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## RECORDS OF IMPERIAL RUSSIAN CONSULATES IN CANADA, 1898-1922

### Introduction

On the 83 rolls of this microfilm publication, M1742, are reproduced the records of the three consulates that the Imperial Russian Government maintained in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The records cover the period 1898-1922. 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 Canadian 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 three cities in Canada (Montreal, Halifax, and Vancouver) and seven cities in United States territory (Portland, OR; Philadelphia; New York; Chicago; San Francisco; Honolulu; and Seattle) 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. This publication is a copy of the film produced by the Canadian National Archives. The records of the Canadian consulates were returned to the National Archives and on January 31, 1990, they and the records of other 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

The microfilm consists of two main parts: (1) records of the individual consulates of Montreal, Halifax, and Vancouver on rolls 1-29, and (2) passport/identity papers on rolls 29-83.

##### Montreal, Quebec

These records were created by the Imperial Russian Consul-Generals in Montreal and include material relating to war, consular administrative affairs, conscription of Russians residing in Canada, and Russian-subject nationalities such as the Galicians and Ukrainians. The records contain correspondence regarding passports and naturalization, Russian mariners, trade and commerce, and aid for Russian subjects in Canada. Also included are registers and journals of the Montreal consulate and passport/identity case files which have been gathered from all three consulates into one series.

In 1922, at the termination of service of A.S. Likhachev, the last Consul General in Montreal, these records were transferred to the Russian Embassy in Washington, DC.

##### Halifax, Nova Scotia

Also transferred to the embassy in Washington in the early 1920's were the records from the vice-consulate in Halifax. These had been created by the Imperial Russian Vice-Consuls there, the last of whom was H.I. Mathers.

The records of Halifax were folded into those of the Montreal Consulate-General by the Public Archives of Canada. The only records identifiable as being from the Halifax Vice-Consulate are some on immigration policy, passport policy and regulations, and files concerning the definition of the vice-consul's role in certification of Russian identity.

## Vancouver, British Columbia

These records were created by the Imperial Russian Consul in Vancouver, the last of whom was K. Ragosin, who served until the early 1920's. At that time the records of the consulate were also transferred to the Russian Embassy building in Washington, DC.

The records include files on administrative affairs and the Russian Orthodox Church in Canada; material concerning consular intervention to aid Russian immigrants in Canada; other forms of assistance requested by Russian subjects; and correspondence regarding recruitment and military service of Russians residing in Canada. Also included are registers and journals of the Vancouver Consulate and passport/identity case files which join with similar records from Montreal and Halifax to form the passport/identity papers series.

## Passport/Identity Papers

This series consists of about 11,400 identity files on individual Russian immigrants who came to Canada in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The series was presumably consolidated from files of the three Canadian consulates. The series is arranged by number, the numbers being assigned in a rough alphabetical order by one of several variant spellings of the Russian name given on each file heading.

These case files provide information on Russian subjects in Canada who applied to the consulates for various documents. In most cases the applicants were seeking new Russian passports following the change of regime in Russia in February-March of 1917. In addition they sought passports to prove their Russian-subject status so as to avoid registration and induction into the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Russian subjects also applied for travel papers to Russia or visas. Whatever their intention, Russian subjects had to provide incontrovertible proof that they were Russian to obtain a new passport. During World War I, this was a matter of concern to the consuls and Canadian authorities because there were Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and Germans in Canada who were subjects of enemy powers (Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) who could present themselves as Russian subjects. Each applicant for Russian identity papers had to complete a questionnaire to which was attached a photo of the applicant.

In addition to this principal document the case files hold a wide variety of other types of documents submitted by applicants. These include proofs of identity issued by Russian Orthodox priests in Canada, notarized proofs of identity, Russian internal village passports, Russian military service and discharge certificates, receipts for passports deposited at the consulates, and personal correspondence. Passports of the Polish, Lithuanian, and Byelorussian republics are also found among these files, concentrated in the later file numbers from 12,900 to 14,420, which has a separate arrangement scheme.

Each roll of microfilm is identified with a number (beginning with "M") assigned by the National Archives of Canada. In addition, each roll bears a disclaimer indicating that permission must be obtained before reproduction. The microfilm was produced in Canada and this is a Canadian requirement, not applicable in the United States. The following Table of Contents is based on finding aids prepared by the Canadian National Archives; file folder titles listed thus sometimes reflect British punctuation and spelling.

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 Portland, OR; Philadelphia; New York; Chicago; San Francisco; Honolulu; and Seattle have been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah in cooperation with the National Archives; a copy of that microfilm is on deposit in the National Archives in Washington, where it is available as a separate microfilm publication, M1486.

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74 File 13501 to 13650  
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75 File 13895 to 13950  
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76 File 14237 to 14250  
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77 File 14403 to 14550  
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78 File 14606 to 14700  
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79 File 14835 to 14850  
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| 80    | File 14998 to 15000<br>File 15001 to 15150<br>File 15151 to 15168; M-7671 |
| 81    | File 15169 to 15280<br>File 15281 to 15339; M-7672                        |
| 1(82) | File 1 to 57; M-8270  |
| 2(83) | File 1 to 15<br>File 1 to 13; M-8271                                      |