The Tsars' Post Offices, 1852-1917

1. Introduction and scope

Russian mail transmission began with the Mongol Yamshchik (postriders) of the Middle Ages. Up to the time of the early Romanovs (17th century), Official mail (the Tsar's mail) was the only mail, even if loosely interpreted—Elizabeth I had express couriers deliver fruit from Astrakhan to Moscow, rubbing shoulders with Imperial Ukaze (directives) travelling the opposite direction. Merchant mail became important in the 18th century, but the Tsars' mail received special consideration up to 1917, first via an office in the Imperial Chancelry and then by offices in Imperial Palaces and the Royal Yacht.

This exhibit displays and analyzes the "what, when and where" of postal markings associated with Romanov Imperial household mail. Chancelry cancels (Section 2) appeared during the reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855). The first examples ca. 1844 were <u>anonymous cancels</u> (office not indicated), followed by <u>locational cancels</u> naming the Chancelry, the first cancels that distinguish Imperial from other Official mail. Locational postmarks continued in use during the reigns of Alexander II (1855-1881) and Alexander III (1881-1894), and into the reign of Nicholas II (1894-1917). In 1908, Chancelry marks gave way to <u>functional cancels</u> (handling of royal mail). This change coincided with proliferation of postmarks associated with royal residences and even the Imperial yacht (Sections 3). The Soviets swept away the royalty, repurposing Palaces to utilitarian purposes (Section 4).

<u>Political structure, terms and transliteration:</u> Understanding Imperial postal history requires defining governmental structure and terminology (glossary). Russia was divided into civilian ("Gubernia") and military ("Oblast") Provinces. The 101 provinces were organized into 30 "Post-Telegraph (P-T) Districts"; geographic areas like Siberia and Ukraine each contained several P-T Districts. Most Russians fervently believed in the divine right of the Tsars to rule, but they also cherished their right to petition the Tsar, as we will see.

<u>Who could use the Kantselyaria office?:</u> This office was used by the Imperial family & court, the Interior Department & Secret Police, and foreign nobles & diplomats. So close was the connection between the SPb Post Office and the police, that they were at one point headed by the same person. Most known examples are inbound.

Exhibit Plan			
1. Intro	2. Chancelry 2.0 Early postmarks	2.1 Locational postmarks Type 1	Types 2-4
2.2 Functional postmarks Type 5	Type 5	Types 5-6	Type 6
Type 6	Types6-7	3. Royal Offices	3.1 Palaces
Palaces	Palaces 3.2 Getaways	Getaways	Getaways 4. Epilog

Most important items are matted in **Red**	
Very significant items are matted in **Blue**	
Illustrative items are matted in **Black**	

Glossary		
Cyrillic:	Transliteration:	Translation:
МОСКВА	Moskva	Moscow
С. ПТЕРБУРГЪ	S. Peterburg	St. Petersburg (SPb)
ВАРШАВА	Varshava	Warsaw
КАНЦЕЛЯРIА	Kantselyaria	Chancelry
ДВОРЕЦЪ	Dvorets	Palace
ЭКСПЕДИЦIА	Expeditsia	Dispatch office
ГУБЕРНIА	Gubernia	Province
ОБЛАСТЪ	Oblast	Military province
КОНТОРА	Kontora	Main office
ОТДЕЛЕНIЕ	Otdelenie	Sub-Office

Original research