

MINNESOTA MEDITERRANEAN AND EAST EUROPEAN
MONOGRAPHS

PRELUDE TO THE GREAT REFORMS

Avraam Sergeevich Norov
and Imperial Russia in Transition



by Peter R. Weisensel

Between the reign of Peter I (d. 1725) and the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the era which presented the greatest opportunity for change in Russia was the 1860s, the era of the “Great Reforms.” This book by Peter Weisensel, a Macalester history professor, focuses on the career of Avraam Sergeevich Norov, the minister of education from 1850 to 1858, whose leadership prepared the way for the momentous reforms of education in the 1860s.

Based on archival research in Russia, *Prelude to the Great Reforms* describes Norov’s formative experiences as the son of a wealthy landowner and as a young officer in the Russian army at the time of the Napoleonic wars, his participation in the literary “battles” of the 1820s, his journey to Egypt and the Holy Land in 1834–35, and his (sometimes conniving) rise in the bureaucracy. Weisensel shows that there were other bureaucrats like Norov, not “enlightened” but at least “transitional,” who performed roles much like Norov’s in the ministries of War, Internal Affairs, and Finance. Weisensel’s book is the first on Norov in any language and the first to bring to light the contributions of the “transitional bureaucrats” to the era of the Great Reforms.

Peter R. Weisensel is professor of history at Macalester College where he has taught since 1973. A specialist in Russian history, he focuses his research on imperial Russia and the question of ethnic interaction. In addition to several articles which appeared in scholarly journals, Weisensel is co-author, with Theofanis G. Stavrou, of *Russian Travelers to the Christian East from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* (1986).

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