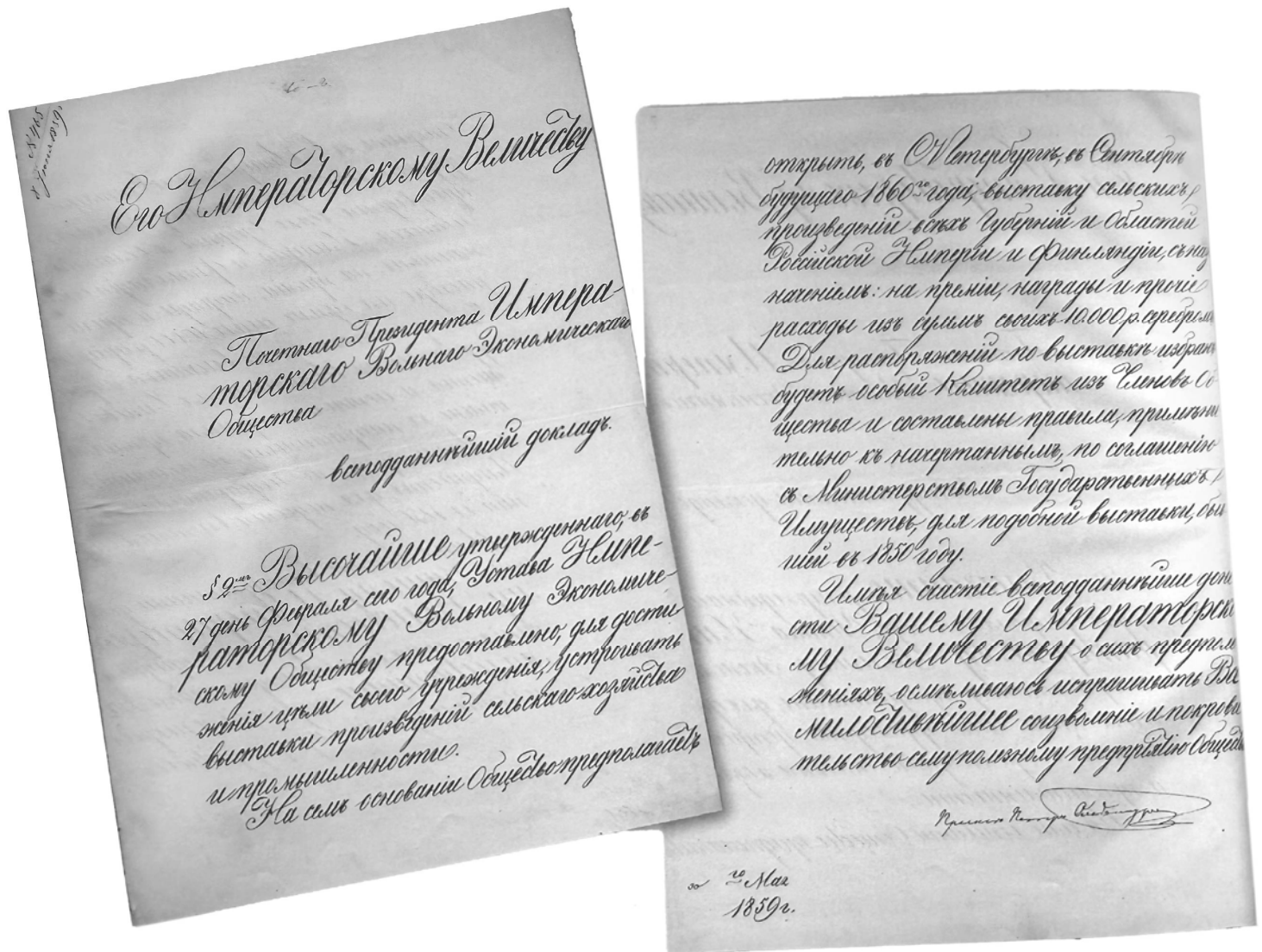
From the very first decades of its existence, VEO recognized that theoretical treatises and questionnaires alone were insufficient to overcome centuries-old inertia. There arose a clear need to demonstrate tangible achievements. Initially, this took the form of establishing a “Sample Cabinet” under the Society, where new tools, improved crop seeds, handicraft products, and minerals were collected. However, passive preservation soon gave way to active display.

By 1770, VEO began organizing public exhibitions of the “economic items” sent in during its meetings. These modest beginnings laid the foundational principle: to show in order to teach and to implement.

“The Society, receiving from different parts of the Empire seeds of previously unknown plants, new agricultural tools, or handicraft products, found it useful not only to preserve these items but also to exhibit them for the members and the honorable public, in order to stimulate curiosity and the desire to imitate”, as noted in the 1781 report of the VEO Agriculture Committee.

Regular Agricultural Exhibitions: The Driving Force of Agro-progress

A true breakthrough came at the beginning of the 19th century, when VEO gave exhibitions a systematic, competitive, and countrywide character.



Letter from the Prince
of Oldenburg dated May 30, 1859

In 1850, under the initiative of the VEO President, Prince P.G. Oldenburgsky, the Society held the Countrywide Agricultural Exhibition in St. Petersburg. The exhibition showcased over 3,500 exhibits including various varieties of agricultural and industrial crops, domestic and working livestock, animal products, manufactured goods, machines and models of improved agricultural implements, as well as samples of soils, ores, clays, salt, and more. The prize fund of the exhibition exceeded 13,500 silver rubles. In addition to monetary awards, 505 gold and silver medals and 180 bronze medals were awarded¹³³. Participants came from all provinces of the European part of Russia, as well as from Siberia, Finland, and the Caucasus. The next similar exhibition was held only ten years later and again took place under the auspices of the Free Economic Society. From that time onward, large-scale handicraft and industrial exhibitions became the most popular in Russia. This exhibition served as a model for subsequent events held periodically every few years. Key innovations introduced by these exhibitions included:

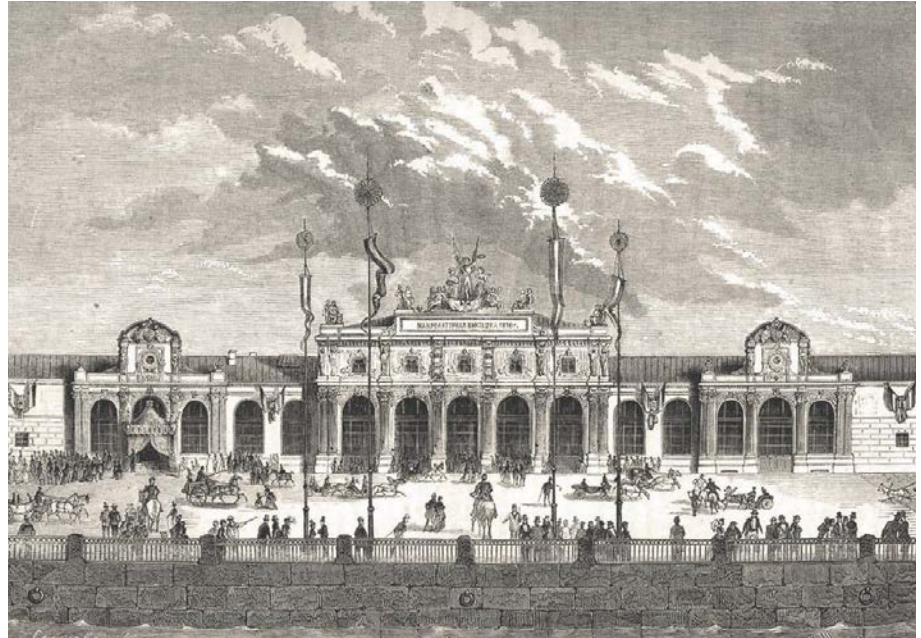


"Russian Art Leaflet"
No. 32 for 1860, dedicated
to the agricultural exhibition
in St. Petersburg, organized
by the Free Economic Society

- **Competitive basis:** The establishment of medals — gold, silver, and bronze — and monetary awards for the finest exhibits in various categories: improved breeds of livestock (particularly fine-wool sheep), bountiful harvests of grains and industrial crops (such as potatoes, flax, and sugar beets), innovatively enhanced agricultural tools, and high-quality artisanal crafts. This created a powerful incentive for landowners, estate managers, and even progressive peasants alike.
- **Thematic focus:** Each exhibition often featured a specific “program” reflecting the most pressing issues of the time. For example, the 1849 exhibition placed special emphasis on promoting potato cultivation and improving pasture management in response to grain harvest failures.
- **National coverage:** The Free Economic Society actively distributed invitations and detailed programs across provinces, encouraging participation not only from the capital but also from provincial farms. Exhibits were gathered from the farthest corners of the empire, creating a unique panoramic view of the country’s economic potential.
- **Connection with scientific research:** The exhibitions served as a tangible foundation for the Society’s scientific endeavors. The displayed tools and equipment were studied for their efficiency, new plant varieties tested on experimental plots, and yield data from model fields compared with survey reports.

Moreover, the Society’s exhibits received high honors at international exhibitions in Paris (1878 and 1889), Prague (1879), and Chicago (1893).

Facade and main entrance
All-Russian Manufacturing
Exhibition. Saint-Petersburg, 1870



Industrial and Handicraft Divisions: The Roots of Industrialization

Although agriculture remained the primary focus, the Free Economic Society steadily broadened its exhibition scope to include sections dedicated to manufacturing industries and artisanal crafts. Between 1830 and 1850, displays of woolen cloth, linen textiles, metalware, porcelain, glassware, and food products such as sugar and oil became increasingly prominent. This development served a dual purpose:

Encouraging domestic production: The exhibition provided craftsmen and small factories a rare opportunity to showcase their work, explore markets, and gain recognition.

Demonstrating the potential for import substitution: The Society emphasized Russia's capacity to produce goods comparable to imports. Successes in sugar refining and fine woolen fabric production, highlighted at the 1850 exhibition, drew significant public attention.

A quintessential example of the exhibition's influence was the dissemination of the Vyatka plow — a locally improved plow awarded the VEO medal at the 1837 exhibition. Thanks to widespread demonstration and detailed descriptions published in the Society's Proceedings, this innovation quickly spread to other regions, enhancing plowing efficiency and promoting agricultural productivity.

The Enlightenment Mission and Public Impact

The exhibitions organized by VEO were not commercial ventures. Their primary purpose was education and the dissemination of knowledge. To this end, VEO employed a variety of methods:

- Publishing detailed catalogs describing the exhibits and listing award recipients, which were then circulated across provinces and abroad.
- Organizing excursions and public lectures during the exhibitions, where VEO members — agrarians and scholars — explained the advantages of new methods and technologies.

VEO established core principles for organizing such events—competition, thematic focus, connection to scientific progress, educational purpose, and publication of results

- Ensuring extensive media coverage, including the Society’s own Proceedings and leading city newspapers, thereby attracting the attention of not only specialists but also an educated general audience.

“The goal of the exhibition is not merely competition and awarding prizes; its main aim is the dissemination of useful knowledge, familiarization with innovations, stimulation of industry, and highlighting those items which are most deserving of attention both for their utility and for their potential for widespread adoption”, as stated in the report on the Countrywide Exhibition of Agricultural Products of 1849, organized by VEO.

The Significance of the Society’s Exhibition Endeavors

The path VEO took in organizing exhibitions was far from easy. The Society faced challenges such as insufficient funding (since the exhibitions relied on contributions and donations), passive participation from landowners, logistical difficulties in transporting exhibits from remote provinces, and limited access for the peasantry — the primary producers — to the capital’s displays. Despite these obstacles, the importance of the Society’s efforts as a pioneer in the realm of exhibitions is difficult to overstate.

VEO demonstrated the viability and immense benefits of large-scale public exhibitions for Russia’s economic development.

It established core principles for organizing such events — competition, thematic focus, connection to scientific progress, educational purpose, and publication of results.

This experience directly influenced the organization of the first official Countrywide Manufacturing Exhibitions, which began in 1829, and later inspired the grand exhibitions of the 1880s and 1890s in Nizhny Novgorod and other cities.

Moreover, the Society’s exhibition practices became a model for local zemstvo agricultural and artisan fairs, which gained widespread popularity in the second half of the 19th century and played a key role in modernizing rural life.

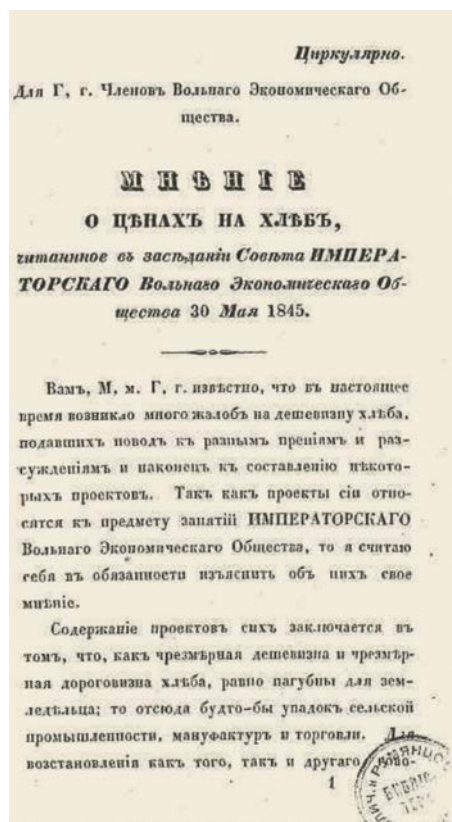
Legacy: From St. Petersburg to Nationwide Exhibitions

The activities of the Free Economic Society in organizing exhibitions stand as a vivid example of its commitment to enlightenment and practical progress. Overcoming skepticism and organizational challenges, VEO transformed exhibitions from rare spectacles into effective tools for economic policy and the dissemination of knowledge. It created that very “platform of progress”, where theory — embodied in surveys and research — found tangible affirmation in the finest examples of domestic craftsmanship and ingenuity. The Society’s experience in organizing competitive displays, along with its methodological and organizational traditions developed over decades, became an unshakable foundation for the entire subsequent exhibition movement in Russia. It proved that what is “seen” often persuades more powerfully than what is merely “read”. As noted by the active VEO member A.T. Bolotov, who observed the first exhibitions, “This spectacle of useful things not only pleased the eye but also nourished the mind with thoughts on ways to further improve our domestic craftsmanship¹³⁴.” In this pursuit of combining visual clarity with practical benefit, the Free Economic Society’s enduring contribution to Russian economics and culture remains undeniable.

WHERE DOES TRUTH COME FROM? VEO AS A PLATFORM FOR PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN RUSSIA

The Free Economic Society (VEO) is rightly regarded as the cradle of Russian public life, owing to its unique role as the first legitimate platform for open discussion of pressing social and economic issues. In the era of absolute monarchy, VEO emerged as the nascent realm where the spirit of public discourse took shape — where voices wove the fabric of societal debate, and the ideas and initiatives born there rippled through the corridors of power, shaping policies and forging new institutions. It established institutional mechanisms, ethical standards, and intellectual traditions that have structured public discourse in Russia for decades.

The first sheet of the opinion on bread prices sent to the members The Free Economic Society



Formalization of Procedures and Guarantees of the “Voice”

From its earliest charters, VEO codified the procedures for conducting meetings, discussions, and voting. This created a **predictable and legitimate** environment for expression. For instance, the meeting minutes emphasized the importance of maintaining order: *“Members have the right to present their opinions, observing due decorum and respect for opposing views... Decisions are made by ballot.”*¹³⁵ Such formalization taught participants the rules of civilized debate.

Every member of the Society was entitled to speak and participate in decision-making. This stood in stark contrast to the absolute dominance of state bureaucracy prevalent in other spheres.

Culture of Argumentation and Reliance on Knowledge

VEO fostered a debate grounded not in noble status or rank, but in **knowledge, facts, and evidence**. This was supported by several practices:

- **questionnaires:** Detailed surveys were sent out across provinces to gather data on agriculture, crafts, and prices. Discussing these data points at meetings transformed debates from abstract to concrete, based on real information;
- **experimental farms and practical competitions:** Evaluating the results of experiments — such as introducing new crops (like potatoes!) or tools — required analyzing tangible outcomes rather than mere theories. Debates about the benefits or harms of deep plowing or optimal sowing times were rooted in reported findings.



The building of the Free Economic Society in St. Petersburg

Russian Archaeological Society and Imperial Russian Geographical Society Medals



- **criticism:** The Proceedings published not only the approved reports but also **reviews, objections, and comments**, creating a precedent for constructive criticism.

“Breaking Boundaries”

Although officially engaged with “the nation’s wealth”, discussions within VEO inevitably extended into **social issues**: the condition of serfs (the 1766 competition, debates on free peasants), education, healthcare, the rights of merchants, infrastructure, and credit organization. This created a model for addressing a broad spectrum of societal problems under the guise of “economic” discourse.

Some topics resonated nationally, far beyond the meeting halls of VEO. An example is the long-standing **debate over forest conservation** (the late 18th and early 19th centuries). Disputes between proponents of strict state regulation of forest use — aimed at preserving resources for the navy — and defenders of private landowners’ rights to harvest wood — advocating for estate-based economic development — raged across the pages of Proceedings, in correspondence, salons, and public discourse. These conflicts reflected competing interests and helped shape public opinion.

Formation of an Expert Community

The Society’s meetings, especially on critical issues, attracted attention beyond its own members. Reports, publications in the Proceedings, and accounts circulated through private correspondence brought the course of these discussions to the educated public.

VEO became the focal point for crystallizing the first generation of Russian **economists — both practitioners and theorists** — such as A.T. Bolotov, I.M. Komov, and later N.S. Mordvinov, M.D. Chulkov, and N.I. Turgenev. Their ongoing interaction through debates, mutual critique, and collaborative work on projects fostered a **corporate spirit and established standards for professional discourse**. The Society served as a **recognized arbiter** on economic matters, whose opinions were heeded even by the authorities, albeit selectively.

Model for Others

The successful experience of VEO as the first public organization and discussion platform in Russia inspired the creation of many other scientific and professional societies in the 19th century.

The VEO model — with its charter, elected leadership (president, secretaries), regular meetings, minutes, and clear rules for debate and voting — was almost one to one replicated:

- **The Imperial Russian Geographical Society (1845):** Adopted a similar departmental structure, practice of expeditions, competitions, and publication of “Notes”, akin to the “Proceedings”.
- **The Imperial Russian Technical Society (1866):** Organized on principles similar to VEO, with specialized departments across various technical fields, exhibitions, public lectures, and discussions of technical projects.
- **The Moscow Agricultural Society (1818)** and other provincial and sectoral agricultural societies: directly copied the Society’s main task — development of agriculture — along with methods for data collection via questionnaires, organization of experimental plots and competitions, and discussions on peasant issues (albeit with greater caution).

Members of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society and the staircase in the building of the society



The practice of VEO bringing to public discussion controversial and previously taboo topics — albeit in a cautious form — set a **precedent**. This tradition of “posing questions” before society, even when immediate decisions did not follow, proved crucial for the development of public thought and critical thinking. The culture nurtured within the walls of VEO became an integral part of the intellectual life of the Russian elite in the 19th century and profoundly influenced the development of the zemstvo movement, journalism, and public discourse as a whole.

Thus, the Free Economic Society was not merely the earliest of its kind, founded in 1765, but stood as a foundational prototype. It forged a functional model, proved its viability within the unique Russian context, and bequeathed to subsequent generations of public figures the essential principles of organization, debate, and engagement with the state. The societies that appeared across diverse fields — from geography and history to technology and agriculture — were not simply “inspired” by it; rather, they were consciously shaped in the image and spirit of VEO, which became their true alma mater both organizationally and intellectually.

Token and medal of the Imperial Russian Technical Society

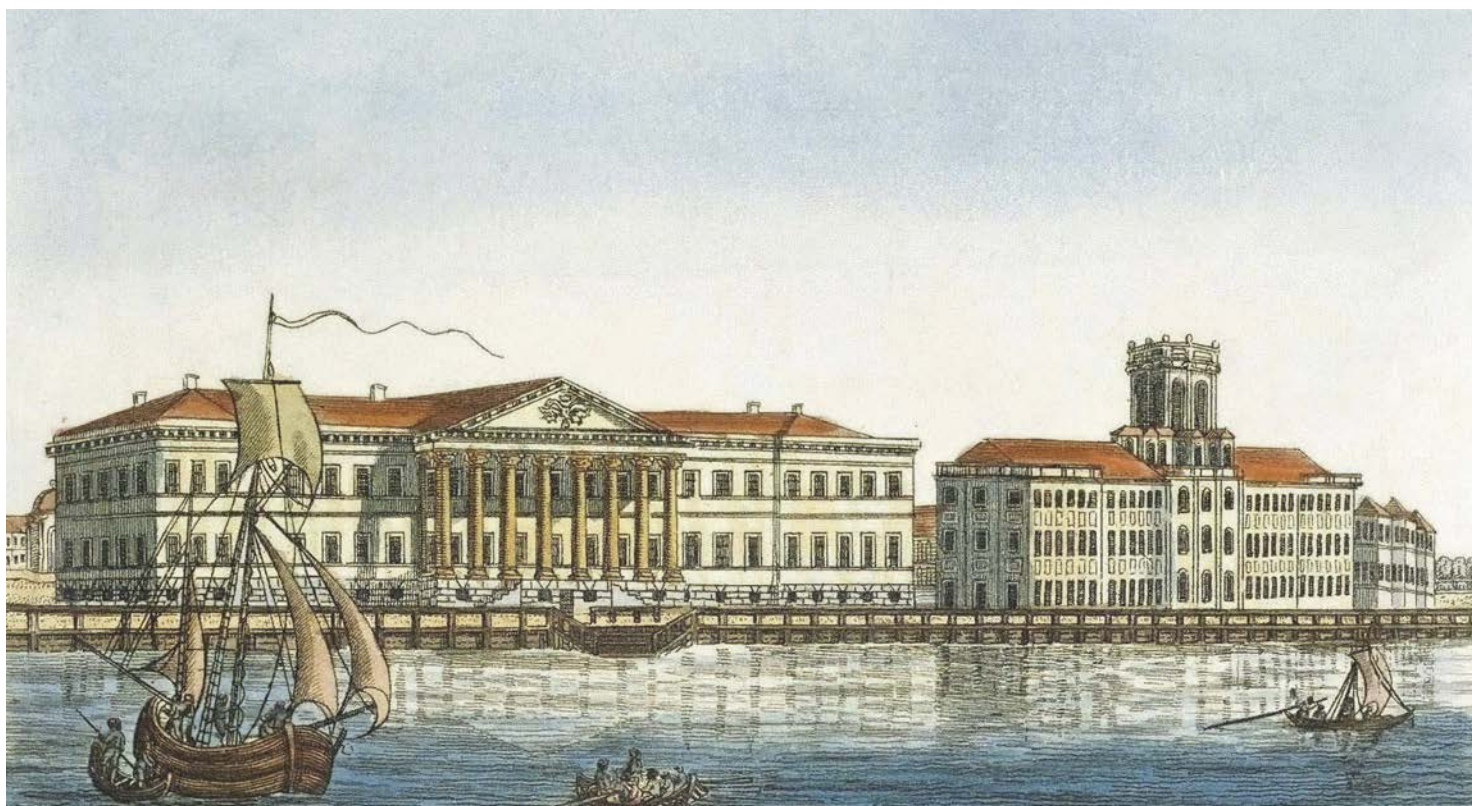
Meeting of the Members Imperial Russian Technical Society



THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND THE FREE ECONOMIC SOCIETY: A HISTORY OF THEIR INTERACTIONS

From its inception, the Free Economic Society maintained close ties with the Russian Academy of Sciences. Members of the Academy played a key role in the establishment and leadership of the Society, advancing economic research on its initiative and implementing the results in the practice of the national economy. Over the centuries, the Academy of Sciences and the Free Economic Society operated in close collaboration, mutually enriching each other. Scientific ideas that were discussed within the public sphere of the Society found practical application and contributed to economic progress.

The building of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg





Grigory Nikolaevich Teplov

Johann Gottlob Lehman



The Foundation of Cooperation: Personal Involvement of Academicians

The collaboration began from the very founding of VEO. Among its fifteen founders, four were representatives of the Russian Academy of Sciences: G.N. Teplov (adjutant in botany, later an honorary member), I.I. Taubert (full member in history), I.G. Model (honorary member, chemist), and J.G. Lehmann (professor of chemistry, geologist, and the first secretary of VEO)¹³⁶. This set a high standard and defined the development trajectory.

The membership of Academicians in VEO was extensive and continuous. During the first 27 years of the Society's existence (1765–1792), out of its 393 members, more than 62 were academicians, accounting for over 15%¹³⁷. Although over time the proportion of academicians among the growing membership of VEO, which later included categories such as honorary members, full members, associates, and correspondents, gradually decreased, their presence remained significant:

- **In 1860:** 4 honorary members of VEO (all academicians), and 33 academicians among 487 full members¹³⁸.
- **In 1899:** 7 academicians among 20 honorary members, and 14 academicians among 560 full members¹³⁹.
- **In 1903:** 7 academicians as honorary members, and 10 academicians among 503 full members¹⁴⁰.
- **In 1915:** 12 academicians within VEO (8 honorary, 4 full members)¹⁴¹.

The role of academicians in leading VEO was particularly significant. Throughout most of the pre-revolutionary period, the Society was almost exclusively led by members of the Academy of Sciences:

- A.A. Nartov (President of VEO from 1797 to 1813, honorary member of the Academy of Sciences)
- N.S. Mordvinov (1823–1840, honorary member of the Academy of Sciences)
- A.S. Greig (1841–1845, honorary member of the Academy of Sciences)
- P.G. Oldenburgsky (1845–1859, honorary member of the Academy of Sciences)
- A.F. Middendorff (1859–1860, adjunct, extraordinary professor, honorary member of the Academy of Sciences)
- E.P. Kovalevsky (1861–1865, honorary member of the Academy of Sciences)
- A.S. Famintsyn (1906–1918, adjunct, extraordinary professor, ordinary academician).

Many academicians also held other key positions; for example, P.N. Fuss simultaneously served as the Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Sciences (1842–1843) and of VEO. This practice ensured continuity and maintained a high scientific standard in the management of the Society.

Field Research: Collaborative Search for Knowledge

One of the most important forms of cooperation was the organization of expeditions.

As early as 1768, VEO, at the initiative of the Academy of Sciences, collected proposals from its members for upcoming academic expeditions to study Russia¹⁴². In the 19th century, the scale of collaboration increased.



Alexander Nikolaevich Beketov

On behalf of, and at the expense of, VEO, academician V.V. Dokuchaev conducted renowned research on chernozem (black soil) from 1877 to 1881. Future leading scientists participated in these works, including D.I. Mendeleev (who was not yet an academician), A.A. Inozemtsev, and A.M. Butlerov. The result was the fundamental work “Russian Chernozem” (1883), which received recognition from VEO and the Makaryev Prize of the Academy of Sciences.

Platform for Ideas: Publications in the Proceedings

The main publication of VEO, its mouthpiece, and its scientific legacy was the “Proceedings of the Free Economic Society” (later titled “Proceedings of the Imperial Free Economic Society”). This journal became the first independent scientific periodical in Russia and the longest-running publication in our history. On its pages, academicians were not just authors but leading thinkers.

Already in the first decade (1765–1775), out of 229 publications in the Proceedings, 58 (about a quarter) were authored by nine members of the Academy of Sciences. Notably, academicians often went beyond their narrow specialization, addressing pressing practical issues in agriculture and the economy of Russia.

A vivid example is Johann Gottlob Lehmann (1719–1767), a chemist and geologist. His article “On the Difference of Land in Consideration of Its Economic Use”, which outlined 24 rules for improving soils, appeared in the very first issue of the Proceedings in 1765¹⁴³. In this article, he argued that “*by reasonably applying [these rules], one can derive some benefit from each type of soil*”. In the same issue, he published an article on testing a rich iron “blue land” from estates belonging to Vorontsov and Rumyantsev. Lehmann also authored detailed practical manuals, such as instructions on brick-making (covering everything from clay selection to oven construction and firing), coal production, alum fabrication, and even a piece titled “Opinion on Forests”, written by someone whose primary activity was far from forestry but who demonstrated remarkable depth of knowledge.

Throughout the entire history of VEO, academicians served as its intellectual backbone.

In the 18th century, this included figures such as J. Stæhlin, L. Euler, J.A. Euler, P.I. Rychkov, and others.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries — N.S. Mordvinov, I.F. Krusenstern, A.S. Greig, A.M. Butlerov, P.P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, M.M. Kovalevsky, J.E. Janson, and A.N. Beketov. The historian of VEO, A.I. Khodnev, rightly noted, “*Among the first figures of the Society, members of the <St.>-Petersburg Academy of Sciences held a very prominent position*”, and he added, “*Most of the members of the Academy were for a long-time members of the F<ree> E<conomic> Society and actively participated in its activities. They addressed issues closely related to Russia and engaged in the study of its natural resources. By doing so, they bridged science with practical life and aimed to bring direct benefit to the country, which had become a new homeland for many of them*¹⁴⁴.”

Practical Benefits: Science Supporting Agriculture

Cooperation was not limited to theory. Academicians actively participated in the practical activities of VEO. The Society organized agricultural exhibitions to “help landowners, industrialists, and peasants adopt the best prac-

Mikhail Lomonosov at the meeting
Conferences of the Academy
of Sciences. By Rumyantseva
G.A., 1950



*The cooperation
between the
Academy of Sciences
and the Free
Economic Society
became a significant
chapter in the history
of Russian science
and economic
thought*

tices in farming¹⁴⁵.” VEO also published individual works. An outstanding example is “The Bee, Its Life and Main Rules of Expert Beekeeping” (1871) by the academician-chemist A.M. Butlerov. This concise guide, primarily aimed at peasants, was awarded a gold medal and went through ten editions, the last one in 1912. Before his election to the Academy, D.I. Mendeleev also proposed speaking at VEO (in 1870) the creation of a society to assist peasant production through product sales and loan services¹⁴⁶.

A Fruitful Partnership for the Benefit of Russia

The history of cooperation between the Academy of Sciences and the Free Economic Society in the second half of the 18th century and the early 20th century exemplifies an effective symbiosis between state science and public initiative. The forms of this collaboration were diverse and profound:

- **Mass membership** of academicians in VEO since its founding.
- **Continuous leadership** of VEO by members of the Academy of Sciences throughout the pre-revolutionary period.
- **Active participation** of academic scientists in solving practical issues in agriculture and the economy of Russia.
- **Publication** of scientific research results by academicians in the Proceedings of VEO, often extending beyond their primary specialization, but always aimed at practical benefits.
- **Organization and conduct** of joint research expeditions of fundamental importance (such as Dokuchaev’s research).

In many ways, these productive relationships contributed to the high scientific level of the Society’s activities. The cooperation between the Academy of Sciences and the Free Economic Society became a significant chapter in the history of Russian science and economic thought, demonstrating how close integration of fundamental knowledge with the country’s practical needs facilitates both the development of science and the progress of national economy.

A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD: VEO STRENGTHENS INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Society's international activities began almost simultaneously with its founding. In its first decades, the Society established a systematic exchange of publications with leading scientific centers in Europe and America. The Proceedings of VEO, which included results from competitions, research in agronomy, statistics, processing technologies, and more, were sent to the Royal Society of London, the French Academy of Sciences, the Royal Societies of Stockholm and Copenhagen, the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, and dozens of other institutions. In return, VEO received and accumulated in its renowned library the latest scientific journals, monographs, and reports from abroad, making them accessible to Russian scientists and practitioners. This exchange was not merely formal but a vital source of current knowledge. As one early report emphasized, the goal was *"to deliver to the Society all the latest discoveries and useful inventions made in other lands."*¹⁴⁷

Interactions with foreign scientific societies began in 1768, when the secretary of the Leipzig Economic Society wrote to Count V.G. Orlov, stating that "they would consider it a pleasure if the Free Economic Society entered into correspondence with them."¹⁴⁸ In 1790, the Society, wishing to strengthen its relations with international economic societies, sent selected copies of its works in German to 16 of them.

However, the cooperation was not limited to correspondence and the exchange of books.

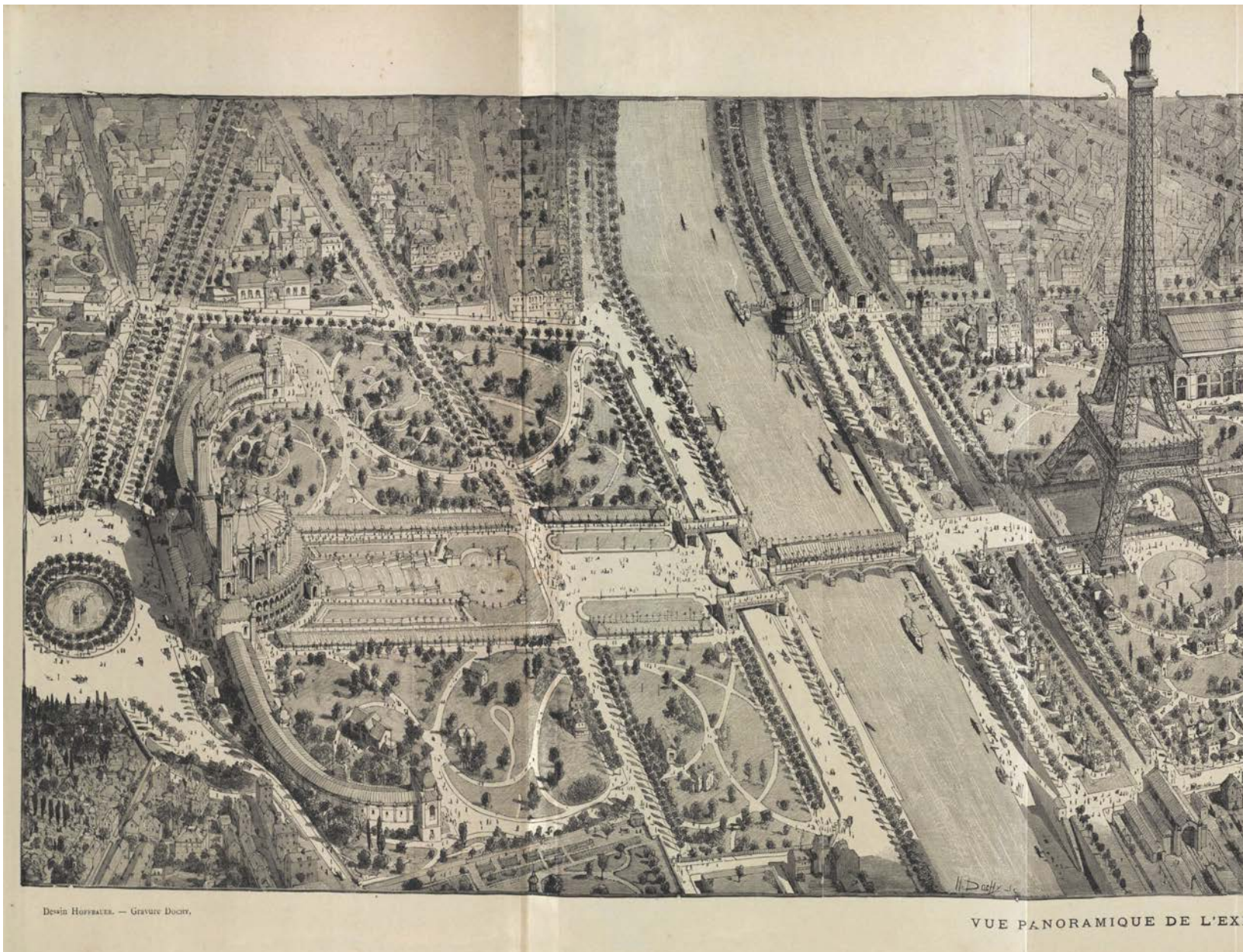
VEO actively initiated and funded the invitation of foreign specialists to Russia to address specific economic challenges. The most ambitious



Members of the London Economic Society

project at the beginning of the 19th century was the invitation of Spanish and Saxon sheep breeders with Merino sheep. Aiming to overcome Russia's lag in producing high-quality fine wool essential for the textile industry, VEO organized the procurement of breeding stock and the hiring of experienced shepherds. The project required extensive efforts: adapting the animals to the new climate, training Russian peasants in advanced care and shearing techniques. These efforts were successful: prosperous sheep-farming enterprises were established in southern provinces, particularly in Ukraine and Novorossiya, supplying wool to Russian and European markets. A.I. Khodnev noted that "The Society actively participated in the dissemination of improved sheep breeding practices across Russia."¹⁴⁹ This example vividly demonstrates the transition from theoretical knowledge exchange to practical technology transfer and personnel training.

The scheme of the Paris Exhibition in 1869



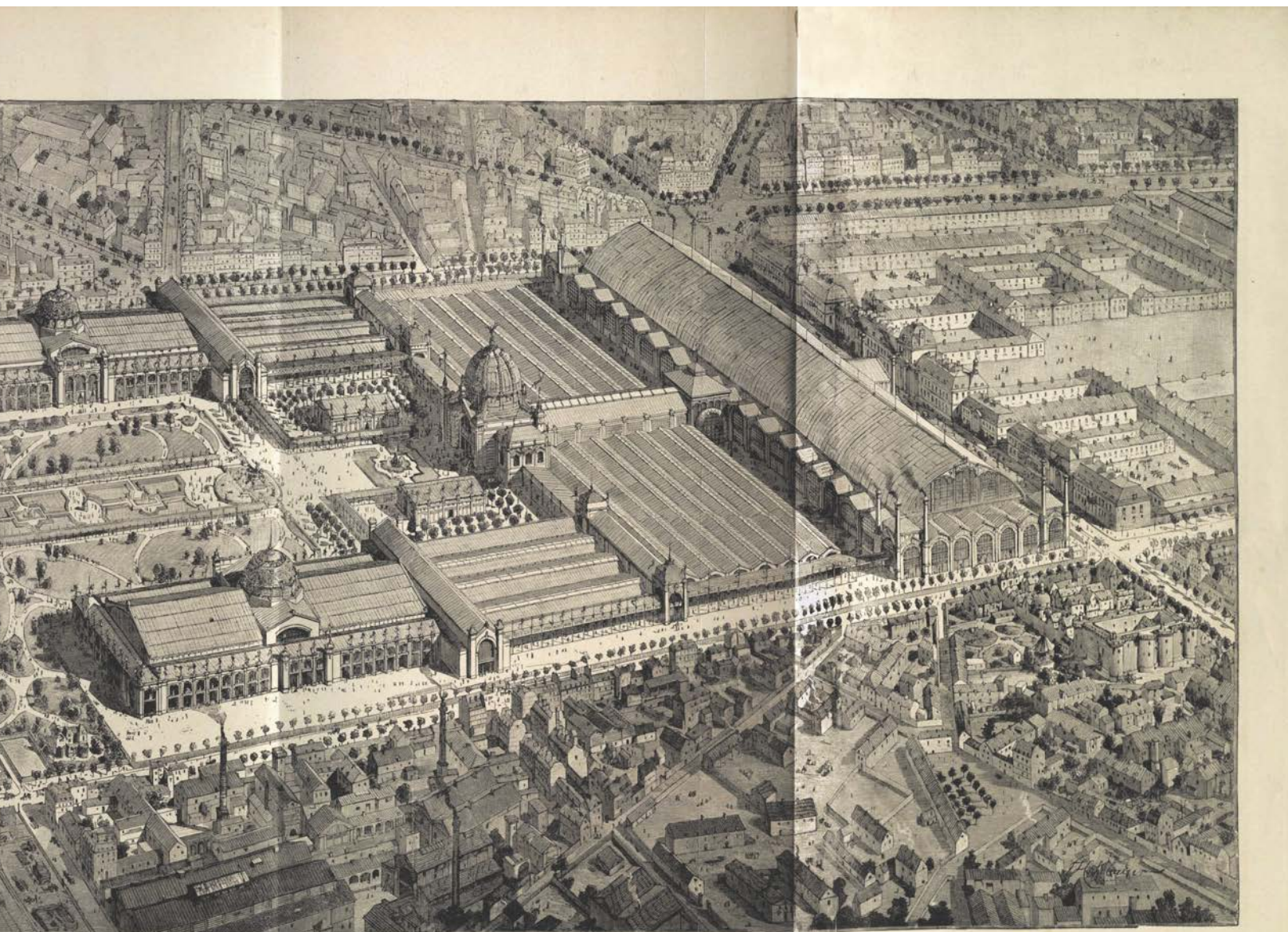
The Golden Age of Interaction: Exhibitions, Expertise, and Institutionalization of Relations

The 19th century marked the heyday of the Society's international activities, which reached unprecedented scale and systematic organization. The Society became a key organizer and participant in international industrial and agricultural exhibitions, the main venues for global economic competition and cooperation.

VEO did not merely present individual exhibits; it often took responsibility for the formation and scientific support of entire Russian sections.

Preparation for the exhibitions was serious scientific work:

- samples of products (grain, flax, hemp, sugar, timber, etc.), soils, and minerals were collected;
- methods for their display were developed;





The Russian Department at the World's Fair in Chicago, 1893

- detailed reports and multilingual catalogs were compiled.

The Society's triumph was its participation in the 1867 World's Fair in Paris. The Society presented an impressive exhibit, including the richest collection of Russian flax samples — a primary export commodity— systematized soil samples from various provinces, a collection of mineral fertilizers, and scientific works on agronomy. This exposition was awarded the highest prize — *the Grand Prix* — which recognized not only the quality of the exhibits but also the scientific work of VEO. The Society's report emphasized the strategic importance of such events:

"...the World's Industrial Exhibition provides both manufacturers and workers the opportunity to directly compare the same products made in different countries and by various methods, to assess the strengths of some and the weaknesses of others, and thereby to draw conclusions about the advantages of one method over another. Indeed, the 1867 World's Fair in Paris eloquently demonstrated the true value of such fairs; it provided us with the opportunity to observe

The Russian Pavilion at the
World's Fair in Paris in 1900



the various stages of development on which different nations stand, and at the same time to form a general understanding of the civilization of the entire globe.¹⁵⁰

The success in Paris was further solidified by participation in other major exhibitions:

- **Vienna (1873):** VEO presented detailed studies on Russian agriculture and cottage industries, contributing to the attraction of foreign investments.
- **Philadelphia (1876):** Emphasis was placed on achievements in technical crops and forestry.
- **Chicago (1893):** The successes of post-emancipation agriculture were widely demonstrated, especially in the black soil provinces.

Alongside exhibition activities, VEO deepened its institutional connections and expert exchanges. The Society carefully studied and promoted in Russia advanced foreign practices in various fields:

- **Agriculture:** Study and implementation of rational crop rotation systems, grass sowing (the so-called “crop-rotation system”), new crops (such as sugar beet production), livestock breeds, and agricultural tools (iron plows, threshers, seeders). VEO organized translations and publications of fundamental works by Western agronomists.
- **Cooperation and finance:** Analysis and adaptation of models for credit and savings societies (based on Raiffeisen and Schulze-Delitzsch), agricultural banks, and insurance (covering fires and livestock disease).
- **Industry and technologies:** Study of organizational experiences in factory production, new processing technologies for agricultural raw materials (sugar, oil, starch), and mechanization.
- **Crisis management:** Analysis of measures to combat famine, epizootics, agricultural pests (locust invasions, ground squirrels), and soil erosion, drawing from international experiences.

VEO acted as an analytical hub, filtering global practices and proposing solutions suitable for Russian conditions. Its committees and commis-

The Society carefully studied and promoted in Russia advanced foreign practices in various fields

sions prepared overviews of foreign experience, published translations of key international works, and organized lectures and business trips. Reports frequently included phrases like “as is done in England/Germany/France/America”, reflecting constant comparative analysis.

Scientific Diplomacy and the Society’s Role in Global Economic Thought

By the beginning of the 20th century, VEO had become a recognized authority within the international scientific and economic community. Its library, containing tens of thousands of volumes of foreign literature, was a unique repository of knowledge. The Society maintained correspondence with hundreds of institutions worldwide. Its Proceedings were in demand in university and scientific libraries across Europe and America. Participation in international congresses on agriculture, statistics, and cooperation became commonplace. VEO contributed not only to the import of ideas but also to the export of Russian experience, especially in fields such as agricultural statistics, black soil studies, and the organization of large landowning and peasant farms under specific conditions.

A Bridge Across Borders

Thus, international cooperation was not merely an element but a foundational principle of the activities of the Free Economic Society.

Through VEO, Russia absorbed the fruits of the global scientific and technological revolution in agriculture and industry, while also demonstrating its own achievements. The Society became a unique Russian institution of “scientific diplomacy”, operating at the intersection of economics, science, and international relations. Its activities significantly accelerated the country’s modernization, contributed to its integration into the global economy, and helped shape a Russian school of economic and agronomic thought open to worldwide influences.

VEO served as a “window to Europe” for agricultural and economic knowledge and at the same time as a “showcase of Russia” for the international scientific community.

FREE ECONOMIC SOCIETY OF RUSSIA TODAY



The Society's structure comprises 65 regional public organizations and branches across various subjects of the Russian Federation

The history of the VEO of Russia is so rich and multifaceted that capturing it in a single publication, without omitting anything, is an impossible task. This book presents a period of recent history of the VEO of Russia, covering the years from 2015 to 2025¹⁹⁴.

Before proceeding to discuss the goals, objectives, and areas of activity of the VEO of Russia in the 21st century, it is important to draw the reader's attention to the fact that today, the traditions of the Imperial VEO are more than just historical heritage. They are carefully preserved and actively developed. This continuity is reflected in every nationwide educational, scientific-expert, and analytical project undertaken by the VEO of Russia.

The primary goal of the VEO of Russia has remained unchanged for 260 years — to promote enlightenment. The VEO of Russia actively participates in addressing current socio-economic development challenges of the country, develops practical recommendations for achieving Russia's national development goals, works to improve the population's financial literacy, enhances the intellectual potential of youth, promotes scientific and public diplomacy, and strengthens scientific-expert contacts with researchers abroad.

To paraphrase Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov, a prominent Russian polymath, who believed that Russian strength would grow through its regions, the scope of the Society's activities steadily expands each year, thanks to the active work of its regional organizations. The VEO of Russia is proud that its structure includes 65 regional organizations and branches across various subjects of the Russian Federation. This enables us to unite hundreds of thousands of experts, scientists, and specialists, representatives of the academic and educational communities, business circles, and government authorities from all regions of Russia, thereby aggregating a comprehensive array of expert ideas and proposals aimed at acceler-



260 years since
the foundation of the Free
Economic Society of Russia

- 65 regional organizations and branches
- 300 000 specialists, experts, and scientists participate in the work of the Free Economic Society of Russia
- 400 000 participants in the Free Economic Society of Russia's educational projects annually
- 30 000 copies of informational, analytical, scientific, and educational publications annually
- 1 000 research, expert, educational, and business events annually



Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin



All-Russian Economic Assembly,
State The Kremlin Palace



All-Russian Economic Assembly,
State The Kremlin Palace



Sergey Ryabukhin,
First Deputy Chair of the
Federation Council Committee on
the Budget and Financial Markets,
Vice-President of the VEO of
Russia

Anatoly Artamonov, Chair of the
Federation Council Committee on
the Budget and Financial Markets
(left to right)



ating the achievement of Russia’s national development goals, facilitating the structural reorganization of the domestic economy, and improving the quality of life for its citizens. To learn more about the activities of the regional organizations and branches of the VEO of Russia, please visit the official website of the VEO of Russia (<https://veorus.ru>), where you can find information on the Society’s nationwide projects and its annual activity reports. Essays on the work of the regional organizations and branches of the VEO of Russia will be published in a separate edition.

In Pursuit of Answers to the Challenges of the 21st Century

In celebration of the 250th anniversary of the VEO of Russia, the Government of Russia established a professional holiday — the “Economist’s Day” — to be celebrated on November 11th, the date of the Society’s founding (new style). This significant event in the history of the VEO of Russia, acknowledging its contribution to the nation’s development, has become an important unifying moment for Russia’s economic community. Every year on November 11th, since 2016, the VEO of Russia holds the Russian Nationwide Economic Assembly dedicated to the professional holiday “Economist’s Day”. The event brings together all the economic communities of the country. In 2024, over four thousand distinguished specialists from 72 regions of Russia and several foreign countries gathered to participate in the Assembly.

On the Economist’s Day, it is customary to honor the authors of the most outstanding economic publications, as well as distinguished domestic economists, in recognition of their contributions to the nation and society. This celebration highlights their achievements in advancing economic practice, fostering social, economic, and technological development, and enriching the fields of economic science, education, and enlightenment.

The culmination of the Russian Nationwide Economic Assembly, as tradition dictates, is the awarding of prestigious nationwide public prizes established by the Free Economic Society of Russia—“Economist of the Year” and “Economic Book of the Year”. Annual conduct of the event maintains and develops the tradition of the Imperial VEO of Russia, initiated by Catherine the Great, of organizing competitions for the best projects in agri-

Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister
of Economic Development
of the Russian Federation





Vladimir Putin,
President of the Russian Federation

” *The Imperial Free Economic Society, founded in 1765, brought together under its auspices eminent scholars, statesmen, politicians, writers, and entrepreneurs — an assembly of educated, passionate individuals who truly care about the fate of their state. Since its establishment, VEO has made a profound contribution to the development of economic thought in our country. It has played a vital role in public education, the organization of research expeditions, and the fostering of open debates on the most pressing issues of the national agenda. Today, the Free Economic Society of Russia actively engages in the life of the nation, all the while preserving the continuity of time and tradition and cherishing the rich scientific, ideological, and intellectual heritage of its predecessors.*

The nationwide highest public economic award, “Economist of the Year”, is the most prestigious honor for the Russian economic community.

culture, industry, and trade. Since 1766, VEO has regularly announced competitions and awarded winners with medals and monetary prizes.

The nationwide highest public economic award, “Economist of the Year”, is the most prestigious honor for the Russian economic community. The profession of an economist is one of the most complex and responsibility-laden. Our future depends on these specialists — on the quality of their expertise, fundamental and applied research, and the precision of their decisions, scenarios, and forecasts. Therefore, it is important to recognize the contribution of economists to the present and future of the country and its people. Maksim Reshetnikov, Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, is convinced that profound transformations in the economy and the fabric of everyday life are, in large measure, the fruit of economists’ endeavors.

“Over the past quarter-century, we have managed to build a stable, open, and competitive economy that confidently withstands domestic and external challenges, becoming more flexible, adaptable, stronger, and growing today faster than the world average rate. Most importantly, the economy is undergoing qualitative transformations. Domestic production is increasing, advanced technologies are being created, new growth points and jobs are emerging in both cities and villages. All this makes regions more independent, businesses more efficient, and gives people confidence in the future. And this is the merit of each of us — economists and man-

Gennady Krasnikov, Co-Chair of MAEF, President of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), RAS Academician

Sergey Bodrunov, Co-Chair of MAEF, President of the VEO of Russia, RAS Corresponding Member

Alexander Dynkin, Co-Chair of the MAEF Program Committee, Vice-President of the VEO of Russia, President of the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS), RAS Academician
(left to right)



Venue of the Moscow Academic Economic Forum (MAEF) — Great Hall of the Russian Academy of Sciences



agers at enterprises, entrepreneurs and business owners, federal and regional management teams, development institutions, and representatives of science”, said the Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation in his greeting to the participants of the Russian Nationwide Economic Assembly.

The winners of the “Economist of the Year” award are chosen by a distinguished jury, which includes leading scientists and experts, government and public figures, heads of specialized research institutes, and representatives of ministries, agencies, and public organizations. Over the years, laureates of the “Economist of the Year” award have included Roman Artyuhin, Head of the Federal Treasury, Valery Kryukov, Director of the Institute of Economics and Organization of Industrial Production of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Arkady Trachuk, CEO of Goznak JSC, Vladimir Shcherbakov, Chairman of the Board of the Autotor Investment Company, and others.

The “Economic Book of the Year” public award has been held since 2018 and, over this time, has established itself as a reputable guide in the world

of economic literature. Annually, thousands of books on economics and finance are published in Russia. When readers find it difficult to navigate through this diversity, they can simply refer to the shortlists of the “Economic Book of the Year” — all publications included in these lists deserve attention. Expert councils and the award jury carefully examine the works submitted for the competition and select the best monographs, textbooks, and popular science publications.

In addition to the awards presented to laureates of the nationwide public prizes of the VEO of Russia, the Society has two highest honors: the Silver Medal and the Great Gold Medal of the VEO of Russia. These medals are modeled after the awards of the Imperial VEO, with the originals preserved in the Hermitage Museum. The medals are registered with the Heraldic Council under the President of the Russian Federation and are included in the federal heraldic registry. These awards honor outstanding economists, scientists, and experts for their exceptional contributions to the common good.

Within the framework of the Russian Nationwide Economic Assembly, the expert community summarizes the results of the current economic year, presents scenario forecasts for the coming year, and proposes outlines for a new model of economic growth. This model aims to transition to a trajectory of balanced socio-economic development, strengthen the country’s economic and technological sovereignty, enhance Russia’s economy resilience to external shocks, and realize its full potential.

The VEO of Russia and its regional organizations annually hold over a thousand diverse educational and scientific-expert events, aimed at conducting research, developing recommendations, and proposing solutions on current issues of the country’s socio-economic development.

One of the largest nationwide projects organized by the VEO of Russia in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences is the continual-



Valentina Matviyenko,
Chairperson of the Federation Council of the Federal
Assembly of the Russian Federation

”

The Free Economic Society of Russia — the country’s first civil society institution — proudly upholds the noble traditions of its distinguished predecessors and commands well-deserved respect both within Russia and beyond its borders. The Society’s active endeavors, rooted in the ideological heritage and experience of the Imperial Free Economic Society, take on particular significance in today’s conditions — times that demand the unification of civil society institutions and the state to ensure sustainable development and the prosperity of our country.

Large Gold Medal of the Free Economic Society of Russia registered by the Heraldic Council under the President of the Russian Federation and entered into the federal heraldic registry (Certificate No. 078 dated October 14, 2005, Registration No. 158)

Silver Medal of the Free Economic Society of Russia registered by the Heraldic Council under the President of the Russian Federation and entered into the federal heraldic registry (Certificate No. 079 dated October 14, 2005, Registration No. 160)



ly active International Moscow Academic Economic Forum (MAEF). The forum was first held in 2019 and has become a significant event in the country's scientific and economic life, establishing itself as a reputable platform for dialogue. Each year, MAEF expands in scale, attracting new participants and broadening its geographical reach. In 2025, the Forum attracted over 17,500 participants from 32 countries worldwide. To compare, the inaugural MAEF in 2019 gathered about 2,500 people from 24 countries.

The unique aspect of MAEF is that it is a continuously active intellectual platform, maintaining ongoing dialogue and engagement. Within the framework of MAEF, thematic and sector-specific forums, regional platforms based at leading universities and scientific centers across the country, as well as regional organizations of the VEO of Russia, operate annually. The central events of MAEF traditionally take place in the capital, at the Russian Academy of Sciences, leading universities, scientific centers, and RAS institutes.

The multi-layered structure of MAEF ensures broad discussions by engaging experts, scientists, and specialists from all regions of Russia, facilitating the accumulation of well-considered ideas and specific proposals. The final recommendations of MAEF are highly valued within expert, scientific, and business communities, and they are in demand among government institutions.

"...MAEF makes a significant contribution to strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration among various scientific fields, consolidating the efforts of scientists, experts, business representatives, public institutions, and the government to achieve the country's national development goals, ensure technological leadership, and improve the quality of life for people..." said Valery Falkov, Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation.

"...In the context of turbulent global circumstances and increasing geopolitical tensions, expert and scientific support for efforts to create a more just, multipolar economic architecture is more in demand than ever. Collaborative work among government officials, business leaders, scientists, and public circles within the framework of MAEF is becoming especially significant", said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.



Boris Porfiryev, Vice President of the VEO of Russia, Head of the Economics Section of the Department of Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), Scientific Director of the RAS Institute of Economic Forecasting, RAS Academician

The “Abalkin Readings” scientific forum has been held by the VEO of Russia since 1994. Previously, it was called “Economic Growth of Russia” and was led by Vice President of the VEO of Russia and RAS Academician L.I. Abalkin. In memory of the scientist, the VEO Presidium decided to rename the forum “Abalkin Readings”. Currently, the forum is headed by Boris Nikolaevich Porfiryev, Vice President of the VEO of Russia, Head of the Economics Section of the Department of Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), Scientific Director of the RAS Institute of Economic Forecasting, and a RAS Academician. The focus of the experts’ attention at the “Abalkin Readings” includes pressing issues of the country’s socio-economic development: strategies for achieving Russia’s national development goals, spatial, fiscal, and monetary policies, scientific and technological policy, development of specific sectors such as industry, healthcare, the labor market, and education.

Reforming economic education is one of the key topics on the agenda of the “Abalkin Readings”. The development of new technological paradigms, a broad spectrum of transformations in economic and social spheres, and the intensification of geopolitical contradictions — all these processes necessitate the urgent update and revitalization of educational programs in the field of economics.

The topic of developing economic education is also the focus of a multi-level discussion organized by the VEO of Russia during the Nationwide Assembly on reforming economic education. This discussion addresses the directions and content of the reform in the country’s economic education system, taking into account the challenges and objectives facing Russia in the new geopolitical and economic reality. The Assembly’s experts concluded that, within the framework of reforming domestic economic education, it is necessary to update the curriculum content, actively promote a practice-oriented approach in the educational process, develop systems to attract young people to economic sciences, and continuously improve teachers’ qualifications (for more details, see the analytical materials and the Assembly’s resolution available on the platforms of the VEO of Russia).

Pressing social and economic development issues are brought to the agenda of expert sessions and scientific-practical conferences organized by the VEO of Russia. Participants examine a wide range of economic issues: discussing new approaches to state planning and spatial



Column Hall of the House of Unions Russian Nationwide Economic Assembly

Sergey Glazyev,
Vice-President of the VEO
of Russia, RAS Academician
Anatoly Aksakov,
Chairman of the State Duma
Committee on Financial Markets,
Board Member of the VEO
of Russia
(left to right)



“Abalkin Readings” Scientific
Forum



development; providing expert assessments of key measures and tools for achieving the country’s national development goals; and offering proposals and recommendations to strengthen technological sovereignty, accelerate scientific and technological progress, improve the business climate, enhance the effectiveness of fiscal and monetary policies, and develop cooperation with friendly countries.

The outcomes of the Society’s extensive scientific-practical and expert-analytical activities are compiled into expert opinions, recommendations, and resolutions. These documents are then sent to relevant government agencies and leading analytical and scientific centers across the country.

The Congress of the VEO of Russia is the highest governing body of the organization. Delegates from regional organizations and branches of the VEO of Russia, scientists and experts from Russia and abroad, as well as representatives from government, business, and the educational community, participate in the Congress. During the scientific sessions, participants address priority issues related to Russia’s technological

Vladimir Gutenev, Chairman
of the State Duma Committee
on Industry and Trade



Georgiy Muradov, Deputy
Chairman of the Council
of Ministers of the Republic
of Crimea — Permanent
Representative of the Republic
of Crimea under the President
of the Russian Federation, Board
Member of the VEO of Russia



Alexander Shokhin,
President of the Russian
Union of Industrialists and
Entrepreneurs, Presidium
Member of the VEO of Russia



Andrey Klepach,
Chief Economist of the State
Development Corporation VEB.
RF, Board Member of the VEO
of Russia

Abel Aganbegyan,
RAS Academician

Alexander Shirov, Director
of the Institute of Economic
Forecasting of the Russian
Academy of Sciences, RAS
Corresponding Member,
Presidium Member
of the VEO of Russia
(left to right)





Sergey Naryshkin,
Director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service
and Chairman of the Russian Historical Society

” *By bringing together exceptional and talented individuals, the Free Economic Society has always strived to discover the most effective ways to develop the nation. Today, the agenda includes the pressing challenges of our era — strengthening national economic security, devising anti-crisis strategies, and ensuring employment amidst rising productivity. The active participation of both young and established scientists and entrepreneurs in these discussions fosters the growth of Russia’s scientific, technological, and intellectual potential. Moreover, a focus on sectors of the real economy guarantees that the solutions developed are practical and impactful.*

and socio-economic development, while organizational sessions focus on making decisions related to the society’s activities. The Congress serves as a crucial platform to review the work of the VEO of Russia over the past five years and to set strategic directions for future development. In its modern history, the VEO of Russia has held ten Congresses, which have taken place at venues such as the Tauride Palace in St. Petersburg, the Column Hall of the House of the Union in Moscow, and the State Kremlin Palace.

Another important area of the Society’s activities is outreach among youth, including the promotion of the historical, economic, and cultural heritage of the VEO of Russia, as well as the popularization of Russian socio-economic thought. More than 400,000 participants from all regions of Russia participate annually in outreach projects of the VEO of Russia.

A Step into the Future: The Area of Youth Initiatives

The VEO of Russia has always placed great emphasis on disseminating knowledge about the achievements of domestic economic thought, the contributions of prominent economists to the socio-economic life of the country, and the development of economic theory. Therefore, many of the competition and national youth projects of the VEO of Russia are focused on education: promoting science and technology, engaging young people in research and scientific-practical activities, enhancing intellectual capabilities and fostering creative potential among youth, as well as developing economic literacy.



Sergey Sobyenin,
Mayor of Moscow

“ For centuries, the Society has made significant contributions to addressing the key challenges of our country’s economic development. Its great merit lies in preserving and enhancing the finest traditions of the Russian economic school and ensuring the continuity of generations in economic science. Today, the VEO of Russia continues to play a vital role in the economic, scientific, and public life of the state. By uniting leading practicing economists, scholars, and experts, your organization serves as a respected platform for discussing pressing issues of economic theory and practice, providing objective assessments of Russia’s transformations. I am confident that the Society will continue to support the resolution of complex socio-economic challenges facing the country and propose new progressive models of economic growth.

One of the most large-scale nationwide projects organized by the VEO of Russia is the “Russian Nationwide Economic Dictation”, an educational initiative held annually since 2017. In 2025, over 392,000 participants from all regions of Russia and 11 foreign countries took part in the Economic Dictation, including Belarus, Mongolia, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Syria, and China. This is six times the number of participants compared to the first event in 2017.

The tasks of the initiative are designed to familiarize Russians with economic theory and history, to cultivate a culture of informed economic and financial behavior, to foster interest in current economic issues, and to demonstrate how to apply economic knowledge and skills in everyday life. Ultimately, the mission of the Economic Dictation is to contribute to improving the quality of life for the Russian population.

Traditionally, Russians participate in the Economic Dictation both individually and at regional venues via the event’s website. Every year, over 1,350 regional sites operate across all regions of Russia and in several foreign countries, organized in educational institutions, museums, libraries, government agencies, and entrepreneurship development centers.

Sergey Ryabukhin, First Deputy Chairman of the Budget and Financial Markets Committee of the Federation Council, Vice President

Dauren Abayev,
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Ambassador of the Republic
of Kazakhstan to the Russian
Federation

Alexander Auzan,
Dean of the Faculty of Economics
at Lomonosov Moscow State
University



Igor Artemyev, Head
of the Federal Antimonopoly
Service (2004–2020), President
of the St. Petersburg International
Mercantile Exchange (SPIMEX)

Valery Kryukov,
Director of the Institute
of Economics and Industrial
Engineering within the Siberian
Branch of the Russian Academy
of Sciences, RAS Academician,
Presidium Member of the VEO
of Russia

Vladimir Betelin, Scientific
Director of the Research Institute
for Systems Analysis of Russian
Academy of Sciences, RAS
Academician

Oleg Smolin,
First Deputy Chairman of the State
Duma Committee on Science
and Higher Education, Presidium
Member of the VEO of Russia



Vasily Bogoyavlensky,
Deputy Director of the Institute
of Oil and Gas Problems
of the Russian Academy
of Sciences, RAS Corresponding
Member, Presidium Member
of the VEO of Russia



Nikolay Bortnikov, Academician-
Secretary of the Earth Sciences
Department of the Russian
Academy of Sciences, Presidium
Member of the VEO of Russia,
Scientific Director of the Institute
of Geology of Ore Deposits,
Petrography, Mineralogy and
Geochemistry of the Russian
Academy of Sciences



Albert Bakhtizin,
Director of the Central Economic
and Mathematical Institute of the
RAS, Corresponding Member of
the RAS, Member of the Presidium
of the VEO of Russia

Alexander Buzgalin
(19.07.1954 — 18.10.2023),
Director of the Center for
Contemporary Marxist Studies
at the Faculty of Philosophy
of Lomonosov Moscow State
University, Distinguished
Professor at Lomonosov Moscow
State University, Vice President of
the VEO of Russia

Alexey Vedev, Director
of the Eurasian Economic
Commission's Macroeconomic
Policy Department, Board
Member of the VEO of Russia



Fyodor Voytolovsky, Director
of the Primakov National
Research Institute of World
Economy and International
Relations of the Russian Academy
of Sciences, RAS Corresponding
Member

Alexey Gvishiani,
Scientific Director
of the Geophysical Center
of the Russian Academy
of Sciences, Chairman of the RAS
Scientific Council for the Study
of the Arctic and Antarctica, RAS
Academician, Board Member
of the VEO of Russia



Mikhail Golovnin,
Director of the Institute
of Economics of the Russian
Academy of Sciences, RAS
Corresponding Member,
Presidium Member of the VEO
of Russia



Mikhail Gorshkov, Director of
the Institute of Sociology of the
Federal Center of Theoretical and
Applied Sociology of the RAS,
Scientific Director of the Federal
Scientific Research Sociological
Center of the RAS, Academician
of the RAS, Member of the
Presidium of the VEO of Russia

Anton Danilov-Danilyan,
Deputy Chairman of Delovaya
Rossiya (Business Russia),
Deputy Chairman of the Public
Council of the Ministry of
Industry and Trade of the Russian
Federation, Chairman of the
Expert Council of the Industrial
Development Fund

Mikhail Ershov, Chief Director
of Financial Research at
the Institute of Energy
and Finance, Professor at
the Financial University under
the Government of the Russian
Federation, Presidium Member
of the VEO of Russia

Alexander Ageev,
Director of the Institute
of Economic Strategies, CEO
of the International Research
Institute for Advanced Systems

(left to right)





Talia Khabrieva,
Academician-Secretary
of the Department of Social
Sciences of the Russian Academy
of Sciences, RAS Academician



Ruslan Grinberg,
Scientific Director of the RAS
Institute of Economics, RAS
Corresponding Member, Active
Member of the Senate of the VEO
of Russia

Mikhail Eskindarov, President and
Scientific Director of the Financial
University under the Government
of the Russian Federation, Vice
President of the VEO of Russia



Victor Ivanter
(14.11.1935 — 15.09.2019),
Soviet and Russian Economist,
RAS Academician, headed
the RAS Institute of Economic
Forecasting from 1997 to 2017,
Active Member of the Senate
of the VEO of Russia



Sergey Kalashnikov,
Chairman of the Presidium of
the International Union of Public
Associations "Russian Association
for International Cooperation",
Member of the Presidium of the
VEO of Russia



Stepan Kalmykov,
Vice President of the RAS,
Scientific Director of the Faculty of
Chemistry at Lomonosov Moscow
State University, Academician of
the RAS



Andrey Kolganov, Head of the Laboratory for Comparative Study of Socio-Economic Systems at the Faculty of Economics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Presidium Member of the VEO of Russia

Elena Lenchuk, Head of the Economic Policy at the RAS Institute of Economics, Board Member of the VEO of Russia



Andrey Kaprin, General Director of the National Medical Research Radiology Center of the Ministry of Health of Russia, Director of the P.A. Hertzen Moscow Research Oncological Institute, Chief Freelance Oncologist of the Ministry of Health of Russia, Academician of the RAS

Georgy Kleiner, Head of the Research Area "Meso-Economics, Microeconomics, Corporate Economics" at the Central Economic and Mathematical Institute of the RAS, Corresponding Member of the RAS, Member of the Presidium of the VEO of Russia



Valery Makarov, Scientific Director of the Central Economic and Mathematical Institute of the RAS, Academician of the RAS, Member of the Presidium of the VEO of Russia



Elena Panina, Director of the Institute for International Political and Economic Strategies—RUSSTRAT; Vice President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Member of the Presidium of the VEO of Russia



Alexander Petrikov, Director of the Nikonov All-Russian Institute of Agrarian Problems and Informatics, RAS Academician, Presidium Member of the VEO of Russia



Stanislav Prokofyev, Rector of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Board Member of the VEO of Russia



Margarita Ratnikova, Vice President of the VEO of Russia, Director of the VEO of Russia

Dmitry Sorokin (01.01.1946 — 14.03.2021), Soviet and Russian economist, Corresponding Member of RAS, Vice-Rector for Research at the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Vice President of the VEO of Russia

Vladimir Starodubov, Academician-Secretary of the RAS Department of Medical Sciences, RAS Academician



Vladimir Stroev, Rector of the State University of Management



Boris Titov, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for Relations with International Organizations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, Member of the Board of the VEO of Russia



Garegin Tosunyan, President of the Association of Russian Banks, Academician of the RAS, Vice President of the VEO of Russia



Sergey Filippov, Director of the Institute of Energy Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences, RAS Academician

Vladimir Shcherbakov, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Avtotor Group of Companies, Presidium Member of the VEO of Russia

Yuri Yakutin, Vice President of the VEO of Russia, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Scientific Director of JSC Publishing House "Economic Newspaper", General Director of JSC Publishing House "Economics and Life"



Vladimir Milovidov, Deputy Director for Research at the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), Corresponding Member of RAS, Member of the Board of the VEO of Russia

Dmitry Birichevsky, Director of the Department of Economic Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. Fireplace Hall of the Economist's House



Inna Svyatenko, Deputy Chair of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation



Vladimir Okrepilov, President of the St. Petersburg Regional Organization of the VEO of Russia, Scientific Director of the RAS Institute of Regional Economic Problems, RAS Academician

Congress Hall of the Free Economic Society of Russia



Presidium Hall of the Russian Academy of Sciences



Nikolay Makarov, Vice President of the Russian Academy of Sciences, RAS Academician, Presidium Member of the VEO of Russia

Sergey Bodrunov, President of the VEO of Russia, RAS Corresponding Member

Mikhail Shmakov, President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia

Ekaterina Kharchenko, Deputy Chair of the State Duma Committee on Science and Higher Education of the RF Federal Assembly, Board Member of the VEO of Russia. Exhibition of economic publications of the VEO of Russia



Press Conference dedicated to the launch of the “Russian Nationwide Economic Dictation” nationwide educational campaign in the TASS press center



Regional Platforms of the “Russian Nationwide Economic Dictation” Campaign



of the VEO of Russia, is confident that initiatives like the Economic Dictation motivate Russians to actively engage in the country’s economic life. Oleg Smolin, First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee of the RF Federal Assembly on Science and Higher Education, member of the Presidium of the VEO of Russia, has repeatedly emphasized the significant role of such activities in expanding Russians’ economic horizons.

“The Economic Dictation is an incentive for young people to seriously start reading works on economics, including those on economic theory, which, in my experience, often go unnoticed by students, despite the fact that students begin studying social studies since the sixth grade. This initiative is a wonderful effort”, said the Deputy.

“For young people, this is primarily very valuable and new knowledge. Participants prepare thoroughly for the Economic Dictation, studying the fundamentals of economics. Perhaps some of the young participants will even develop an interest in this subject and pursue it more deeply in the future”, said Mikhail Eskindarov, President and Scientific Director

Awarding of the best speakers at the MAEF International Youth Conference at the headquarters of the VEO of Russia



Ceremony of Awarding the Winners of the International Youth Scientific Works Competition in Economics at the Moscow Academic Economic Forum, Great Hall of the Russian Academy of Sciences

The awards are presented by the co-chairs of the MAEF Program Committee:

Boris Porfiryev, Vice President of the VEO of Russia, RAS Academician, and Alexander Dynkin, RAS Academician, Vice President of the VEO of Russia

(left to right)



of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation and Vice President of the VEO of Russia.

“By testing your knowledge, you can assess your strengths and weaknesses, and understand what additional knowledge you need. This is a unique opportunity for self-education — no grades are given, and no one scolds you here”, Yakov Silin, Rector of Ural State University of Economics, Vice President of the VEO of Russia, and President of the Ural Branch of the VEO of Russia.

Economists and scientists place high hopes on initiatives like the Economic Dictation.

“Not everyone has a clear idea of what the profession of an economist entails today — both in academic and applied terms. Initiatives like the Economic Dictation help young people who are planning to enter an economics university to consider what range of knowledge a modern economist should possess”, said Aleksandr Shirov, Director of the RAS Institute of Economic Forecasting, RAS Corresponding Member, and Member of the Presidium of the VEO of Russia.

Vladimir Kvint,
Chair of the Economic and
Financial Strategy Department at
the Moscow School of Economics,
Lomonosov Moscow State
University, Board Member
of the VEO of Russia

Vladimir Ivanov,
Deputy President of the Russian
Academy of Sciences, Presidium
Member of the VEO of Russia
(left to right)



Vladimir Kuznetsov, Chairman
of the UN country team in Russia
and Director of the UN Information
Centre in Moscow



Igor Maksimtsev,
Rector of St. Petersburg State
University of Economics, Board
Member of the VEO of Russia

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy
(25.04.1946 — 06.04.2022),
Head of the LDPR faction, Deputy
Chairman of the State Duma



Roman Artyukhin, Head of the Federal Treasury of Russia, Laureate of the Russian Nationwide Supreme Public Economic Award "Economist of the Year — 2024"



Konstantin Mogilevsky, Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, Co-Chairman of the Russian Historical Society



Sergey Mitin, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the Federation Council of the RF Federal Assembly on Agrarian and Food Policy and Environmental Management, Vice President of the VEO of Russia

Alexander Murychev, Vice President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Presidium Member of the VEO of Russia

(left to right)



Russian Nationwide Economic Assembly dedicated to the professional holiday "Economist's Day", The Carlton Hotel, Moscow, Grand Conference Hall



International Conference
“Conceptual Platform of Global
Transformation: Noonomy,
Socialization, and Economy
of Solidarity” in Mexico



Radhika Desai, Professor at
the University of Manitoba



Professor Alan Freeman, Director
of the Geopolitical Economy
Research Group, University
of Manitoba

International Experts,
the Congress Hall of the VEO
of Russia



Awarding winners of the Russian Nationwide Festival of Economic Science at the Moscow Academic Economic Forum, Congress Hall of the VEO of Russia



Ekaterina Kharchenko, Deputy Chairperson of the State Duma Committee on Science and Higher Education and Board Member of the VEO of Russia, agrees that the career guidance mission of the Economic Dictation is very important.

“Many school students taking the Unified State Exam do not understand what they want to pursue in higher education; their choice of university and future profession is often made unconsciously. We hope that some participants will develop an interest in economics and consider it as a potential career path”, she said.

Interest in the Economic Dictation is high across all age groups in Russia: participation includes not only school and university students but also their parents and older relatives, university professors, entrepreneurs, government officials, and scientists.

The results of the Economic Dictation are annually used as the basis for analytical research. The data obtained allow assessments of the level of economic literacy and economic activity among the population of Russia and its individual regions.

Every year, on the eve of the event, a press conference is held at the TASS press center dedicated to the start of the Economic Dictation. This event brings together scientists, government representatives, and public figures.

Since 1997, nearly thirty years, the Free Economic Society of Russia has been organizing the Youth Competition of Scientific Works in Economics. The competition has already opened doors to science for dozens of young people and motivated them to pursue careers in economics. Many of the laureates of the early competitions now hold prominent positions in government agencies, leading universities, and scientific centers across the country, yet they remember their beginnings. Some actively participate in the activities of the Free Economic Society of Russia, while others support young researchers by mentoring and guiding them in preparing entries for the Youth Scientific Works Competition.

Since 2018, the VEO of Russia has been organizing the Russian Nationwide Festival of Economic Science. Every year, hundreds of thousands of students from universities, colleges, schools, lyceums, and gymnasiums participate in the festival. Participants include winners and finalists of its various events: the nationwide educational campaign “Russian Na-

The Russian Nationwide Economic Dictation is attended annually not only by school and university students but also by entrepreneurs, researchers, educators, and government officials. The consolidation of these diverse groups is a unique aspect of this educational initiative.

Final of the Russian Nationwide Festival of Economic Science at the Moscow Aviation Institute (National Technical University)



Presentation of the UN report "Global Economic Situation and Perspectives", Moscow, Congress Hall of the VEO of Russia



tionwide Economic Dictation", the International Youth Scientific Works Competition in Economics, and other related projects.

"The Festival is a boiling point of Russian youth scientific thought. It brings together talented young people, allows them to realize their intellectual potential in science, motivates self-education and scientific activity, and provides an impulse to expand their economic horizons, knowledge, and opportunities", said Roman Golov, Member of the Presidium of the VEO of Russia, leader and coordinator of the groups preparing for the Festival final.

The festival final serves as a platform where young participants hone their teamwork skills — collaboratively answering economic quiz questions and solving situational cases. The strongest teams earn the status of festival winners and receive invitations to the award ceremony held during the main events of the Moscow Academic Economic Forum.

To promote economic literacy, the VEO of Russia organizes public lectures both at the Society's venue and in leading universities across the country. These lectures bring together experienced specialists, scientists, experts, and representatives of the younger generation, fostering knowledge exchange and engagement.



Sergey Lavrov,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

” *The Society’s chronicle is adorned with many luminous names — distinguished scientists, eminent statesmen, and influential politicians — who made significant contributions to strengthening Russian statehood. It is heartening to note that today VEO continues to implement in-demand projects and programs, drawing upon its rich experience and established traditions. Its members engage in diverse scientific and educational activities, contributing to the socio-economic development of the country and improving the living standards of its citizens. In today’s conditions, when our nation faces grand tasks of comprehensive modernization, such efforts command deep respect. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs warmly welcomes the Society’s active international engagement, which fosters the expansion of humanitarian ties with foreign partners and strengthens an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding in global affairs.*

New Horizons of Public and Scientific Diplomacy

Today, the VEO of Russia dedicates significant attention to the development of scientific and public diplomacy, as well as international cooperation, aiming to strengthen the country’s position on the global scientific stage. This tradition dates back centuries — since the founding of VEO many outstanding foreign scientists have been involved in its activities, and for many of them, Russia has become a new homeland.

The VEO of Russia maintains close cooperation with UN agencies, including the UN Information Centre in Moscow, and serves as an official platform for presenting key UN reports in Russia, such as “The World Economic Situation and Prospects” and “The Trade and Development Report”. The United Nations presents these reports annually on a single day across all the world’s capitals.

Nikolay Ryzhkov
(28.09.1929–28.02.2024),
Senator of the RF Federation
Council (2012–2023), Chairman
of the Council of Ministers
of the USSR (1985–1991)

Dmitry Belousov,
Deputy CEO of the Center for
Macroeconomic Analysis and
Short-Term Forecasting, Presenter
of UN reports “Global Economic
Situation and Perspectives”
in Moscow



“The annual publication of the UN reports “The World Economic Situation and Prospects” and “The Trade and Development Report” is a significant event for all specialists in the field of global economics”, said Aleksandr Dynkin, President of IMEMO RAS, RAS academician, and Vice-President of the VEO of Russia, who moderates the presentation of the UN reports in Moscow.

“There is no need to emphasize the importance of the Society’s contribution to presenting the key UN reports. The very fact of involving leading experts and practitioners in discussions clearly demonstrates the high level of cooperation that has developed between the UN and the VEO of Russia”, said Vladimir Kuznetsov, Chairman of the UN country team in Russia and Director of the UN Information Centre in Moscow.

Leading Russian experts in global economics actively participate in discussions of UN reports at the platform of the VEO of Russia. They provide valuable feedback for UN analysts by offering expert assessments of the economic forecasts and risk reduction recommendations presented in the documents for managing worldwide economic and social development. The opinions and proposals of Russian experts, voiced during these presentations, are forwarded to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UN structures.

The practical importance of the Society’s cooperation with specialized UN agencies, such as UNCTAD, is increasing in today’s global development context. For example, within the framework of the XVI International Economic Forum “Russia — Islamic World: KazanForum 2025”, a special session of the VEO of Russia titled “On the Path to a Multipolar World and Sustainable Development (Dedicated to the 80th Anniversary of the UN)” was held. Participants, including representatives from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UN country teams in Russia, leading Russian research centers, and experts from the Islamic world, discussed possible scenarios of global development, the future architecture of a post-unipolar world order, as well as the processes and trends shaping it.

A longstanding tradition has been the holding of working meetings between the leadership and experts of the VEO of Russia and UN structures. Over the years, prominent officials such as UNCTAD Secretaries-General Mukhisa Kituyi and Rebeca Grynspan have visited the platform of the VEO of Russia.

Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, the former Secretary-General of UNCTAD (2013–2021) at the headquarters of the VEO of Russia



II China-Russia Economic Dialogue



International Conference
“Russian-Chinese Relations
in the Context of Contemporary
Social and Economic Challenges”





Professor Wang Wen, Executive Dean of Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Co-Chairman of the Expert and Business Council of the VEO of Russia on the Development of Russian-Chinese Cooperation, Doctor of Economics

One of the significant milestones in the development of the Society's cooperation with UNCTAD was the international round table held at the Society's headquarters, the House of Economist. Organized by the VEO of Russia, the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, and the UN Information Centre in Moscow, the event was dedicated to the role of business in achieving sustainable development goals. Participants outlined the development directions for cooperation between the VEO of Russia and UNCTAD, which will help Russian businesses more actively implement ESG practices and sustainability principles into their business strategies. UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi emphasized that developing bilateral dialogue makes a significant contribution to solving global problems and achieving sustainability goals, and he expressed gratitude to the VEO of Russia for its collaboration.

As Russian-Chinese relations enter a new phase characterized by strengthening strategic partnership and expanding cooperation across various fields, the VEO of Russia is actively deepening scientific contacts between Russian and Chinese scientists. Annually, at the Society's platform, the China-Russia Economic Dialogue takes place, bringing together leading scientists, experts, diplomats, business representatives, government officials, and the educational community from Russia and China. This forum serves as a platform for discussing the development of bilateral cooperation across diverse sectors, including the scientific and expert domains.

Within the VEO of Russia, a dedicated structure was established with the goal of developing proposals and recommendations to strengthen Russian-Chinese cooperation in the scientific, technological, and economic fields. In 2022, at the international conference titled "Russian-Chinese Relations in the Context of Contemporary Social and Economic Challenges", held under the patronage of the Chinese Embassy in Russia, the Expert and Business Council of the VEO of Russia for the Development of Russian-Chinese Cooperation was founded. The co-chairpersons of this council are Professor Wang Wen, Executive Dean of Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China, and Sergey Glazyev, Vice-President of the VEO of Russia and RAS academician.

Sergey Glazyev is convinced that "the strategic partnership between China and Russia forms the foundation of the Greater Eurasian Partnership and the establishment of a new global economic order. Therefore, the two countries should actively enhance cooperation across all areas".

Within the activities of the Expert and Business Council of the VEO of Russia for the Development of Russian-Chinese Cooperation, visits are organized whereby Chinese scientists travel to Russia, and Russian scientists travel to China.

"The widespread dissemination of the scientific research findings of Russian scientists within China's scientific and expert communities will serve to strengthen mutual understanding and foster dialogue among researchers, think tanks, and public institutions of the two nations. The development of bilateral scientific exchanges takes on particular significance in light of the vast potential inherent in China-Russia relations", said Professor Wang Wen, expert of the Valdai Club, Executive Dean of the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China.

Bilateral visits have been highly fruitful. Notably, during the VEO delegation's visit to China, productive meetings were held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, the Center for the Belt and Road Initiative under the National Development and Reform Commission of China, Renmin University of China, and China Railway Construction

Visit of the Russian VEO delegation to Beijing by invitation Chinese People's University



Professor Cheng Enfu, Chairman of the World Association of Political Economy

Mr. Sun Weidong, China's Charge d'Affaires to Russia

Foreign Experts at the Event of the Free Economic Society of Russia





António Guterres,
UN Secretary-General

” *The world has faced numerous challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, social conflicts, poverty, and hunger. All these and many other pressing issues can only be addressed through solidarity — by means of effective, inclusive, and coordinated multilateral actions. We hope that the Free Economic Society of Russia will continue its active efforts in analyzing these existing challenges and ensuring sustainable development, maintaining its vital role in fostering expert dialogue and seeking constructive solutions — all in pursuit of a common goal: creating a sustainable future for all.*

Corporation. Among the topics discussed were the development of Russian-Chinese cooperation in science, culture, and education, as well as collaboration among public institutions.

According to Zhang Hanhui, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People’s Republic of China to the Russian Federation, the “consolidation of Russia and China’s intellectual resources” will play a crucial role in the further development of comprehensive strategic partnership and cooperation between the two countries. The Ambassador expressed this during a meeting with Sergey Bodrunov, President of the VEO of Russia, which took place at the Chinese Embassy.

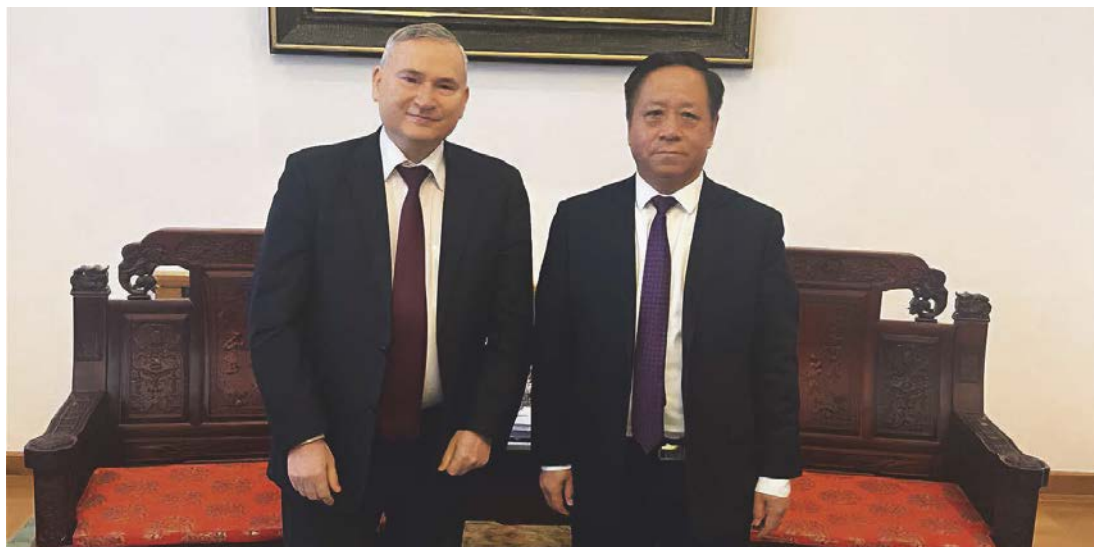
During the meeting, avenues for expanding scientific and expert cooperation, as well as academic exchanges between the two nations, were outlined. Discussions also focused on the further development of public and scientific diplomacy institutions, and a work plan was proposed for the Expert and Business Council of the Free Economic Society of Russia concerning the advancement of Russia-China relations.

Researchers from China continuously articulate their perspectives on the development of Russia-China strategic partnership at scientific and expert events organized by the VEO of Russia. For instance, among the keynote speakers at the Moscow Academic Economic Forum were Professor Wang Wen, Valdai Club expert, Executive Dean of Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China, and Professor Cheng Enfu, academician at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Chairman of the World Association for Political Economy.

The future of the global economy is closely intertwined with the progress of integration processes. International integration facilitates the expansion of trade, economic, and political ties between developed and developing

Sergey Bodrunov, President
of the VEO of Russia

Mr. Zhang Hanhui, Ambassador
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the People's Republic of China
to the Russian Federation
(left to right)



nations, providing opportunities for increasing mutual investments, trade exchanges, and the sharing of technologies and innovations. Consequently, key topics of debate within the scientific and expert forums of the VEO of Russia include the development of international integration within BRICS, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The experts of the VEO of Russia explore new directions for international cooperation, strategies to strengthen production and scientific-technological links among member states of integration alliances, and solutions for organizing technology transfer, applied and fundamental sciences, and engineering between countries. The proposals and recommendations of these experts are reflected in expert reports and scientific publications within the outlets of the VEO of Russia.

The forums and conferences of the VEO of Russia serve not only as platforms for developing expert recommendations but also as venues for exchanging experiences and best practices among Russian and international scientists. Over the years, renowned scholars such as Nobel laureate in economics Jean Tirole, James Kenneth Galbraith, Radhika Desai, Alan Freeman, Jacques Sapir, Ercan Uygur, David Lane, Leo Gabriel, and many others have shared their ideas and proposals at the venues of the VEO of Russia.

Educational Events in the Media Space

The VEO of Russia actively engages in educational outreach to a broad audience, including informing the public about the results of scientific, practical, and expert-analytical activities, as well as the progress and outcomes of large-scale nationwide projects, through mass media. Between 2020 and 2025, the media activities of the VEO of Russia were reflected in over 35,400 publications, segments, and articles.

For many years, the status of the main information partner of the VEO of Russia has belonged to the TASS news agency, with the official media partner being Rossiyskaya Gazeta.

One of the significant achievements of the collaboration between the VEO of Russia and Rossiyskaya Gazeta is the establishment of the Expert Council of the VEO of Russia and Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Meetings of this Council are regularly held at the publication's media



Gennady Krasnikov,
President of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS),
RAS academician

”

For over 250 years, the Free Economic Society of Russia has operated under the motto “Useful”, bestowed upon it by Catherine the Great, while successfully continuing the traditions of enlightenment established by its founders and selflessly serving its country. The Society unites the intellectual elite of the country under its aegis. Its structure includes 65 regional organizations and branches that actively engage in scientific, practical, expert, and educational activities across Russia’s regions, enabling the accumulation of a wide range of perspectives on the country’s socio-economic development. The history of collaboration between the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Free Economic Society of Russia dates back to the founding of this country’s first public organization in 1765. Since then, many members of our Academy (initially the Imperial Academy, then the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and now the Russian Academy of Sciences) have participated in the work of the Free Economic Society. The leadership, scientists, and specialists of the Russian Academy of Sciences highly value the Society’s role in facilitating the integration of academic knowledge and applied research into the national economy and their effective practical application, as well as the Society’s active involvement in advancing scientific communication. The Free Economic Society of Russia and the Russian Academy of Sciences continue to collaborate on projects aimed at achieving the nation’s development goals.

Expert Session at the Media
Center of Rossiyskaya GazetaAward Ceremony for the Winners
of the Russian Nationwide
Economic Journalism
Competition at the Media Center
of Rossiyskaya Gazeta

center, providing a platform to voice the scientific and expert community's positions on pressing economic issues in the country's leading business media.

Each year, the VEO of Russia recognizes the creative contributions of Russian journalists in covering pressing economic topics and developments both within the country and globally through the Russian Nationwide Economic Journalism Competition, established in 2018. The competition is conducted across four categories: "Best Publication in Print Media", "Best Publication in Online Media", "Best Television or Radio Segment", and "For Contributions to Covering the Activities of the VEO of Russia". Over the years, the competition's winners have included correspondents and journalists from Russia's leading publications and television channels such as Kommersant, Vedomosti, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, TASS, Rossiya 24, Expert, Moskva 24, Vesti FM, as well as numerous regional media outlets and TV programs.

"The number of entries, their broad "industry spectrum", and the geographical diversity attest to the fact that the competition is an engaging and highly regarded event within both the expert and journalistic com-

Jean Tirole, Nobel Laureate in Economics, Sergey Bodrunov, President of the VEO of Russia, and participants of the Moscow Academic Economic Forum



Alexey Gromyko, Director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, RAS Corresponding Member

Alexander Nekipelov, Director of the Moscow School of Economics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, RAS Academician, Vice President of the VEO of Russia

(left to right)



munities”, said Andrey Sokolov, Chairman of the Competition Jury, Board Member of the VEO of Russia, and Deputy CEO of TASS.

“The competition of the VEO of Russia aims to increase the number of high-quality, objective materials on economic topics in the media. Most of the entries deserve respect. Their authors demonstrate the ability to find and verify information, differentiate between important and minor things, and separate opinions from facts — qualities that are highly valuable”, said Yuri Yakutin, Chairman of the Competition Organizing Committee, Scientific Director of the Economic Newspaper Publishing House, and Vice President of the VEO of Russia.

Each year, the jury selects the best works by Russian journalists based on a list of criteria. “Empress Catherine the Great, who founded the VEO of Russia, gifted the Society with her motto “Useful”, and one of the primary criteria became the material’s significance for the socio-economic development of the country”, said Aleksey Savin, Deputy Chairman of the Competition Jury and Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Rossiyskaya Gazeta. “Additionally, the material must be timely, addressing what is important here and now. Undoubtedly, considerations of objectivity, completeness, and accuracy



Alexander Shokhin,
President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and
Entrepreneurs

“ *The Free Economic Society of Russia — the country’s first civil society institution — has played a decisive role in the history of the formation and development of public organizations in Russia, helping to shape a robust layer of civil society. For over 255 years, the VEO of Russia has been engaged in active scientific, practical, and expert activities aimed at finding effective solutions to the country’s socio-economic development challenges, a task that has gained particular relevance in today’s realities. The systemic solutions developed by the VEO of Russia are highly valued at the highest levels of government and contribute to determining optimal trajectories for the country’s socio-economic progress. The Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs highly appreciates the Society’s efforts in uniting the professional community in the interests of further strengthening and prospering the Russian state and ensuring the well-being of its citizens.*

of information, as well as the professionalism of the author, were taken into account”.

Participants in the competition note that today’s financial press is in a challenging position. Economic journalism in the country is experiencing a difficult period, but they express hope that the next generation of readers will return to long-form articles and well-argued journalism, and that the competition of the VEO of Russia will play a role in fostering this trend.

The VEO of Russia also develops its own educational media projects. Since 2016, the authorial program “House “E” produced by the VEO of Russia has been broadcast on the Public Television of Russia channel. The show is designed not only for scientists and specialists in economics but also for a wide audience interested in the country’s economic and socio-political life. Many leading scholars, practicing economists, and public figures from Russia and abroad have appeared as guests of the program’s

author and host Sergey Bodrunov, President of the VEO of Russia and Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Among them are Nobel laureate in economics Jean Tirole and James Kenneth Galbraith, Professor of Economics at the University of Texas.

The VEO of Russia annually publishes approximately 30,000 copies of informational, analytical, scientific, and educational publications, which are distributed free of charge. Among these is the popular science and analytical Free Economy Journal, published four times a year and aimed at both specialists in the field of economics and a broad audience. The journal features economic analytics, interviews with leading Russian and foreign scientists and public figures, historical materials, reviews of new publications on economic topics, and exclusive columns by practicing economists — ensuring that every reader will find something of interest in it.

The series of publications by the Free Economic Society of Russia, “What To Do?”, aptly titled “Polemic Notes on the Issues of Socio-Economic Development of Russia”, reflects its core nature. Throughout its

Exhibition of economic publications of the VEO of Russia

Yuri Petrov, Scientific Director of the RAS Institute of Russian History, RAS Corresponding Member



history, the VEO of Russia has brought together representatives from various schools and directions within economic science. The uniqueness of this platform lies in its ability to present diverse positions and sometimes consolidate polarizing viewpoints, because, as is well known, effective solutions often emerge from debates. This series includes texts of discussions dedicated to exploring solutions to pressing issues of the country's socio-economic development.

The perspectives of leading scholars, experts, and public figures on issues of socio-economic development in Russia and the world are also presented in the popular science publication "Conversations about Economics". This series compiles the most interesting and topical discussions held within the platform of the VEO of Russia, including those featured on the authorial television project "House "E" and other media initiatives by the VEO of Russia.

The publicly accessible Library of the VEO of Russia welcomes all visitors. Its collection comprises over 20,000 publications. In honor of the VEO of Russia's 250th anniversary, a monumental effort was undertaken in collaboration with the Russian State Library: all 345 volumes of "The Proceedings of the Imperial VEO" — published between 1765 and 1918 — were digitized and made freely available online. Researchers, scholars, and the general public now have access to unique materials that not only introduce readers to the VEO of Russia's educational and scientific-practical activities during the pre-revolutionary period but also serve as documentary evidence of the formation and development of various sectors of the national economy and economic thought in Russia over the course of a century and a half. The library's "Scientific Works of the VEO of Russia" collection is also regularly updated with new economic publications.

The VEO of Russia continues to publish Scientific Works of VEO Russia. Incredible but true: the journal's history dates back to the founding of the VEO of Russia in 1765. Thanks to the Works of the VEO of Russia, historians can reconstruct in detail how applied economic thought developed in the country, particularly in agriculture — such as potato farming, beekeeping, dairy and cheese industries, as well as the production of agricultural machinery and fertilizers. Currently, the journal publishes scientific articles by leading domestic researchers and experts, as well as international specialists, addressing pressing issues of socio-economic development in Russia and around the world. By 2025, more than 250 volumes had been published in the modern history of the VEO of Russia. The journal is included in the highest — first — category of the Higher Attestation Commission's list of peer-reviewed scientific publications. Articles from "Scientific Works of the VEO of Russia" are indexed in international abstract and full-text databases. It is also possible that, in the future, these "Scientific Works of the VEO of Russia" will serve as a living record of their time, providing valuable material for economists, historians, and researchers.

"No Future Is Possible Without a Past" M.V. Lomonosov. Efforts to Preserve and Promote the Historical and Economic Heritage

VEO actively engages in the study, preservation, and promotion of the nation's historical and economic heritage. In 2025, the Society co-organized the annual competition project of the Russian Historical Society and the National History Fund, aimed at supporting socially significant educational initiatives dedicated to important dates in the history of our country.

Ruslan Gagkuev,
Executive Director of the National
History Fund, Chairman
of the Board of the Russian
Historical Society





Tatiana Valovaya,
Director-General of the United Nations Office
at Geneva

” *The Free Economic Society of Russia actively cooperates with the United Nations. Multilateral collaboration is evolving, becoming more integrated and inclusive, which makes dialogue with reputable non-governmental organizations like the Free Economic Society of Russia especially important for the UN today.*

The Imperial VEO has always actively collaborated with Russia’s scholarly societies, in particular organizing scientific expeditions with the Russian Geographical Society to study grain trade and agricultural productivity across the country. Today, VEO upholds this tradition through collaborative educational initiatives with leading public organizations. Experts from the VEO of Russia and the Russian Historical Society are organizing a panel session as part of the Russian Geographical Society Festival, dedicated to the economic geography of Russia, its developmental stages, key challenges during various periods of the nation’s history, and the role of research in economic geography in shaping effective economic policies.

The VEO of Russia closely collaborates with institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences in preserving the country’s cultural, historical, and

Russian Nationwide Scientific
Conference “Economics
of the Great Victory”



economic heritage. As part of a project aimed at reflecting on the historical lessons of the Russian revolutions of the 20th century, with the participation of the Institute of Russian History, the Institute of Sociology, and the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the VEO of Russia organizes nationwide scientific conferences. The Tauride Palace was symbolically chosen as the venue for the events, as it was one of the centers where the new organs of power were born in 1917.

The VEO of Russia places great emphasis on preserving the historical memory of the events of the Great Patriotic War and the heroic deeds of the Soviet people. For each anniversary of the Great Victory, the Society organizes scientific and expert events and publishes materials dedicated to the heroism of the Soviet people and the contribution of economists to the Great Victory. On the 80th anniversary of the Victory, the National Scientific Conference “The Economy of the Great Victory” was held at the VEO of Russia Congress Hall, where participants examined the key economic factors that laid the foundation for the Great Victory. To commemorate this anniversary, the VEO of Russia also published a collection titled “The Military and Labor Feats of Academic Economists: Essays and Articles”, which includes materials about the lives of scientists-frontline fighters and their role in the development of economic science, practice, and education both during wartime and in peacetime.

Building on its educational and expert-analytical activities, the VEO of Russia collaborates jointly with leading scientific centers, universities, and public organizations across the country. Memoranda of cooperation have been signed with the Russian Academy of Sciences, institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), the Russian Historical Society, the National History Fund, TASS, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP), “Delovaya Rossiya”, and other organizations. This enables the effective consolidation of the country’s scientific, expert, and business potential for developing recommendations and proposals on socio-economic development issues in Russia, while also significantly expanding the audience of educational initiatives by the VEO of Russia, and implementing large-scale projects aimed at preserving historical, economic, scientific, and cultural heritage.

The Congress of the VEO of Russia
in the Tauride Palace





Sergey Bodrunov,
President of the VEO of Russia

” *The initiatives of the Free Economic Society of Russia have made a tremendous contribution to the development of all sectors of the national economy, as well as to the modernization of education, healthcare, science, and technology; they have exerted a significant influence on Russia’s development and the course of historical events. History does not tolerate the subjunctive mood. Nevertheless, without the Society, the paths of our country’s development would undoubtedly have been quite different. Throughout history, the organization has united Russia’s brightest minds, working for the benefit and welfare of our country. It serves as a platform for progressive ideas and facilitates their implementation into practice and policy. The members of the Society — outstanding scientists, statesmen, and public figures — have for centuries contributed to shaping our cultural identity and paving the way for social, economic, scientific, and technological progress in Russia. Today, more than ever, it is crucial to preserve and develop our scientific, historical, economic, and cultural heritage, along with our value orientations and great traditions — the domestic cultural code. As the President of Russia has repeatedly emphasized, it is precisely within this cultural code that the foundation of national stability lies. Within our traditions and cultural code lies Russia’s powerful potential — its present and its great future.*

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FOOTNOTES

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- 6** Grech N.I. Notes on My Life. — Moscow, 1930, p. 124.
- 7** See Morozov A.A. Lomonosov. — Moscow, 1950.
- 8** Draft of this manuscript, containing numerous corrections and annotations, was discovered in the archive of M.V. Lomonosov after his death and was first published in 1952 with the title: Lomonosov M.V., Complete Works / Academy of Sciences of the USSR; — Moscow; Leningrad, 1950–1983. Vol. 6: Works on Russian History, Socio-Economic Issues, and Geography. 1747–1765. — Moscow; Leningrad: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1952, pp. 409–413.
- 9** See Morozov A.A. Lomonosov. — Moscow, 1950.
- 10** See Shinkarenko P.V. The Reborn Phoenix. — Moscow, 2005.
- 11** The titles, positions, and regalia of the founders are listed as of the time the Free Economic Society was established.
- 12** Quoted from: Hodnev A.I. History of the Imperial Free Economic Society from 1765 to 1865 — St. Petersburg, 1865, p. 14.
- 13** For more details, see Part 4 of this edition.
- 14** Quoted from: Hodnev A.I. History of the Imperial Free Economic Society from 1765 to 1865 — St. Petersburg, 1865, p. 18.
- 15** Subsequently, the number of members and correspondents of the Society increased each year. Nearly a hundred years after its founding, in 1857, it comprised 764 people, including 397 members and 367 correspondents.
- 16** See: P.G. Oldenburgsky. In a Tireless Pursuit of Enlightenment and Russia’s Greatness. — Moscow: Economic Newspaper Publishing House, 2013.
- 17** Duke of Leuchtenberg, in particular, reviewed a translation of a research paper by the renowned German chemist Lambert Babo on behalf of the Society in 1847, which was later published based on the Duke’s review.
- 18** Quoted from: Hodnev A.I. History of the Imperial Free Economic Society from 1765 to 1865 — St. Petersburg, 1865, p. 24.
- 19** Introductory Speech by Leonhard and Johann Albrecht Euler // Belyavsky M.T. New Documents on the Discussion of the Peasant Question in 1766–1768. And Archaeographic Yearbook for 1958. — Moscow, 1960, pp. 402–404.
- 20** Strictly speaking, there were 160 original works, since two responses existed in two copies.
- 21** During the one and a half years from the announcement of the competition to its completion, the Society admitted Count A. Stroganov, Academicians L. and A. Euler, F. Aepinus, G. Miller, J. Stählin, and A. Bolotov. In 1767, I. Leman passed away. Thus, the Free Economic Society comprised 31 members.
- 22** Decision of the Competition Committee // Belyavsky M.T. New Documents on the Discussion of the Peasant Question in 1766–1768 // Archaeographic Yearbook for 1958. — Moscow, 1960, p. 404.
- 23** From Latin, meaning “most suitable”.
- 24** Initially, it was decided not to award medals to the authors of works classified in Class II, limiting recognition to expressing “satisfaction with their compositions” by some token of honor; however, this decision was later changed.
- 25** Quoted from: Hodnev A.I. History of the Imperial Free Economic Society from 1765 to 1865 — St. Petersburg, 1865, p. 30.
- 26** Id. at pp. 30–31.
- 27** Quoted from: Semevsky V.I. The Peasant Question in Russia in the 18th and First Half of the 19th Century. Vol. 1: The Peasant Question in the 18th and First Quarter of the 19th Century. — St. Petersburg, 1888, pp. 59–60.
- 28** Id. at p. 60.
- 29** The work of Bearde de l’Abbaye was republished once again in 1862 in the Proceedings of the Society of Russian History and Antiquities.
- 30** The first translation of Bearde de l’Abbaye’s work was made by A. Polenov, but Taubert, Oleshev, and Nartov judged that “his translation did not satisfactorily possess the embellishments and strong expressions in the Russian language with which the author had enriched his essay”, and they made the translation themselves. This version was unanimously recognized at the general meeting as fully consistent with the original, “both in reasoning and in the beauty of the language”.
- 31** The essay that won the prize for addressing the issue raised in 1766 by the Free Economic Society in St. Petersburg, which received the accessit award. — St. Petersburg, 1768, p. 151.
- 32** The essay that won the prize for addressing the issue raised in 1766 by the Free Economic Society in St. Petersburg, which received the accessit award. — St. Petersburg, 1768, p. 149.
- 33** Under the title “Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline”.
- 34** Polenov A.Ya. On the Serfdom of Peasants in Russia. — Moscow, 1865, p. 13.
- 35** Id. at p. 9.
- 36** Id. p. 28.
- 37** A.Y. Polenov, The Russian Lawgiver of the 18th Century. Archive of the Free Economic Society, Book 90, pp. 114–116, and Russian Archive, 1865.
- 38** Id. at p. 5.
- 39** “Research on the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations”, Book I, Chapter VIII, and Book III, Chapter II; in Bibikov’s edition. St. Petersburg, 1866, Vol. 1, pp. 223–224, Vol. II, pp. 177–178; compare with the translation by Politkovsky, Vol. I, pp. 170–171, Vol. II, pp. 276.
- 40** Semevsky V.I. The Peasant Question in the Free Economic Society in 1803–1822. Journal “Russian Thought”, 1883, p. 31.
- 41** Id. at p. 47.
- 42** Id. at pp. 55–56.
- 43** Id. at p. 71.
- 44** Id. at pp. 76–77.
- 45** Id. at pp. 82–83.
- 46** The Free Economic Society of Russia. 250 Years in the Service of the Nation. — Moscow, 2015, pp. 45–46.
- 47** Vasilchikov A.I. Landownership and Agriculture in Russia and Other European States. Vol. 1. — St. Petersburg: M. Stasyulevich Publishing, 1876. 622 pages.
- 48** Postnikov A.S. “Communal Agriculture”. — Yaroslavl, 1875, p. 190.
- 49** Kankrin E.F. Report of the Minister of Finance... for 1842. — St. Petersburg: Printing House of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1843, p. 15. (Cited in the context of the activities of VEO).

- 50** Report of the Imperial Free Economic Society for 1860. — St. Petersburg: V. Bezobrazov & Co. Printing House, 1861, p. 32.
- 51** Bolotov A.T. Notes on Agriculture in General // Proceedings of the Free Economic Society, 1768, Part 8, p. 7.
- 52** Komov I.M. On Agriculture. — St. Petersburg: Breitkopf Printing House, 1788, pp. 147–148.
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- 55** Komov I.M. On Agriculture. — St. Petersburg: Breitkopf Printing House, 1788, p. 170.
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- 57** Nemykin, V.V. D.I. Mendeleev and the Organization of Geographical Experiments of the Free Economic Society. // *Agrokhimiya*. — 1990, No. 8, pp. 112–122. (Cited regarding events of 1866).
- 58** Lyudogovsky A.P. On Artificial Fertilizers // Proceedings of the Imperial Free Economic Society, 1866, Vol. 3, Issue 3, p. 15.
- 59** Proceedings of the Free Economic Society, 1766.
- 60** Komov I.M. On Agriculture. — St. Petersburg, 1788, p. 53.
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