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## RECORDS OF IMPERIAL RUSSIAN CONSULATES IN THE UNITED STATES, 1862-1922

### Introduction

On the 180 rolls of this microfilm publication, M1486, are reproduced the records of the seven consulates that the Imperial Russian Government maintained in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The records cover the period 1844-1929, with the bulk of the material spanning the years 1862-1922. They include correspondence, telegrams, certified legal documents, passport and other photographs, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, and other Russian and English-language documents. Additional languages represented in the records are Finnish, Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, French, and German; a small number of Yiddish documents are also included.

### Background

Officials in Russian consulates dealt with the problems of large numbers of Russian emigrants who, for business or personal reasons, needed to maintain contact with their homeland. The consulates also aided Russian subjects who had dealings with the United States Government. The functions of consular officials included (1) issuing passports and visas to Russian subjects in North America desiring to travel to other countries; (2) certifying legal documents such as birth certificates; (3) issuing identification papers; (4) assisting persons recently arrived from Russia; (5) attending to inheritance cases; (6) assisting individuals in commercial transactions with Russians; and (7) providing information about Russia.

The Russian consular records followed a tortuous path to the National Archives. In 1917 when the Imperial Russian Government fell, Russian consuls in seven cities in United States territory (Portland, OR; Philadelphia; New York; Chicago; San Francisco; Honolulu; and Seattle) and three Canadian cities (Montreal, Vancouver, and Halifax) remained loyal to the Czar. Within a few months the United States and Canadian Governments began to pay these consuls' expenses; they valued the diplomats' expertise in dealing with the large number of Russian emigrants to North America. The consuls continued to perform their duties until the late 1920's; but, as the consulates closed their doors, their records, primarily dating from 1862 to 1922, were packed and shipped to the former Russian Embassy in Washington, DC. During the evening of November 16, 1933, several hours before the United States officially recognized the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, U.S. troops removed 500 packing crates of records from the embassy building and stored them in a State Department facility. Twenty percent of the contents of these crates were the archives of the consulates of the Imperial Russian Government. There is evidence that the new Soviet Ambassador knew of this transfer; in the years following, members of the Soviet Embassy staff were allowed to consult the records.

The legality of United States possession of these Russian records became the subject of a long debate. It was argued that the records belonged to the Soviet Union as successor to the Imperial Russian

Government. The State Department Legal Advisor wrote on June 8, 1949, "It would seem that the long period of time that the Department has had possession, care, control, and use of the records would warrant a conclusion that the Department has acquired certain rights in connection with them. It is our opinion that the circumstances are such that the records may be considered as 'records belonging to the Government of the United States' for the purpose of referring them to the National Archives, with the understanding that they may be subject to retransfer (replevin) to the Soviet Union in the event that such action should seem desirable."

The documents were transferred to the custody of the National Archives in 1949 and allocated to Record Group 261, Records of Former Russian Agencies. In 1980 the National Archives loaned the records of the three Canadian consulates (Montreal, Halifax, and Vancouver) to the National Archives of Canada for microfilming. Those records remaining at the National Archives were microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah. The records of the Canadian consulates were returned to the National Archives and on January 31, 1990, the records of all ten North American consulates in the custody of the National Archives were returned to the Soviet Union. The records are now in the custody of the Archives of the Foreign Policy of Russia in Moscow and are maintained by the Historical Documentary Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. The microfilm will be considered originals for evidentiary purposes and will be retained permanently as evidence of the United States Government's organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and transactions.

#### Records Description

##### Portland, Oregon

The records were created by Gustav Wilson, a Finnish-born American citizen who was appointed Imperial Russian Vice Consul at Portland in 1883 and served until 1901. Wilson worked under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Russian Consul General at San Francisco. He was responsible for protecting the interests of Russian subjects in Oregon. Wilson took a special interest in Russian subjects of Finnish origin and many of the records document his dealings with that part of the Russian Empire. After Wilson's resignation, the Portland vice consulate was closed and the records were moved to San Francisco.

The records include the consular file, 1883-1901, containing documents relating to daily business, financial records, and instructions from the consul general in San Francisco, arranged by subject. Also included is correspondence, 1883-1901, arranged chronologically with alphabetical indexes.

##### Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Most of the records were created by William H. Tucker, an American citizen and prominent member of the Philadelphia Board of Trade, who was appointed Honorary Imperial Russian Vice Consul in 1895 and named full consul in 1912. His office was under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Russian Consul General in New York until 1915 when responsibility was assumed by the consul general in Pittsburgh. Tucker died in 1930 at the age of 84. Shortly thereafter the records of the consulate in Philadelphia were moved to the Russian Embassy building in Washington.

The records include a subject file, 1899-1916, containing consular instructions, calling cards, and other material relating to daily business. Administrative files, 1897-1922, contain much the same material and

are also arranged by subject. Correspondence, 1883-1921, is arranged chronologically with indexes. Individual files, 1897-1928, contain nationality certificates, certified documents, correspondence concerning inheritance matters, and other papers, all arranged alphabetically. Also included are private business files of Consul William R. Tucker, 1844-1911.

### New York, New York

The records of the Imperial Russian Consul General in New York, dated 1903-26, are more voluminous than those of the other Russian consulates in the United States. Most Russian emigrants to the United States entered the country at New York, many settled in the metropolitan area and, as with most new immigrants, they needed services from their consul. Providing passports, visas, certifications of Russian legal documents, and contacts on inheritance matters; making available certificates of nationality; and arranging for withdrawals from Russian state savings banks were just a few of the duties of the consul. This diplomat also had important responsibilities in the areas of finance, trade, and commerce. The Imperial Russian Consul General in New York, M. Oustinoff, served until 1925.

The records include war-related correspondence dated 1915; Red Cross reports on missing persons, 1914-15 and 1919-25; correspondence concerning drafting of Russian subjects into the U.S. military, 1916-19; passport applications arranged chronologically, 1910-14; and passport correspondence arranged alphabetically, 1917-26. Also included are nationality certificates and legalizations (certifications) of Russian language documents arranged chronologically and thereunder alphabetically, 1917-25; documents concerning extraditions of persons to Russia, 1908-12; material on the Russian Orthodox Church, 1919-23; personal files of M. Oustinoff, 1924-25; records of deceased persons and their estates, 1903-15; banking and financial records including money transfers, 1916-22; correspondence concerning relief activities, 1919-20; documents relating to the Russian Volunteer Fleet and Russian seamen, 1916-23; correspondence with other Russian consulates, 1917-19; documents relating to trade and commerce, 1915-17; and various other documents dealing with such subjects as agriculture, Armenians, the Black Tom explosion, and Galicians.

### Chicago, Illinois

The records, dated 1906-20, were created by Baron Ernest de Shilling, consul from 1909 to 1912, and his successors, Victor Chihckine, 1912-14, and Antoine Volkoff, who served as consul general from 1914 until the United States recognized the Soviet Union in 1933. The Chicago consul general had responsibility for the problems of Russian subjects in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

The records include a consular file containing chronologically-arranged documents regarding passports, burials, military service, and business and commerce, 1909-11; records pertaining to an agricultural exhibit in Omsk, 1910; papers relating to Baptists, 1909; visa applications, 1915-20, arranged chronologically; and individual case files containing passport and legal correspondence, 1910-16, arranged alphabetically by name. Also included are nationality certificates, 1917-20, and cancelled passports, 1906-15, both alphabetically arranged.

### San Francisco, California

The records of the San Francisco consul general, 1852-1924, document a critical Russian post always headed by a professional diplomat. Over the years the post was held by Vladimir R. Artsimovitch, 1899-1902; Paul Kosakevitch, 1902-9; Pierre Rogestvensky, 1909-15; A.M. de Wywodzoff, 1915-17; and George S. Romanovsky, 1917-23. The San Francisco consulate had jurisdiction over Russian subjects residing in the western states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming, as well as the territories of Hawaii and Alaska. Alaska was at one time a part of the Russian Empire, and the records reflect the problems of its residents who had been Russian subjects.

The records include correspondence with other Russian consulates, arranged alphabetically by city, 1901-21; subject correspondence, 1875-1923; general correspondence, arranged chronologically with alphabetical registers, 1852-1920; and correspondence, arranged alphabetically, 1914-23. Also included are various visa and passport files, 1888-1924; photographs of Russian landscapes, 1920; legal documents of individuals, 1908-14; documents concerning estates, 1860-1911; logs of daily business, 1856-1924; account books and financial records, 1856-1923; documents concerning the Russian savings banks, 1917-22; various reports and correspondence relating to the political situation in Russia, 1918-21; papers relating to trade and commerce, 1859-1914; and newspaper clippings, 1917-19.

#### Honolulu, Hawaii

The records, dated 1859-1911, were accumulated by a succession of non-professional diplomats who were appointed Imperial Russian Vice Consul. They included J.C. Pflueger, 1862-72; J.W. Pflueger, 1872-86; J.F. Hackfeld, 1886-1900; I.A. Isenberg, 1900-4; and F.A. Klamp, 1904-7. The main function of the vice consul was to look after the needs and commercial interests of Russians in Hawaii. The Honolulu vice consul was under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Russian Consul General in San Francisco.

The records include outgoing letters, arranged chronologically, 1860-1907; a log of daily business such as appointments, arranged chronologically, 1862-88; a register of Russian ships arriving in Honolulu, 1859-68; and a register of ship provisions, 1862-63. Also included is a copy of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Hawaii and a report on the military situation in Hawaii dated 1911.

#### Seattle, Washington

The records of the Imperial Russian Consulate at Seattle include those of the earlier Consulate General at Nome and Seattle. From 1914 to 1933 the Seattle post was held by Nicholas N. Bogoiavlensky. The Seattle consulate was under the jurisdiction of the San Francisco consul general and was held responsible for Russian subjects and affairs in the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, and the territory of Alaska.

The records, dated 1887-1928, include correspondence registers, arranged chronologically, 1914-25; consular files, arranged by subject, 1913-28; correspondence concerning business, commerce, and military shipments, arranged by subject, 1914-26; and correspondence regarding the Russian Volunteer Fleet, 1914-22. Also included and arranged alphabetically by name are individual case files, 1887-1928, and certified documents, 1914-17.

#### Related Documents and Published Materials

Related records in Record Group 261 include approximately 600 cubic feet of records of the Russian Supply Committee, 1914-22. These consist of correspondence with commercial firms and U.S. Government agencies, reports, and records concerning Russian Government procurement efforts during the World War I period. Records of the Imperial Russian consulates at Montreal, Halifax, and Vancouver have been microfilmed by the National Archives of Canada; a copy of that microfilm is on deposit in the National Archives in Washington, where it is available as a separate microfilm publication, M1742.

Before the records of the consulates in the United States were microfilmed, an index to names cited in them was prepared by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Washington. The work produced by Sallyann Amdur Sack and Suzan Fisher Wynne, *The Russian Consular Records Index and Catalog*, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), commonly known as the "Sacks Index," is a record of Jewish and other immigrant names. Index information may include for each name, the date and place of birth, names of family members, occupation, and date of emigration.

Because it was created before the records were microfilmed, the Sacks Index links information to boxes rather than roll numbers. To assist researchers in using the index in conjunction with the microfilm, a staff member at the National Archives prepared a table relating box numbers to roll numbers. Information from this conversion table has been incorporated in the Contents section of this publication.

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