

Great opportunity of moving from the past to the future

The first Belarusian railway carriages were horse drawn, a train once travelled between Stolbtsy and Paris, and Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote a famous poem about using his Soviet passport at a Belarusian station

By Larisa Monashinskaya

These and similar fascinating facts are to be found in a book on the history of Belarusian Railways. Celebrating 150 years of operation, Mastatskaya Litaratura Publishing House has launched *The History of Belarusian Railways. From the 19th to the 21st Century*. Prepared by Belarusian historians, it includes reproductions of photographs, maps and tickets. The book enables us to learn the most curious facts about the history of the 'hero of the anniversary'.

Like other places around the world, Belarus used horse-drawn wagons for cargo transportation before steam engines revolutionised the railway system. The first such great-grandmother of the railway linked Starinka metallurgical and machine-building plant (owned by retired lieutenant Alexander Benkendorf) to various workshops and the pier at Sozh, using about six miles of track. The plant was operational in 1840-60 and was located in the village of Starinka, in the Cherkov District (today's Slavgorod District).

Until recently, it was believed that Belarusian railways dated from 1871. However, according to archive documents, its true birthday should be celebrated on December 15th, 1862. "At that time, a section of the railway track from St. Petersburg to Warsaw ran through Belarus," explains candidate of historical sciences Valentina Yanovskaya, who contributed to the book. "The Porechie-Grodno segment was the first to run



Presentation of new book *The History of Belarusian Railways. From the 19th to the 21st Century*

through Belarusian land."

Less than a century ago, there was the Manchuria-Stolbtsy express (Stolbtsy is now a district centre in the Minsk Region) and a train linked Paris and Negoreloe, running through the city. Ms. Yanovskaya continues, "In the 1920s, Belarus was divided into

two parts, in accordance with the Treaty of Riga. One half was Soviet and the other Polish, accompanied by two stations: Negoreloe and Stolbtsy. All Soviet residents travelling to Europe went through Stolbtsy and returned through Negoreloe." In the 1920s-30s, these stations were often mentioned in

the press, and were marked on most world maps.

Belarusian railway stations were often located in remote places away from the main cities, so it wasn't always possible to easily buy food. Railway staff and their families were given free travel passes, which allowed wives to travel to

another station to find groceries. Meanwhile, medical treatment was available 'on wheels'. Ms. Yanovskaya tells us, "There were special hospital trains, not like ones for wartime wounded but mini-hospitals which provided not only first aid but more complex surgery." Such trains ran throughout Belarus, beginning on the Libava-Romny route.

Many famous Russian and foreign writers, artists, actors, musicians, sculptors and scientists travelled through Stolbtsy and Negoreloe — poet Vladimir Mayakovsky among them. He wrote: 'On the horizon — white: snow and Negoreloe'. It's thought that he was traversing the old Soviet-Polish border on the Manchuria-Stolbtsy express, which inspired his *My Soviet Passport*. He shared his compartment with Swedish and British travellers.

The 3rd class Belarusian stations were built of brick; and 4th class stations (straight-line) were constructed from wood. Each had a room for the post, a lamp room (where lamps were refilled with kerosene), and separate offices for the commandant, transport service agent and telegraph operator. There was also a waiting room heated by woodstove and 3rd class stations would have had a buffet. Winter ice was used to preserve food and each station also had its own garden nearby.

Railway enthusiasts can learn more from *The History of Belarusian Railways. From the 19th to the 21st Century*.

Booking a place in electronic queue

By Anton Anufriev

It's now possible to book your border crossing time online

The customs services of Belarus and Poland have agreed to pilot 'e-queuing', allowing people to book their time for crossing the border online, alleviating the problem of queuing at checkpoints.

At recent meetings for the heads of our two countries' customs services, hosted by Bialystok, Poland presented the experimental project. The Internet booking system is to trial in Poland and, if successful, will be adopted by Belarus. The Poles have also suggested using 'green corridors' for passenger traffic. Belarus is to trial the idea in Bruzgi, in preparation for possible use during the 2014 IIHF World Championship.

Bravely facing modern challenge of building phytotron for 30m Euros

By Andrey Afanasiev

Scientists from Belarus and Russia plan to jointly implement a major project to hybridise plants

At a cost of 30m Euros, a phytotron is to be built — to grow new kinds of plants under controlled conditions. "Using rotation, it will be able to emulate conditions in any part of the globe, allowing us to take orders from various countries, including Chile and Bolivia," notes Professor of Genetics Victor Dragavtsev, the Chief Researcher of the Agro-physical Institute of the Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences, a member of the Linnean Society of London and an Honoured Scientist of Russia.

The project has been approved by the State Duma Committee of the Russian Federation for Science and High Technologies, which has suggested funding from the Rus-



Genetic engineering to help farmers improve quality of products

sian Ministry of Agriculture: the decision is yet to be taken. Since the project is being jointly organised with Belarus, funds could be allocated from the Union State budget. Once money has been re-

leased, it will take a year to design the phytotron and another year to build it.

"If Russia creates the phytotron with Belarus, both countries will benefit," emphasises Prof. Draga-

vtsev. The project will enable us to reduce the number of possible hybrid crossings by 200 times while recognition of genotypes could rise 1,100 times. The phytotron will work in artificial and natural light. "On sunny days, the roof could open, allowing the plants to use sunlight," he explains. Accordingly, it should be built in a place with enough access to light. However, the resulting heat could disrupt optimal conditions. "Ideally, it would be built in a moderate climate. St. Petersburg has too many cloudy days but it could be built somewhere between Minsk and St. Petersburg," he adds.

The phytotron is to focus on cereal crops. "We'll use crops from around the world but especially from Belarus and Russia. The potential is huge: we could raise wheat yields from the Urals to Sakhalin by 60-80 percent," he asserts.