

**Traditional Customs of Russian Old Believers
in Woodburn, Oregon**

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Old-Believers led a traditional mode of life for centuries with the aim of preserving the purity of their faith. However, due to their forced dispersion, their preservation efforts resulted in their disseminating traditional Russian culture around the world.

V.S. Bakhtin

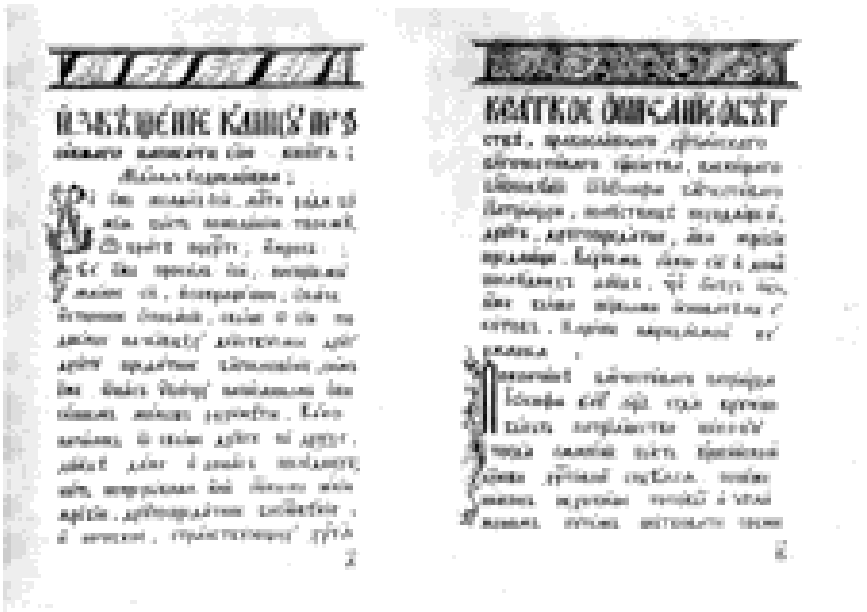
Woodburn, Oregon is the home of a sizable community of Old Believers. Most of those who settled in Woodburn in the early 1960s came from Turkey. Their ancestors were among the original Old Believers who chose not to accept the 1656 church reforms of Patriarch Nikon and were persecuted as a result. They left Russia almost three centuries ago, first appearing in the trans-Danube territories (present day Romania) at the end of the 17 – beginning of the 18th century, and later migrating to Turkey. This group call themselves *Turchane*. Another important Old Believer group reached Woodburn by a more complicated route: from China via Hong-Kong and Brazil. Their ancestors were exiled after the 1656 reforms to the banks of the Angara River in the Far East of Russia. In the 1920s, they fled to Northern China to escape the “Red plague.” They had to move again in 1949, however, when Mao came to power. They arrived in Oregon in the 1960s. This group call themselves *Harbintsy* (from Harbin, China). Their separation from the homeland is three times shorter than that of the *Turchane* group.

When the Old Believers arrived in Oregon, the state administration apportioned land for them, allocating about 5-8 hectares per family. They also provided interest-free loans and excused the newcomers from taxes for ten years.(1)

By the 1990s the Old Believers had paid off their debts and lived in prosperity as economic equals to the average American farmer. They cultivated strawberries and blackberries and Christmas trees, all crops that thrive in Oregon soil. In the mid-1990s, the Russian Old Believer community of Woodburn numbered approximately five thousand persons belonging to five parishes. These include groups who do not acknowledge the role of the clergy in the service (*bespopovtsy*), and those who choose to be led by a priest (*popovtsy*).

United by strict laws of faith and in spite of their different routes, both the 'Turkish' and the 'Harbin' branches of Old Believers have preserved their religion, rituals and everyday life as it was practiced in Old Russia before the church schism of 1656. They are typical representatives of the so called 'island culture,' having preserved inside their enclosed space the main features of the 'mainland culture' from which they were torn away a long time back.

Old Believers who came to North America brought with them ancient icons, old printed books, and handwritten notebooks with texts of spiritual poetry (*stikharniki*).



First pages, A and B, of the hand-written book "Family History" (ER)

СТИХИ ЛЮБОВНЫЕ.
КАКО ЗАПЕЧАТЫ
 СТИХИ > а. ѿ воскресеніи хрѣста
 СПИТЪ СЕБѢ И ДРЕМЛЕТЪ ЗАБОА >
 СПИТЪ ВОГРОБѢ ЦРЬ ЧРѢМЪ .
 ЗАПЕЧАТЮ КАМЕНЬ ГРОБА >
 ВСЮДУ СТРАЖА ОУДѢВРЕН .
 Н ОШЬ НЕМАА, САДЪ СЪБЕЗЕМЛЕТЪ ,
 СТРАЖА ПРОЗНАА НЕСПИТЪ .
 Ч ОТКІЙ СЛЪЗЪ ЕА НЕДРЕМЛЕТЪ .
 ЗОРКО ВЪ ДАЛЪ СОНА ГЛАДІТЪ .
 НОЦЬ КО ОУТРУ НАГРОБЪ РАНО ,
 СЪ АРОМАТАМИ ВЪ РЪКАХЪ .
 ШЕЛИ МИРОНОСИЦЫ И МАРІА ,
 БЕЗЪ ПОКОИТВО ВЪ ИХЪ СРЦАХЪ .
 И ТРЕВЕТА ИХЪ ПЕЧАЛІТЪ , КТО

БРАТІЕ , АЩЕ ШЕРАЩЕТСА
 КАМ ПОГРЕШНОСТЬ ВЪ КНИ
 ЖИЦѢ СЕИ , ВСАКО ПРОСИ
 ВАІА ИСПРАВИТИ . И НАСѢ
 ТРУДИШИСА ВЪ ДѢЛѢ СЕИ
 ПРОЩЕНІА СПОДЪБИТИ , ДА
 И САМИ ПРОЩЕНІЕ ѿ ХРТА БГА
 ПОЛУЧИТЕ , ВЪ ДЕНЬ
 ПОСЛАНИЕ ВОДА
 АНІА >
 АМНЬ ;
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 ;

The first and the last pages of the handwritten notebook “Spiritual Poems” (ER).

They also brought traditional garments. To this day, the women of the community craft shirts, skirts and dresses according to old patterns and embellish them with ancient embroidered designs. They also make their own hand-woven or hand-knit belts. The women wear their hair long and cover it with traditional headgear, meaning that married women wear a cloth cap under their kerchiefs: Turchane call it *kichka*, and Harbintsy call it *shashmura*. Old women normally tie their kerchiefs in the front, while young and middle-age married women use triangle-shaped kerchiefs (*kosiachki*) and tie them at the back. Men do not cut their hair and do not shave. Their traditional embroidered shirts are worn outside their jeans. Children are dressed in the same manner as adults. For Easter and for wedding celebrations, new festive attire is usually sewn for all family members, both the adults and the children.



The Semeriakov family, 46 persons (photo made in Woodburn in 1992).

In their prayer houses, Old Believers still sing ancient chants using the old system of *kryuki* notation. They also gather in their homes in small groups to sing spiritual poetry (*psal'my* is the term used by the Turchane; *stikhi* is used by the Harbintsy) while they are doing their crafts and handiwork.

$\text{♩} = 64$

1. Сле-зы ли-вши о Си-о - не и с се-р-де-чно-ю то - ской
 пел И-зра-и - ль в Ва-ви - ло - не, пленный се - дя над ре-кой.

2. Ску-чно жить в стра-не бе - збо-жной без свя - то-го а-лга-ря,
 где ку - ми-ра власть по-дло-жна, власть на - дме - нно-го ца-ря.

“The Lament of Israel”

Outside of Lenten periods, middle-aged Old Believers sing secular songs. The secular music brought to the New World by *Turchane* differs from that brought by the *Harbintsy*. The songs imported by the *Turchane* are predominantly long and quiet songs, while the songs that the *Harbintsy* brought with them are mainly love lyrics which are sung in a style where the leader begins by singing in a high or low voice while the rest of the singers enter later with supporting voices. Over the years, the repertoires of the two groups have naturally blended into one.

$\text{♩} = 96$

Музыкальный фрагмент, состоящий из двух систем по пять нотных стaves каждая. Первая система содержит вокальные партии с русскими текстами: «Па - си - ди, Ду - ня, па - гля - ди, Ду - ня, /». Вторая система продолжает мелодию и включает текст: «как цве - ты цве - туть, / как лю - ди жи - вут. /». В начале первой системы указано темп $\text{♩} = 96$. Музыкальная запись включает ноты, паузы, фразы и динамические обозначения.

Oregon Old Believers do not have television sets or tape-recorders, which they consider the work of Satan.(2) Instead they continue the custom of spending evenings in groups talking, making handicrafts and singing. As one Oregon Old Believer noted, "When a person sings, he develops his thoughts and voice, while tape-recorders and television stultify the mind."(3) Neighbors from both groups routinely gather at each other's homes in the evening. At first they work on their handicrafts. Then, after work, they share tea and pastry. Turchane and Harbintsy call such gatherings differently, though. The terms used are *posidenki* and *vechorki* respectively.

The Old Believers love of singing becomes apparent in a variety of contexts. One member noted, "Whenever I sit and knit, I hum songs all the time."(4) Another stated, "If I and my wife go somewhere, we always sing, because man must have moments of joy and sadness".(5) Needless to say, all celebrations and religious events and even everyday occurrences are accompanied with songs.

The contemporary wedding ceremony celebrated by Oregon Old Believers has preserved all the main episodes of Russian ritual as it was practiced in the distant past, the so called "ritual minimum,"(6) consisting of the following elements: 'drinking away the bride', preparing the dowry, the girls' party, ritual bathing, the visit of the groom to the bride to 'purchase' her plait, parental blessing, the wedding ceremony, the game of redeeming the dowry from 'robbers', the wedding feast under a tent, and presenting gifts to the young couple.

The wedding takes place on a Sunday, just as in the past. One week before the day of the wedding, the groom's family comes to visit the bride's family and brings alcoholic beverages. This is called drinking away the bride (Harbintsy call it *propoi* and Turchane use the term *zapoi*). On Friday there is a traditional *devishnik*, an all-female party where the bride bids farewell to her single status. On Saturday morning the bride goes to wash herself in the sauna (*bania*), a symbolic purification before the beginning of her new life. Saturday night into Sunday the groom and his young relatives come to fetch the bride. They "purchase" (*vykupaiut*) her from her parents and the parents then bless the bride and groom. Afterwards, the young couple goes to the prayer house or church for the morning service. The presence of the bride and groom at Morning Prayer is required for sacred purification before the wedding rite. After the wedding ceremony, the party moves to the groom's house. There a large tent is erected in the yard for the marriage feast. The floor inside the tent is covered with straw. This is supposed to

ensure the future health, wealth, and fertility of the young family. The first meal, where the head of the community is present, is called the cold or spiritual meal (*kholodnyi* or *dukhovnyi obed*). During it, only water, juices and snacks are served. After the head of the community leaves, the hot meal (*goriachii obed*) is served. This is the point when hot dishes are brought in and alcohol is allowed. Between the two meals, a ritual game called *redeeming the dowry from robbers* (*vykupaiut pridanoie u razboinikov*) is played. Young men from the bride's family, dressed as pirates (wearing sailors' striped smocks, turbans and wooden swords), bring traditional wooden chests (*sunduki*) with the bedding and other gifts that the bride has prepared for the groom's family. They then "auction" them off in a humorous and jesting manner. Another traditional ritual is the presentation of gifts to the young couple. This occurs during the hot meal. As the bride and groom receive each gift, they acknowledge it by getting on their knees and executing a low bow. This ceremony is called making bows (*bit' poklony*).

Traditional wedding songs sung prior to the church ceremony are called maiden songs (*devishnye pesni*) and those sung after the ceremony are called wedding songs (*svad'bishnye pesni*). During the wedding ceremony and the cold meal people sing prayers and spiritual poems. After the hot meal, the guests dance to the songs. Turchane call these songs *khorovodnitskie*, while Harbintsy use the term *krugovye*. The dancing may be accompanied by a harmonica, the only musical instrument allowed at Old Believer weddings. It was brought to Oregon by the *Turchane*.(7)



Kirill Kutsey, singer of spiritual and non-religious songs. (ER)
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The Wedding in Woodburn (8)

In Woodburn, during the week that precedes the wedding, the bridesmaids equip the bride (*snariazhaiut nevestu*). They help her to assemble the dowry. In the United States this is an easy task as all the bedding, kitchen appliances, tableware and so forth, ‘all things needed for the new life ahead,’ can be purchased in attractive packages in supermarkets. Formerly, tablecloths and curtains for icons, which the bride had to decorate with embroidery, were sewn specifically as part of the dowry. Embroidery for the home continues today, but the items which women who are skilled in needlework now produce are sentimental pictures executed in satin-stitch and put in wooden frames. As for clothing items, the bride and bridesmaids embroider shirts, plait belts, and make decorative edgings on kerchiefs. These will be used as gifts to the groom’s kinsfolk. This work must be completed by the Friday.



Newlyweds in the wedding tent. They listen to the instructional speech from parents who sit in front of them. (ER)

Friday is the day of the girls’ party. According to the custom of the *Turchane*, this party should last one day. The *Harbintsy*, however, often extend the girls’ party and draw it out so that it runs the entire week.

Friday, then, is the culmination of this part of the ritual. On Friday morning, bridesmaids knit the bride's flower cap, her "maiden's beauty" (*div'ia krosota*). This cap must be decorated with crocheted pastel-colored flowers. White and pink ribbons and bows are attached to the cap at the back. In the evening, the groom and groomsmen come and join the girls. They are met by the bridesmaids dressed in new identical gowns. The color of the gowns is chosen by the bride. The bridesmaids then present the bride who is by this point wearing her white gown and flower cap, to the groom and his party. The bride kneels and bows before the groom three times (*b'iet poklony zhenikhu*), thus showing her respect and obedience to the future husband. Each time she bows, the groom helps the bride to her feet. He then kisses her and leads her to the table. At the table, the bridesmaids congratulate the groom and the bride by singing special songs. In these songs, they link the names of various groomsmen and the names of the bridesmaids thus suggesting potential new couples. This is followed by the game of selling white bows. The young man who buys a bow, say for the price of twenty dollars, puts it around his neck and orders a song. During the course of the sale, the bride leaves the room and returns three times. Each time she comes back in she is wearing new and different garments. This is supposed to display her beauty and wealth to the guests. The girls' party ends with the ceremony of seeing off the groom. Accompanied by groomsmen and bridesmaids, the groom walks arm-in-arm with the bride to his home. During this procession the bride wears her flower cap and the groomsmen and bridesmaids sing special songs of parting (*raskhozhye songs*). When the groom parts with his bride, he kisses her.

♩ = 66

1. Ле - жат бру - сьи, ле - жат бру - сьи, //

ле - жат бру - сьи да не - тѣ - са - ны - е,
 ле - жат бру - сьи да не - тѣ - са - ны - е.

2. По тех бру - сьях, по тех бру - сьях,

по тех бру - сьях да не кто ж не хо - дил,
 по тех бру - сьях да не кто ж не хо - дил.

"Planks aren't hewed"

The last evening of the prenuptials falls on Saturday. The first step is ritual bathing. On Saturday morning the bride and the groom each bathe at home. Then the groom's kinsfolk deliver the wedding wreath made of white fabric and knitted flowers to the bride. The bride, wearing her flower cap, comes out to greet the guests and bows to the ground thanking them for their gift.

In the wee hours of Sunday morning, typically 1 AM to 2 AM, the bridesmaids come and awaken the bride. They plait her hair into a braid and dress her in her wedding garments (*venchal'naia odezhda*): a white shirt, white *sarafan*, white belt, white apron, white shoes and the flower cap.

At two o'clock in the morning, a knock comes at the door. The bride is seated at the table, covered with a white kerchief with a pale-color pattern. Her younger brother, with scissors in hand, stands behind her. Some of the bridesmaids encircle the bride; others go to open the door. The groomsman, the groom and two young girls (*svashki*) from the groom's family enter the room in single file. They bring a "chain" made of white kerchiefs tied tightly together and each person holds on to it a foot or so apart. This chain is a symbol of the conjugal unit. They also bring in a large bottle of homemade brew and boxes with pasties (*pirozhki*). The groom wears a blue embroidered shirt and white jeans. The groomsman (Harbintsy call him *tysiatskii*) walks up to the table, peeks under the bride's kerchief and asks the groom if this is the right woman.⁽⁹⁾ Upon getting a positive answer, the groomsman lowers the edge of the kerchief. A joyful ransom game begins. This consists of "buying" the bride from the bridesmaids and "buying" her braid from her younger brother, the one with the scissors. He jokingly threatens to cut off his sister's hair if the ransom is not paid. The "purchase" has the character of a facetious auction and it is accompanied by mutual teasing and mocking between bridesmaids and groomsman. The game ends in a party with drinks and snacks. After the game, the younger brother removes the kerchief covering his sister, takes her hand, and leads her to the guests. The bride bows before the groom. She then also takes hold of the chain of white kerchiefs, and stands to the left of the groom. The groom receives traditional wedding gifts from the bride, a white shirt embroidered with flowers and a white woven belt. A groomsman leads the groom out of the room so that he can change into the shirt that he has just received. While he is changing, the bridesmaids replace the bride's flower cap with the wedding wreath given to her by the groom.



Iosif and Evdokia Postnikov after the wedding ceremony (photo made in Woodburn in 1975). Evdokia is one of the leading singers of the women's vocal group that was formed in Woodburn in the early 1990s.

The next step is the parental blessing of the couple. The bride's parents bless their daughter and the groom with bread-and-salt and an icon. Then all guests pray to the icons in the icon corner. The bride and groom bid farewell to her parents, bowing twice, first individually and then together. The groomsmen and bridesmaids then all exit the house and all hold on to the "chain" of tied kerchiefs. The bride and groom get into a white car and go to the church (10) while the parents remain at home.

The morning service during which the bride and groom pray (this ritual action is called *molenie molodykh*) lasts from 3 AM to 7 AM and the common prayer service follows. This service takes place in the presence of the entire congregation, with the men standing in front, closer to the iconostasis, and the women standing behind them. The wedding ceremony begins at 8 AM and lasts for two hours. It is accompanied by the singing of prayers, spiritual poems and canons. The bride and groom repeatedly bow.

Throughout the ceremony, the bride and groom stand on a white cloth placed in front of the altar stand (*analoï*). The white cap of a married woman lies on the altar stand. The community leader (*nastavnik*)(11) reads a sermon to the newlyweds and asks the questions required by religious canon. Examples of required questions include:

“Are you taking this woman of your own free will?” “Are you marrying this man of your own free will?” Candles are lit in front of the altar stand. The community leader picks up the wedding rings, then crosses his hands, presenting the rings to the newlyweds. The couple responds by repeating the wedding vows three times: “I take you as my wife. – I take you as my husband” (*“Az tia posiagaiu, zhenu moiu – Az tia posiagaiu, muzha moego”*). This, according to Kiril Kutsev, “is where the Sixth secret is performed when the Holy Spirit comes down.”

After the formal vows, the bride changes her status (*beriet chin*): the young girls from the groom’s family lead the bride to the women’s side of the church. They undo her single braid and replait her hair into two braids instead of one to show that she is now married. They then place the married woman’s cap on her head. This cap is something “which she will wear till her grave.”(12) The groom’s relatives then lead the bride over to the groom. The bride bows to him three times. The bride and groom then kiss each other three times.

The head of the community presents the groom’s father with the icon of the Savior, and the newlyweds bow to him, saying:

- *Father, forgive us for the sake of Christ.*

- *God will forgive!*, replies the father.

- *Father, bless us!*

- *God bless you. I bless you, my children. Live together in friendship, do not quarrel. Love and respect each other. My blessing be with you!*

- *Christ will save you.*

The same dialogue is repeated with the bride’s father. He is given the icon of the Mother of God and he holds this during the ritual dialogue. This final episode of the ceremony is called *releasing the newlyweds (otpusk molodym)*.

The head of the community then leads the newlyweds from the church to the groom’s home. They all walk in single file with the groom’s young relatives and friends, holding on to the chain of white kerchiefs. The rest of the guests, all of the relatives and friends invited to the wedding, follow the couple and the bridal party.

The next step is the cold meal and during it the newlyweds retire and rest. They reappear at the high point of the hot meal, wearing their new festive attire. They are accompanied by the head groomsman and two girls from the groom’s family.



A traditional wedding chest containing the bride's dowry: hand-woven belts and embroidered shirts prepared to be given to the groom's family. (ER)

This group does not join the common table but, holding on to the “chain” of tied white kerchiefs, approach the tent pole where there is a shelf with an icon and a lamp placed on it. The groomsman (*druzhka*) invites the newlyweds' relatives to approach the icon one by one for presentation of gifts and the ceremony called *sitting for the bows* (*sadit'sia na poklony*). First the parents of the bride and groom approach and then other relatives come forward. Each married couple that takes part in the ceremony expresses good wishes to the newlyweds and gives them expensive gifts and money. At the wedding recorded by the author, for example, the groom's parents presented the newlyweds with the key to a new house while the bride's parents gave the couple the key to a new Mercedes car. The groomsman offers a glass of home-brewed beer to every guest who gives presents. The guest empties the glass and covers it with banknotes.

The wedding feast continues on throughout the night and into the next day, that is Monday. During the course of the entire banquet, the newlyweds continue executing deep bows to thank the guests for their gifts. When a new dinner course is brought, the couple leaves for a short while to rest. They then return having donned new attire. When the bride returns, she is always wearing her wedding wreath atop a new kerchief.

The final episode of the wedding ritual is the supper in the newlyweds' home on Tuesday. The bride does not wear the wreath during this meal. The guests dine at the newlyweds' expense, and in this manner are symbolically compensated for their wedding gifts. "We go to the newlyweds to return our treasury."(13)

The Old Believers hire cooks (*striapukhi*) and pay them with traditional gifts: each cook receives a kerchief and a pretty apron. Relatives of the newlyweds help the cooks: they set the tables, serve the food, fill the glasses with homemade spirits, and wash the dishes. Volunteers designate themselves with ribbons or kerchiefs tied across their shoulders. The groom's kinfolk wear blue kerchiefs and ribbons, and the bride's, pink.

The wedding celebration I documented had forty-three cooks, twenty-four tables, and more than three hundred guests. The wedding expenses came to \$18,000. The newlyweds received \$10,000 in cash, apart from the presents that they were given. All adults, including the women in gowns, came to the wedding in their own vehicles. Many of the guests had video cameras.

During the four festive days, while I observed this particular wedding, I did not hear any swear words, nor did I see even one inebriated person. There were no quarrels or fights.(14)

The color white, which dominates in Old Believers' wedding ceremonies, can be linked to the traditional white dress clothing worn during burials and funeral ceremonies.(15) Old Believers say, "We live for life, not for death ... for our future life." The white color is seen as a symbol of eternal life. It is a vivid metaphor for the purity of Old Believer faith and it represents their good intentions and their decent human behavior.

"Nikon persecuted us. Peter (16) persecuted us. The Reds persecuted us.... For our sufferings the Lord gave us a good life in America. No one mistreats us. They only respect us here. Americans do not accept us as sectarians. They say, 'You are our ancestors. Your Christian faith is older than ours.' It is a pity that we live in a strange land. We would come back if Yeltsin gave the land back to the peasants. (...). But here we live as in Eden."(17)

A complex variety of historical events drove Old Believer peasants out of Russia and into the New World. Thanks to their spiritual strength, invincible will, and their determination to work and live honestly, they have earned their "American Eden." My research has afforded me a chance to look at their life and to compare it with the life of present-day

Russian peasants. I understand now that I have seen the Russian conception of a Peasant Eden. In Woodburn, Oregon this Peasant Eden is absolutely earthly and real for the Old Believers who live there. For peasants living in Russia, however, it is but utopian and unattainable, like Heaven.



The first page of the letter from Vassa Kraskova to Elena Razumovskaya. The letter was written on 25 June 1996 upon the return from St. Petersburg where the group of women from Oregon sang at a folk concert. Vassa Kraskova was born in Turkey and went to school in Oregon, she can read and write in English. Like all children in Old Believers families, she learned to read Old Slavonic at home and taught herself how to write in Russian ‘by ear.’ (ER)

LIST OF INFORMANTS

1. Olga Gavrilovna Valikhova (1942), Harbin group, resident of Woodburn since 1968.
2. Uliana Vassilievna Zharkova (1951), Harbin group, resident of Woodburn since 1971.
3. Makar Afanasievich Zaniukhin (1938), Harbin group, resident of Woodburn since 1971.
4. Matriona Ulianovna Kalugina (1935), Turkish group, resident of Woodburn since 1962.
5. Vassa Vassilievna Kraskova (1957), Turkish group, resident of Woodburn since 1963.
6. Kirill Petrovich Kutsev (1942), Harbin group, resident of Woodburn since 1968.
7. Evdokia Vassilievna Postnikova (1951), Turkish group, resident of Woodburn since 1963.
8. Elena Levontievna Semerikova (1954), Harbin group, resident of Woodburn since 1967.

NOTES

- 1 Similar privileges were provided to the peasants moving to Siberia by P.A. Stolypin in the beginning of the 20th century.
- 2 The taboo does not apply to photo or video cameras or computers.
- 3 Comment by Makar Afanasievich Zaniukhin, 1938, Harbin group, resident of Woodburn.
- 4 Comment by Olga Gavrilovna Velikhova, 1942, Harbin group, resident of Woodburn.
- 5 Comment by Kirill Petrovich Kutsev, 1942, Harbin group, resident of Woodburn.
- 6 The term suggested by the Russian folklorist Kirill Chistov.
- 7 The information on the history and ethnography was provided by informants 3, 4, 6 and 8. The details of folk culture and traditional clothes were given by informants 1, 2, 5 and 7 (see the list of informants at the end of the article).
- 8 Recorded on 17 – 20 November 1995 in Woodburn, Oregon. All comments on the wedding ritual were made by Kirill Kutsev, resident of Woodburn, on 20 November 1995.
- 9 At this moment of the ritual game the bride can be replaced. In the Woodburn wedding the replacement was not performed.

10 The church, or prayer house, of the bespopovtsy group of Old Believers does not have a dome, unlike a Russian Orthodox church. It looks like a big house with a flat roof and a cross mounted on top.

11 The wedding ritual in Woodburn was held in the version of Turchane bespopovtsy; the role of the priest was performed by the community leader.

12 Comment by Kirill Kutsev.

13 Ibid.

14 By way of comparison, at all of the twenty-seven weddings, recorded by me and my students in the Russian-Belarusian border area, we saw many drunken guests, both men and women. There, wedding feasts often ended with fights. The speeches of matchmakers and the texts of songs during the second part of the wedding party abounded in obscene words.

15 In Western Russia, old women peasants come to the funerals wearing white kerchiefs as “the old tradition requires it”. It is known that traditionally, the color white was a sign of mourning in Ancient Egypt; and still is in India and in China.

16 Peter the Great.

17 From the conversation with Makar Zaniukhin and Kirill Kutsev.

Translated by Hanna Chuchvaha