

Russia's Colony

Nikolai Rezanov (1764-1806)

Born in St. Petersburg, the son of a judge. Through family connections he obtained appointment to the military, and then to a succession of bureaucratic positions at which he demonstrated unusual competence. At age 30 he went to Irkutsk where he met Shelikhov and married his daughter. With the ascension of Emperor Paul as tsar, Rezanov became chief secretary of the imperial advisory senate. In that position he advanced the interests of his acquired family's interests in America, and in 1799 secured the charter for the Russian American Company. When his wife died in childbirth in 1802, Rezanov helped to plan a Russian naval voyage to Russian America. In transit he attempted unsuccessfully to persuade the Japanese to open trade with Russia. After a winter in Sitka, he traveled to San Francisco where he persuaded the Spanish commandant to help relieve a supply shortage in Russian America. While in San Francisco he wooed and won the hand of the commandant's young daughter. Returning to St. Petersburg by land from Okhotsk in the winter and spring of 1807 he contracted a fever and died at Krasnoyarsk in March.