

**THE RUSSIAN POST IN THE
EMPIRE,
TURKEY, CHINA, AND THE POST
IN
THE KINGDOM OF POLAND**



A detailed reference book for collectors of
Russian postage stamps, entires and postmarks

COMPILED BY S. V. PRIGARA

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“Rossica”

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Русская Почта

въ Имперіи,

въ Турціи, въ Китаѣ и почта

въ Царствѣ Польскомъ

Подробный Справочникъ

для собирающихъ

Почтовые Марки, Цѣльные Вѣщи и
Почтовые Штемпеля.

Составилъ С. В. ПРИГАРА

Почетный Членъ

Русскаго Общества Филателистовъ

„РОССИКА“.

1941.

г. Нью-Йоркъ.

*This translation is dedicated
to my wife Cathy, who put up
with it and me with equal fortitude.*

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Boyarin Afonasiy Lavrent'evich Ordyn-Nashchokin
The first organizer of a regular postal service for State correspondence
and private commercial mail.



S.V. Prigara

THE MONTHS IN RUSSIAN (OLD ORTHOGRAPHY)

Because of the many tables in this book concerned with postmarks, the following list of the months in Russian is provided for the non-Russian-speaking reader in order that the tables may remain in their original form. The listing in the second column shows the usual form of abbreviation found on postmarks from that period.

ЯНВАРЬ	ЯНВ.	January	ИЮЛЬ	ИЮЛ.	July
ФЕВРАЛЬ	ФЕВ.	February	АВГУСТЪ	АВГ.	August
МАРТЪ	МАР.	March	СЕНТЯБРЬ	СЕН.	September
АПРѢЛЬ	АПР.	April	ОКТЯБРЬ	ОКТ.	October
МАЙ	МАЯ	May	НОЯБРЬ	НОЯ.	November
ИЮНЬ	ИЮН.	June	ДЕКАБРЬ	ДЕК.	December

TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

Although the Prigara reference book was published in 1941, the printing was in the old orthography. A 35-character alphabet was used in Russia until after the revolution. When a “Decree on the introduction of the New Orthography” was promulgated on 10 October 1918 (basically a repetition of the resolution by the Academy of Science on 11 May 1917) three of the letters were dropped completely, and the use of the hard sign drastically curtailed. A number of other changes in spelling were also made. In this translation, the hard sign at the end of masculine words has been omitted.

The upper and lower case for both print and script are provided below, with their transliterations.

А а А а	- a	Л л Л л	- l	Ч ч Ч ч	- ch
Б б Б б	- b	М м М м	- m	Ш ш Ш ш	- sh
В в В в	- v	Н н Н н	- n	Щ щ Щ щ	- shch
Г г Г г	- g	О о О о	- o	Ъ ъ	- "
Д д Д д, ъ	- d	П п П п	- p	Ы ы	- y
Е е Е е	- e	Р р Р р	- r	Ь ь	- ' (hard sign)
Ж ж Ж ж	- zh	С с С с	- s	Ѣ ѣ	- ye
З з З з	- z	Т т Т т	- t	Э э Э э	- eh
И и И и	- i	У у У у	- u	Ю ю Ю ю	- yu
Й й Й й	- j	Ф ф Ф ф	- f	Я я Я я	- ya
І і І і	- i (soft)	Х х Х х	- kh	Ѧ ѧ	- f (th)
К к К к	- k	Ц ц Ц ц	- ts		

PREFACE

The purpose of this work is to satisfy the needs of those who collect the postage stamps, entires (among which are included stamped envelopes, postcards, and other issues with postal payment or postage stamps imprinted on them), and postal cancellations of Russia.

Both the growing interest in Russian philately among Russians and Americans, especially after the Russian Philatelic Exhibition in New York (which was put on by the New York Chapter of the Russian Philatelic Society “Rossica”), and the complete lack of Russian philatelic literature on the book market, prompted me to write “The Russian Post in the Empire, Turkey, China, and the Kingdom of Poland” and to illustrate the descriptions with pictures, some of which were borrowed from philatelic literature in my possession, and also from collections of various persons who are members of the Rossica Society – to these I give my thanks, and especial thanks to G. M. Shenitz.

I also cannot pass by in silence and fail to express my gratitude to those people who contributed to the publication of this book with their participation and help.

The difficulty in the realization of this work is explained by

the lack of Russian Postal Archives in America, and also by the insufficiency of Russian philatelic literature.

Nevertheless, I hope that my Reference Book will be of sufficiently great help to collector-specialists of the pre-Soviet Russian Post.

– Sergej Vasil'evich Prigara

21 August, 1941
New York

Some explanatory notes and comments on the translation:

Sergej Vasil'evich Prigara's masterwork on Imperial Russian-period philately is undoubtedly the greatest compilation of such information contained in one book, but for many years much of the knowledge it held remained largely unavailable to non-Russian-speaking collectors. It is hoped that this translation will afford them a better understanding and grasp of the depth and richness of the Russian field.

In the 39 years since the handbook's publication, much information which was unavailable or unknown to Mr. Prigara has come to light. As a result, there are a few errors and omissions in the original that have been retained – it must be kept in mind that this is a translation and not an update or rewrite. In some instances, clarifications have been made and a few holes plugged, but the translation has adhered as closely to the original as possible. The reader is invited to refer to the “bibliography” in the back for more recent information; some of them are definitive and almost all acknowledge some debt to Mr. Prigara's monumental work.

An additional page has also been appended concerning the transliteration system used in this translation and the months in Russian, to aid the reader in deciphering many of the lists and tables (reprinted as they appeared in the original). The transliteration system was chosen not for its phonetic approximation, but to provide a one-for-one substitution method so that the reader may reconstruct the exact Russian spelling. Placenames cause considerable difficulty in an endeavor such as this, because some cities, such as Moscow or St. Petersburg, are more recognizable to the English-speaking reader than are their transliterations “Moskva” and “Sankt Peterburg”. In numerous

instances, it is a toss-up whether a town in, say, Poland or one of the Baltic countries would retain its Russian form (Varshava, Libava, Vindava, etc.) or be represented by that area's own spelling (Warszawa, Libau/Liepaja, Windau/Ventspils). Some attempt has been made to provide the placenames in their countries' spellings, but many do not appear in any gazetteers available to the translator, so they have been left in their transliterated Russian form. The reader is warned that, while the system is largely uniform, enough exceptions are present to render it mildly chaotic. Any errors in translation are entirely mine.

Finally, a tremendous "Thank you!" is owed to Mr. Rimma Sklarevski for a long proof-reading job; to Dr. Gordon Torrey for his constant liaison work; to Mr. Alexis Lysloff for some great photography; to Mr. Norman Epstein for his tremendous efforts in publishing it, and some additional photography; to Col. Eugene Prince for helping me out of some very sticky translation questions; to the Kenner Printing Co. for their help and consideration, and to the many other members of Rossica whose comments, suggestions and corrections have been invaluable, and whose gracious help on this "project" made it possible.

Dave Skipton
Glen Burnie, Md.
March 6, 1980

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(Translator's Note: The Russian terms “shtempel’ klejmeniya” and “shtempel’ gasheniya” do not always lend themselves to easy translations, more so for the first than the second. “Klejmeniya” has been “divided” into two translations; “handstruck stamps” usually, but not always, referring to a pre-adhesive era handstamp mark denoting that postage had been paid and usually showing a placename with or without a date, and “datestamp”, a mark showing both the placename and date, providing a record of the item’s postal handling. It may be used as a cancellation. “Gashenie” is much more straightforward – any marking, stamped or otherwise, which renders a postage stamp or indicium useless for further postage duty. “Postmark” I have used as a catch-all encompassing cancellations, datestamps, handstruck stamps, etc.; thus, any marking applied by the post.)

THE IMPERIAL POST IN RUSSIA

Postal History

The history of the Postal Administration in Russia can be divided into four periods.

During the time of the first period, the only means of postal communication, both internal and external, was in the form of the so-called “yam”, or relay station system, which continued until the time of Peter the Great.

The beginnings of the Post in Russia stretch back to the time of Mongol rule, when the Tatars established relay stations with couriers along the routes of their conquests, whose duty it was to relay the orders of the Khans.

At that time in Russia, the appanage princes communicated with one another by means of correspondence by courier, and also with the boyars to inform them of orders and instructions on governmental matters.

The relay stations were not, however, a postal institution in the modern sense of the word. They served as stopping places where travelers could obtain fresh horses, food and lodging for the night, and also the necessary people for continuation of the trip. The costs of maintaining these relay stations fell upon the local populace, but horses and lodging at the stations were only made available to the bearers of “podorozhnye” (orders for post-horses), which were issued by the authorities. The oldest extant “order for post-horses” dates from the reign of Ivan III (1462-1505); it was issued in 1470 to a courier of a great prince. Since obtaining these orders entailed great difficulties, and because they severely hindered freedom of movement of those traveling

along the post routes, these documents, in use for more than 400 years, were abolished in 1874.

The first hires at an attempt to organize a regular postal system came during the reign of Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584), but at the end of the 16th century there existed only irregular postal communications between several of the most important cities, and that was used exclusively by the State, which sent officials with orders, instructions and diplomatic correspondence when necessary. As for the general populace, the need for a postal service was not yet recognized, and up to the middle of the 17th century letters from the private sector were not accepted by the Post.

The question of organizing a regular postal service was raised before the Government by foreigners who at that time were in considerable numbers in Russia, and who desired communication with their homelands. It was only in the reign of Aleksej Mikhajlovich (1645-1676), at the initiative of one of the most remarkable men of that time – the Boyarin A. L. Ordyn-Nashchokin – that a regular letter post was begun in Russia in 1666, for communication between Moscow and Courland and, because of the Russo-Polish treaty, also between Russia and Poland. The mail was carried by horse along the relay stations by chosen postriders, but the entire business of the postal administration was concentrated in the hands of foreigners, as they were more experienced in such matters, and who enjoyed all the advantages of and profits from it. However, this system could not be considered a post in the generally accepted meaning of the word.

The Second Period – from Peter the Great to the postal reforms of Empress Catherine II, when Postal Establishments in

the modern sense began to arise gradually and concurrently with the relay system. They slowly merged with the “yam” system and finally absorbed it completely.

A true, regular postal system was organized during the time of Peter the Great (1689-1725), when State Postal Establishments began to be formed. Postal Administrations and Post Offices were set up first in the capitals of St. Petersburg (in 1716) and Moscow, and then gradually in the cities of Riga, Vyborg, Revel, Narva, Arkhangel'sk and Vologda. At each of these Postal Establishments there were a Postmaster and the necessary number of postillions. All postal officials were German, and the official language of postal administration was likewise German, from which all postal terminology was borrowed and preserved to this day. That change in the procedures marked the transition from the old postal system to the postal institutions of the modern sense, although without established staffs and without a definite (overall) system. The right to make use of the relay horses was first granted to the private sector by governmental decrees in 1713 and 1714. The entire post in Russia at that time was divided into two parts – one for “foreigners” or merchants for private correspondence, and the other, the relays, for government correspondence and transportation of officials and nobility. The two parts were merged by the Ukase of 1721.

For a long time the lettermail post in Russia, established and run by foreigners, was set up along the lines of foreign posts, wherein the tariff for sending letters, as it was almost everywhere abroad in that period, was assessed according to distance. The “zolotnik” was fixed as the unit of weight, equivalent to approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ “lot”. Calculation in “lots” was later introduced in 1767 by the Ukase of Empress Catherine II.

Payment for sending a letter abroad from Moscow (only as far as the border) was set at 8 kopecks per zolotnik, but because a letter weighed not less than 3 zolotniks, thanks to the thickness and heaviness of paper at that time. and also taking into account the value of money then, when rye was sold at 50 kopecks a quarter instead of 7-8 rubles a quarter today, sending such a letter would cost about 4 rubles by today's valuation.

The third period began with the postal reforms of Empress Catherine II and continued up to the amalgamation of the Postal Administration and the Telegraph Department in 1884.

In the year after her accession to the throne, 1763, Empress Catherine II (1762-1796) charged Counts Chernyshev and Ovtzyn "to establish and improve the posts throughout the State." Municipal postal institutions had no permanent staffs as yet – officials and employees were appointed as the need arose. The receipt and dispatch of correspondence in many cities were managed by Mayors, Magistrates, Town Halls, Viceregal and Provincial Governments, persons entrusted by local authorities, and Relay-Stationmasters. The staffs of the Post Offices (St. Petersburg, Moscow and Riga) were insignificant, and all responsibilities were held exclusively by Germans.

During the reform of the Municipal Postal Institutions, Postmasters began to be appointed in various cities where there were postal establishments, and at the head of several Postmasters were placed Senior Postmasters (Ober pochtmeister), of whom each had his residence in a major city. The Postal Departments of St. Petersburg and Moscow became the highest bodies of the Municipal Postal Administration. Then in 1782, the Malorossijsk and the Pogranichnyj Ol'viopol' were added (the latter was established in 1781). These Postal

Departments comprised the second level of the Postal Administration, and to them were subordinated the Provincial Postal Departments and Post Offices of the nearest provinces. From 1790 on Post Offices in several cities were replaced with Postal Dispatch Offices. The lowest level of the Municipal Postal Administration was that of the Postal Stations, created in 1781 by Catherine II to replace the former relay stations.

At the same time, postal communications were instituted between all the most important points of the country, and Russia was divided into postal zones by which the standard rates for letters and travelers throughout the State were determined (Imperial Ukase of 14 November 1783). To send a letter weighing one “lot” less than 100 versts cost one kopeck, and two kopecks for each 100 versts. Rates for transportation of travelers were also standardized.

At the end of the 18th century, the post had several subdivisions: the “heavy” or “yam” post, the “light” post, and the relays. The number of Postal Establishments, however, did not exceed 20. The “heavy” post handled official packages and parcels weighing more than 5 lbs. Lightweight parcels, official packages of ordinary size and private letters made up the “light” post. The relays were a special aspect of the post. To the already-existing two types of postal dispatch (letters and parcels) was added the third in 1781 – the transfer of money by post, at first by “currency bills”, and then also gold and silver coinage.

During the reign of Paul I (1796-1801), still another form of the post appeared which afterwards was employed on a considerable scale. An Ukase of 1799 stipulated that all letters and packages with Moscow and outbound international mail were to be sent directly to St. Petersburg without stopping at the

way stations. This was to be carried by express couriers under the title of “extra-mail”.

In that same year (1799), the first tables of organization (shtaty) for the Imperial Postal Establishments were formed and consolidated. (These had been reformed in the previous reign). According to these tables, the Chief Municipal Postal Administration belonged to six Main Post Offices (pochtamy): 1) St. Petersburg, 2) Moscow, 3) Malorossiysk, 4) Lithuanian, established in 1797 in Vil’no, 5) Tambov, and 6) Kazan’. A seventh pochtamt, the Siberian, was added in 1800.

The Post Offices (Pochtovyya Kontory), Dispatch Offices and Field Posts were subordinated to the pochtamts.

The “kontory” were divided into five classes: 1) 1st class – the Dubossary Border PO, 2) 2nd class – the Provincial Border and Port Offices, 3) 3rd class – other Provincial Post Offices, 4) 4th class – Border and Port PO’s, and 5) 5th class – City Post Offices.

The Dispatch Offices (ehkspeditsii) were divided into City and District PDO’s.

Postal Stations were under the supervision of District PO’s and PDO’s, as were the Postillions who accompanied the mail. At the beginning of the 19th century during the reign of Alexander I (1801-1825), there were 458 Postal Establishments in existence in Russia, employing about 5000 officials.

Soon after the formation of the various Ministries in 1802, the Chief Administrative Board for Postal Affairs, at the head of which stood the Chief Director of the Posts, was transferred (in 1806) to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In 1819 it was withdrawn from the MIA and placed under the Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and Public Education, but soon it

was again withdrawn and given independent status as the Postal Department, with a Postmaster-General at its head.

A daily exchange of mail was established in 1824 on the St. Petersburg-Moscow highway, and on several other routes the post began to operate twice a week, as opposed to the former schedule of once a week. In 1825 the mail was dispatched daily throughout the country – 13 heavy post routes, 635 light, and 21 extra-mail.

During the reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855), two mail exchanges per week in the provinces was considered a normal schedule. At that time there were already 751 Postal Establishments in Russia, with 5,947 employees.

The Emperor's Ukase to the Senate followed on 22 October 1830, concerning the new organization of the Post in the Empire. On the basis of this Ukase, 1) the Provincial Main Post Offices of Malorossiysk, Tambov, Kazan' and the Siberian were abolished, with Provincial Post Offices (Gubernskiya Pochtovyya Kontory) established in those towns where the Main PO's had been (the Lithuanian Main PO was closed somewhat later, in 1832); 2) the Capital Main PO's (Stolichnyye Pochtamty) of St. Petersburg and Moscow became independent postal establishments directly subordinated to the Postal Department; 3) all other Postal Establishments were divided into 11 Postal Districts; 4) all Provincial, Territorial, Border PO's and Offices abroad came under the direct control of the Postal Department; 5) the Provincial and Territorial PO's were given control over all those places in the districts of their area where postal business was conducted. These places were re-named "District Post Offices (Uezdnyya Pochtovyya Kontory), with no distinctions between them (in name).