

Researcher's Introduction to the Russian State Archive

Jeffrey Burds

In S. V. Mironenko and Jeffrey Burds,
Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii.
Tom 2. Fondy Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva Rossiiskoi Federatsii po istorii RSFSR [State Archive of the Russian Federation. A Research Guide. Volume 2. Collections of the State Archive of the Russian Federation on the History of the USSR]. Volume IV in *The Russian Archive Series*, University of Pittsburgh. In *Russian and English* (Moscow-Pittsburgh, 1996), pp. i-viii.

This volume represents the first comprehensive survey ever published of holdings in the collections of what was formally called the Central State Archive of the Russian Federation (*Tsentral'nyi Gosudar-stvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, or *TsGA RSFSR*).¹ As such, it is likewise the first *comprehensive* republic-level guide to collections ever published from the former Soviet Union. The collections offer invaluable insight into the operations and function of state and public institutions in the Soviet Union's largest republic, the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (*RSFSR*). The Russian Republic encompassed a land mass from Petersburg to Sakhalin, from the North Pole to Stavropol, spanning eight time zones. In 1990, the Russian Republic contained 51.4 percent of the Soviet population, 76.2 percent of all Soviet territory, and accounted for 61.1 percent of the Soviet Union's annual Gross National Product.² Unlike so-called all-union central state archives of the Soviet period, which were generally divided by scope or content, this republic archive contains consolidated and integrated collections detailing the history of nearly every

¹Previously a depository of records of Russian institutions in the Soviet Union, this archive was placed under the jurisdiction of the State Archives of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, or *GA RF*) in a merger of 28 April 1992. The new institution's first director, S. V. Mironenko, now manages the pre- and post-revolutionary collections of the former Central State Archive of the October Revolution and Socialist Construction (*Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii i Sotsialisticheskogo Stroitel'stva*, or *TsGAORSS*) as well as the Central State Archives of the RSFSR. This is the second in a multi-volume survey of the vast collections of GA RF. For a survey of GA RF's rich pre-1917 collections, see *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Putevoditel'. Tom 1. Fondy Gosudarstvennogo Arkhiva Rossiiskoi Federatsii po istorii Rossii XIX-nachala XX vv.*, ed. G. L. Freeze and S. V. Mironenko (Moscow-Pittsburgh, 1994).

²See the aggregate data presented in Susan Senior Nello, "The Food Situation in the ex-Soviet Republics," *Soviet Studies* Volume 44, No. 5 (1992), p. 859.

aspect of the Russian Republic's seventy-year existence: economic, political, institutional, administrative, social.

Comprising more than 1.5 million archival units (*dela*)—30 percent of the all files preserved at the State Archives of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, or *GA RF*)—these holdings consist of materials assembled from collections relevant to the history of the Russian Republic during the Soviet era, 1917-1991. While the institutions of the Soviet Russian Republic were limited to these dates, the documents themselves both precede and extend beyond the Soviet period.

The current guide includes changes wrought by a fundamental reorganization of the Russian Federation archives to create a far more integrated and ordered structure of collections. The reorganization has indeed been far-reaching. For instance, there were 547 collections in TsGA RSFSR when this project started back in 1991; as a result of this reorganization, 212 additional collections devoted to the history of the Russian Republic were stripped from the GA RF-Soviet holdings, and merged with 533 collections in their more appropriate place in TsGA.³ In all, this volume now contains a description of 745 collections, most of which are fully declassified and available for research.⁴

Alas, the integration of these collections is thematic, not physical: while the holdings of the Russian Federation archives are seamlessly integrated in this volume, the obstacles to actual physical relocation of the 212 new collections added in recent years to the TsGA component proved insurmountable. To assist researchers, a simple formula has been adopted in collection identification numbers: the prefix “A-” before a *fond* number indicates that the collection is physically located in TsGA (26 Berezhkovskaia Naberezhna); while the prefix “R-” indicates physical location at the main repository at GA RF (17 Bol'shaia Pirogovskaia Street). Five *fondy* numbered 10001-10011 are likewise located at 26 Berezhkovskaia Naberezhna, while *f.* 10010 is located at Bol'shaia Pirogovskaia.

While this thick volume represents a comprehensive guide to the collections of the Russian Federation, there are definite restrictions and limitations. For instance, two wholly secret collections (*ff.* A-462 and A-669, related to national defense issues

³To avoid confusion, the author will use the acronym *TsGA* throughout the text to refer to the collections in the State Archives of the Russian Federation specifically related to the history and institutions of the Russian Republic, or RSFSR. Since the merger of 28 April 1992, *TsGA* no longer exists; readers and scholars should always cite the consolidated GA RF when referring to specific holdings in scholarly references.

⁴Veteran researchers at TsGA or scholars pursuing references from works published before the recent reorganization need not be alarmed. GA RF archivists did not change old *fond* numbers during the reorganization, but only created new collections. Consequently, old *fond* references and citations are still valid.

of the Russian Republic) have been included in the *fond* list, although in compliance with formal restrictions in the State Secrets Act of August 1993, there are no annotations to describe the contents of these still-classified collections. Moreover, forty personal collections currently preserved in TsGA have been excluded from this survey altogether, and will be included in a comprehensive guide to GA RF's personal collections to be published in a separate volume in this series. Finally, the efforts at re-integration of recent years have led to the transfer of forty-one collections formerly located at TsGA to the jurisdiction of two other archives, the Russian State Scientific-Technical Archive (*RGNTA*), and the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (*AVPR*). A list of these collections appears at the end of this volume.

Besides a detailed survey of collections, there are six indexes in this volume which will be of particular importance to scholars: a list of institutions and agencies in the Russian Republic, organized thematically, with cross-listings to the appropriate *fond* number; an index of surnames; a geographical or place index; an index of abbreviations; a numerical list of all collections in TsGA RSFSR; and a list of collections in TsGA RSFSR which have been transferred to the jurisdiction of other archives.

Brief History of the Collection

As the Soviet Union's largest republic, and as the seat of the Soviet central government, the Russian Republic has been largely inconsistent in preserving the integrity of its state institutional collections since 1917. For the most part, the archives of the Russian Republic have usually been absorbed into competing central state archival collections of the Soviet Union, which presented Russian archivists in the post-Soviet era with the monumental task of reorganizing and re-establishing the integrity of archives restricted to the history of the Russian Republic.⁵

Despite its dominant role, and in contrast to most of the other Soviet republics, the Russian Republic did not for a long period of Soviet history have its own central state archive for the preservation of documents of republic institutions, a fact which led to the dispersion of Russian Republic materials among various central, all-union Soviet archives: mainly the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (*TsGAOR SSSR*), the Central State Archive of the National Economy (*TsGANKh SSSR*), the Central State Archive of Literature and Art (*TsGALI SSSR*), and the Central State Archive of the Soviet Army (*TsGASA SSSR*).

⁵Tatiana Kotlova's informative Russian-language introduction ("*Predislovie*") to the current volume contains a detailed chronicle of the complex history of collection at TsGA. Western scholars are strongly advised to read that Introduction closely for a better understanding of the holdings in this important archive, as well as for a better understanding of the complex history of the central state archival system of the former Soviet Union.

For most of the Soviet era, the Central State Archive of the October Revolution—from October 1920, a mere department in the archival administration, and from February 1925, an independent central state archive—had the dual role of preserving documents relevant to the history of the Bolshevik revolution, as well as serving as the main repository for central state Soviet institutions and agencies. From 1926, the October Revolution Archive's status as official repository of documents of the Soviet state and the RSFSR became official and compulsory. As a result, the archives of the Russian Republic continued to exist under the rubric of the 'all-union' (*obshchесоiuznye*) collections of TsGAOR.

By the beginning of the Second World War, the voluminous collections at TsGAOR had grown so massively that other central state archives were created or expanded to absorb specific types of documents. This consisted largely of the centralization of RSFSR documents devoted to the Far East in TsGA RSFSR in Tomsk; the transfer of materials directly related to Russian and Soviet cultural history to the Central State Archive of Literature and Art; and the transfer of film and photographic collections to the Central State Archive of Kino-Photo Documents.

The practice of absorbing the documents of the Russian Republic directly into TsGAOR was ended only on 10 May 1957. On 17 August 1957, the Central State Archive of the Russian Republic was officially established by decree of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. The formation of the archives of the Russian Republic began largely with the concerted effort to consolidate in TsGA RSFSR only the records of those institutions and agencies which had ceased to exist, a process more or less completed by 1962. Active agencies—most notably, the NKVD-MVD, TsIK, VSNKh, and most republic-level departments subordinated to the jurisdiction of all-union Soviet institutions—continued to consolidate their collections in central state archives. This was remedied only in a decree of the government of the Russian Federation, dated 28 April 1992, which ordered the establishment of a new State Archive of the Russian Federation, consolidating its holdings in three departments: documents of the history of Russian state institutions before November 1917; documents of the history of Soviet state institutions after November 1917; and documents of the history of the RSFSR.

The complex, often contradictory history of the archives of the Russian Federation point toward certain concrete conclusions as scholars develop tactics for their own themes of research. For scholars who specialize in the history of the Soviet Union in the revolutionary era, the 1920s or after 1955, it is crucial to emphasize that TsGA RSFSR has become the main repository for Soviet administrative records in the Russian Republic. This was largely due to the fact that these eras were marked by considerable administrative decentralization in the Soviet Union: the republics, not the Soviet leadership, served as the primary administrative nexus. In the early Soviet era, the pre-history to the creation of the central command system was marked by a distinct emphasis on republic-level over all-union or Soviet administration. During Khrushchev's decentralization campaign, moreover, many vital state functions were

shifted from all-union (*soiuznye*) to republican (*republikanski*) organs. Hence, for the 1950s and 1960s, TsGA is a critical source for scholars, and often has a more complete collection of materials than can be found in any central state archive of the former Soviet Union.

Survey of Holdings in the Russian State Archive

Owing largely to the impetus to re-organize archives pertaining to the governing of the Russian Federation, 1917-1991, the collections of the Central State Archives of the Russian Federation now represent for the first time a coherent integration of Russian republic-level institutions.

This survey of holdings is organized into five main categories. Chapter One (68 *fondy*) is devoted to collections of the chief administrative organs (*vyshie organy*) of the Russian Republic. These include the records of the RSFSR executive committee or *ispolkom* (*TsIK*), (including the files of the President, the Presidium, and the Secretariat of the RSFSR); minutes and supporting materials to various Party congresses; and the records from various republic-level administrative departments which reported directly to the Central Committee (dealing with agitation-propaganda, military preparedness, urban planning, public health, provisions, finances, social order, and numerous other departments which handled the day-to-day administration of the Russian Republic). Researchers will be particularly drawn to the detailed annotated survey of holdings in the Secret section of the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR, 1918-1938 (*f. R-1235, op. 140-141*). Chapter One also includes a survey of collections of numerous special commissions dedicated to a host of specific concerns and problems: economic, military, agricultural, social. Here one finds, for instance, *f. R-6983*, the records of a special commission to study and improve labor and living conditions among working class and peasant women in the Russian Republic, 1926-1932. Likewise, one also finds *f. R-6990*, an extraordinary commission dedicated to the struggle against banditism on the Western front (1921-1922).

Chapter Two (with references to 566 *fondy*) is devoted to the republic-level agencies of all-union and Soviet ministries, sub-ministries, and departments. These are essentially the republic-level offices of Soviet agencies. Representing nearly two-thirds of the annotations in this volume, the survey of holdings in this chapter offers detailed information on nearly every aspect of Russian political, social and economic life in the Soviet era. By design, the classification of these various agencies corresponds largely to the structure used in a separate volume in this series devoted to

the holdings in the Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE).⁶ This will make it a relatively simple task for researchers interested in a particular sector of the Soviet economy or the operation of a particular ministry to move between all-union collections and separate republic-level holdings on the same theme. Researchers are advised to look at both Soviet and republic collections, as well as *oblast'* archives and city museums.⁷ Generally, republic-level collections will offer less of the all-union perspective, while Soviet central state collections will lack much of the raw material which precedes the sort of documentation crucial to the study of specific regions: regular reports and correspondence with *oblast'* and *raion* chiefs, field reports of local agents, etc.

Chapter Three (18 *fondy*) presents a survey of collections of the various legal organs in the Russian Republic: the Ministry (or Kommissariat) of Justice, criminal, civil, and arbitration courts, the Russian Supreme Court, the State Procurator's Office, and various special judicial and investigative agencies. The largest collections in this category are *f.* A-353, the files of the Soviet Ministry of Justice in the Russian Republic, 1917-1963, and *f.* A-428, the files of the RSFSR's Supreme Court, 1935-1971. In addition, of particular interest to researchers will be the long-neglected records of the Revolutionary Tribunal during the early Soviet period (*f.* R-1005). Researchers should look closely at the annotations describing the largely unexplored documents of the Soviet Procurator's office in the Russian Republic from the middle of the Stalin era to the very end of the Soviet period (*f.* A-461). Here, scholars will find documents pertinent to a wide range of themes.

Chapter Four describes the collections of 138 public organizations in the Russian Republic. These include professional unions or *profsoiuzy* in every sector of the Russian labor force, cooperative organizations, scholarly, artistic and educational

⁶For a survey of Soviet economic institutions and agencies, see Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki, *Putevoditel'*. Volumes 1-2, ed. W. J. Chase, J. P. Burds, S. V. Prasolova, A. K. Sokolov and E. A. Tiurina (Moscow-Pittsburgh, 1994-1995). For a survey of Soviet-era materials from local collections within the Russian Republic, see the appropriate guides to *oblast'* archives: e.g., Glavnoe Arkhivnoe Upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov RSFSR, *Spravochnik po fondam Tsentral'nogo Gosudarstvennogo Arkhiva Moskovskoi oblasti i ego filiala v g. Bronnitsy*, ed. M. V. Krivenko (Moscow, 1983).

⁷The best guide to those *oblast'* and city archives is P. K. Grimsted, ed. *Archives in Russia, 1993. A Brief Directory* (Moscow-Washington, 1993). This useful guide is regularly updated in an on-line directory available on *ArcheoBiblioBase*. In addition, see Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR. Vsesoiuznyi nauchno-issledovatel'skikh institut dokumentovedeniia i arkhivnogo dela, *Gosudarstvennye arkhivy SSSR. Spravochnik*. Parts 1-2 (Moscow, 1989). For a recent and comprehensive guide to museums in the Russian Republic, see Ministerstvo kul'tury SSSR and Tsentral'nyi muzei revoliutsii SSSR. *Istoricheskie i kraevedcheskie muzei SSSR. Katalog* (Moscow, 1988).

associations, as well as scientific and medical conferences and agencies, sports associations, social clubs, women's societies, etc.

Finally, Chapter Five presents a survey of six unique collections preserved in the Russian Federation's archives at TsGA. These include *f.* A-461, a collection of invaluable materials on the first presidential elections in the Russian Federation in 1991. The other special collections are devoted to unrelated issues: about 270 files of miscellaneous holdings too small to form their own collections and falling outside of the rubric of existing ones; documents related to the planning and construction of the Volga-Don River canal system, 1918-1952; the protocols of sessions of Vesenkha—the Supreme Council of the National Economy, 1918-1928; documents related to the search in Kaliningrad for valuable museum pieces which disappeared during the Second World War; and documents of the Council of the National Economy regarding the Soviet defense industry in the Russian Republic, 1957-1965.

Three final recommendations are appropriate for researchers intending to work at the Central State Archives of the Russian Federation. First, although the archives of the Russian Federation are ostensibly limited to the collections of central state organs at the republic level, they nonetheless contain immense and voluminous local materials—reports and investigations in local areas that, at least in the 1920s and again in the 1950s, were transmitted directly to Moscow. In many cases, extant copies in TsGA RSFSR are the only remaining copies of such local reports. Consequently, scholars who seek to study any aspect or region in the history of the Russian Republic might well begin research at the archives of the Russian Federation. Second, besides studying the materials and collections in the Russian Federation's archives, researchers should consult other former Soviet archives for additional documents on the operation of the higher organs of the Russian Republic. These include especially the GA RF Soviet collections, as well as the collections of the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Contemporary History (RTsKhIDNI), the Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation (TsKhSD), and the Russian State Archive of the Economy.⁸ The operative principle here is to rely on Soviet bureaucratic patterns of redundancy: multiple copies of documents can almost always be found. And the corollary: documents which may have been removed, lost, destroyed, misfiled or reclassified in one archive may be available for research in another; one should never assume that the collection in one archive is complete. Third, and finally, only a patient and systematic sweep of materials will be likely to render success. Especially for the 1920s, the collections of the archives of the Russian Republic are to a large degree reflections of the Soviet bureaucratic chaos of the era:

⁸For a survey of materials on the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, see Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii, *Kratkii putevoditel' Fondy i kollektzii, sobrannye Tsentral'nym partiinym arkhivom*, ed. J. A. Getty and V. P. Kozlov (Moscow-Pittsburgh, 1993).

files (*dela*) labeled one way will often, for instance, include crucial materials on other unrelated subjects. Readers are encouraged to use their imaginations and to select target files broadly. Scholars should plan to pour through many more files than initially expected, and from this broad base work to ferret out what is essential to their own narrower themes of research.

Access and Working Conditions

The main collections and reading room of TsGA are located at 26 Berezhkovskaia Naberezhna, Moscow 121059. The archive's telephone is (095) 240-32-54. The nearest metro station is Kievskaiia. Walk towards the river and take any bus south (towards Moscow State University) to the third stop. For a reader's pass to the archive, and for access to some formerly GA RF-Soviet materials now under the jurisdiction of TsGA, scholars must first visit the main offices of the State Archives of the Russian Federation, located at 17 Bol'shaia Pirogovskaia ul., Moskva, 119817. (*tel.*: (095) 245-81-41; *FAX*: (095) 181-37-78; or, by electronic mail: garf@glas.apc.org). Visit the *propusk* office to the right inside the main entrance, where each foreign scholar is expected to present his or her passport, visa, a letter of introduction from a sponsoring Russian institution, and complete a short application form. As of this writing, personal computers are allowed into the archive's Reading Room with formal written permission, obtained in advance. Because such rules are subject to change, readers with computers should check with archival officials for a specific statement on current policies regarding computer use. Xerox and microfilm copies of documents are generally available, though turnover time will be affected by user demand and the size and complexity of individual orders. Readers who intend to carry copies of archival materials abroad are strongly advised to obtain expressed written permission to do so from GA RF.

While most materials have been declassified, there are still some exceptions. Two *fondy*, though noted here in the list of collections, are still classified in their entirety as of late-1995, and therefore lack detailed descriptive materials. Besides these restrictions imposed by the terms of the Russian Federation's State Secrets Act of 1993, certain obstacles to research may be encountered. These are associated with the rights of private individuals and the 75-year prohibition on unauthorized access to materials of a personal nature (*dokumenty lichnogo proiskhozhdeniia*, referring to *prava lichnosti* or 'individual rights of privacy'). To give readers some notion of the proportion of materials in any collection deemed to be of a personal and possibly sensitive nature, the editors have also indicated the number of such *dokumenty po lichnomu sostavu*.

To obtain the right to use still-classified materials generally concentrated among more recent documents (less than thirty years old), a researcher must appeal for declassification of materials by applying through GA RF to the appropriate department (or *vedomostvo*) which now controls access to those documents. For

example, to release crime data from ten years ago, the researcher would apply through GA RF to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. For access to a specific court case, the researcher would apply to the Ministry of Justice. Scholars are advised that this process generally requires a *minimum* of six months. To begin, it is best to write a petition to the Director of the State Archives of the Russian Federation with a general summary of one's theme of research, a detailed description of the materials required, and the specific purpose for their use.

Each entry in this volume provides basic information needed to judge the size and contents of each collection. Besides institutional or collection title, each entry contains *fond* identification number (*f.*); the quantity of inventory lists or *opisi* in the collection (*op.*); the number of archival units or *edinytsy khraneniia* (*ed. khr.*), dates of the collection or *krainye daty* (*kr. daty*) as well as chronological range of the documents contained therein (*daty dokumentov*).

Besides this volume, readers are encouraged to consult the myriad in-house guides and card-files to numerous collections preserved at the archives of the Russian Federation. Though not exhaustive, the thematic guides in the Reading Room at TsGA can be quite helpful.

* * * * *

The principal editor of the Russian text is S. V. Mironenko, director of GA RF. The survey of collections in this volume was prepared mainly by A. V. Dobrovskaia (supervisor), T. N. Kotlova, O. N. Kopylova, A. P. Pshenichnyi, V. V. Pankratova, G. P. Tikhacheva, A. L. Raikhtsaum, V. N. Shirokov, A. N. Goliakov, V. P. Naumov, B. F. Dodonov, S. V. Somonova, M. N. Belova, A. V. Kostenetsk, and M. E. Golestenov. Others who assisted in the preparation of this volume were L. G. Aronov, I. M. Demina, G. N. Iofis, I. Iu. Gorbunov, and A. I. Barkovets. T. N. Kotlova prepared the index to collections of state institutions and social organizations of the RSFSR. O. N. Kopylova prepared the name index, and V. I. Shirokov prepared the geographical index. The computerized dataset that provided the basis for this volume was prepared by V. V. Pankratova, O. V. Terenina, Iu. V. Semenova, and L. A. Rogovskaia.