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Prosperity and Precarity in Imperial Russia's Long Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

This article looks at four families living in and around the small town of Gatchina, not far from St Petersburg, Russia, in the long nineteenth century. Their family histories are recreated from archival files based in tsarist Russia's system of social estates (*soslovie*), supplemented by city directories, newspapers, and many other sources. Taken together, the four family histories expand our understanding of tsarist Russia's middle classes in two ways. First, they highlight the role that women played in families as economic actors and as agents of their own destiny. Second, they demonstrate the role that social mobility did and did not play in maintaining families across the long nineteenth century. In addition, they demonstrate some of the ways in which the Russian empire's experience of the nineteenth century differed from a standard Eurocentric narrative, in particular in the way that 'archaic' and 'modern' worlds existed simultaneously.

Hundreds of files sit in the archives of the Tsarskoe Selo *ratusha*, holding thousands of documents that trace out the lives of individual subjects of the Russian empire over the course of the long nineteenth century.¹ The *ratusha* was an institution of the tsarist system of social estates (*sosloviia*), according to which every individual had an official status, registered in a specific place as a member of a specific social group: a peasant from a particular village, a merchant from a particular town, a noble from a particular province.² The documents in the files therefore illuminate moments when that registry mattered in the lives of individuals: when they changed their registration; when new family members were born, died, or married; when they needed an

¹ Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Sanktpeterburga (Central State Historical Archive of St Petersburg), St Petersburg (TsGIASPb), f. 696.

² Alison K. Smith, *For the common good and their own well-being: social estates in imperial Russia* (New York, NY, 2014); N. A. Ivanova and V. P. Zheltova, *Soslovnoe obshchestvo Rossiiskoi imperii (Estate society of the Russian empire)* (Moscow, 2010).

internal passport or registry document; when they wished to go to schools that had controls based on *soslovie*; when they were in need of aid from community resources. Most of the files begin at the moment an individual or a family registered in a new status, and then expand to include these various life events for family members over potentially several generations. They can therefore serve as an incomplete but tantalizing outline of the lives of imperial subjects beyond the nobility and intelligentsia: peasants, merchants, traders, industrialists, clerks, teachers, and many others.

The Tsarskoe Selo *ratusha* handled cases from the town of Tsarskoe Selo and also from several nearby smaller towns; the four family stories recreated here all had ties to one of them: Gatchina. Originally a small village, Gatchina was transformed legally into a town at the start of the reign of Emperor Paul (r. 1796–1801). It was a bustling place in the last years of the eighteenth century, given that the new emperor's favourite palace was there and so the court often visited. After Paul's assassination in 1801, however, the court left, and Gatchina seemed to fit the stereotype of the faraway provinces: dusty and empty and not very interesting (even if provincial life could be vibrant).³ A. V. Eval'd, who grew up there in the 1840s, later described it as 'something in the way of that town in which our friend Ivan Aleksandrovich Khlestakov so successfully played the role of the inspector general', a reference to Gogol's play that came to represent this stereotype.⁴ In the middle of the century the railway arrived, and then Emperor Alexander III (r. 1881–94) moved his family to the palace after his father's assassination and his accession to the throne. By the start of the twentieth century, Gatchina was a busy place again, with a growing population and links to St Petersburg and to the surrounding area. It was not precisely typical – it could not be, with an imperial palace on its edge – but its atypicality probably meant above all that it was better documented than other provincial towns of similar size. Lives lived in Gatchina were, with some particular exceptions tied to the palace, not that different from lives lived in other small towns around the empire.

The archival files of the *ratusha* only give glimpses of a few moments in individual lives, and often (though not always) quite mundane ones at that. Other sources, including archival files from other town institutions, city directories (particularly *Ves' Peterburg (All Petersburg)*), which included regional town addresses for much of its run), newspapers, and memoirs, all enhanced by the ability to do full-text searches, make it possible to flesh out the larger histories of at least some of the families whose papers covering several generations lie in the *ratusha* archives. These family stories can still be frustratingly incomplete, with disappearances and gaps that may hold meaning (a death, a departure) or may simply reflect poor recordkeeping (certainly some gaps could be filled with additional access to archives, but for the

³ Susan Smith-Peter, *Imagining Russian regions: subnational identity and civil society in nineteenth-century Russia* (Leiden, 2018); Anne Lounsbury, *Life is elsewhere: symbolic geography in the Russian provinces, 1800–1917* (Ithaca, NY, 2019).

⁴ 'Vospominaniia A. V. Eval'da' ('The memoirs of A. V. Eval'd'), *Istoricheskii vestnik (Historical Herald)* (1895), p. 295.

foreseeable future that will not be possible). Working to piece together the family histories from these scattered documents requires time and imagination and a willingness to be guided by the sources rather than impose a narrative on them – one reason these archival files have rarely been used by scholars.

Looking at these four family histories together in all their variety illuminates a particularly contested part of our understanding of tsarist Russia. The families here are all part of imperial Russia's elusive middle class or middling sorts. Worry over Russia's 'missing' middle class dates back to the nineteenth century itself, and historians since then have sought to find it in specific social or economic groups or as a political factor or as a cultural milieu.⁵ These family histories not only display the many variations on 'middling' existence but also emphasize two particular elements of that existence. First, they show clearly the significant role that women played in middling families. Women held economic power, women submitted petitions, women changed their status through both marriage and education. Their efforts were part of the way that these families maintained themselves within the middle classes. Second, these family histories in particular show the role that social mobility played in the construction of the tsarist middle classes, in keeping with several recent efforts to reconstruct family histories that emphasize social and/or geographic mobility.⁶ The four families all involve movement between legal statuses – from serf to townsperson or merchant, between town statuses, or from economically based status to professional status – emphasizing the ways in which studying the middle classes requires attention to the fluidity of tsarist Russia's social structure. At the same time, however, the archival information demonstrates the limits of that mobility, particularly when it comes to economic definitions of the middle class. The only people who ended the tsarist era as wealthy merchants show up in these histories that way too. Everyone else either lived lives that flirted with economic precarity or gained prosperity and stability through other means.

I

In March 1829, the brothers Ivan and Fedor Dorofeev Lifant'ev petitioned for a change in their legal status. They were, they reported, currently Gatchina townsmen, and they wished to be given the status of merchants. That change would free them from paying the soul tax levied on every male soul below a certain social status, although it would also require them to keep up their

⁵ Alison K. Smith, 'Honored citizens and the creation of a middle class in imperial Russia', *Slavic Review*, 76 (2017), pp. 327–49; Alison K. Smith, 'The "missing" or "forgotten" middle of tsarist Russia', in Christof DeJung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *The global bourgeoisie: the rise of the middle class in the age of empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), pp. 295–312.

⁶ Anna Joukovskaia and Evgenii Akelev, 'Iz kazakov vo dvoriane: Shagarovy, mikroistoriia sotsial'noi mobil'nosti v Rossii, XVII–XVIII v.' ('From Cossacks to nobles: the Shagarov family, a micro-history of social mobility in Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'), *Cahiers du monde russe*, 57 (2016), pp. 457–504; Alexander M. Martin, *From the Holy Roman Empire to the land of the tsars: one family's odyssey, 1768–1870* (Oxford, 2022); and Alexa von Winning, *Intimate empire: the Mansurov family in Russia and the Orthodox east, 1855–1936* (Oxford, 2022).

merchant guild fees and prove their economic standing every year. Because there were no complicating factors like outstanding military duties that might make the commune loath to let them shift their status, the Gatchina town commune agreed to the change and provided them with a document signed quite neatly by the commune's members. As a result, they were elevated into the status of merchants with what seems from the documents to have been very little fuss.⁷

Even just the names reported by the two brothers shows something about how they fitted into tsarist society. Although the standard patronymic (son of/ daughter of) ending for men is now *-ovich/-evich* and for women *-ovna/-evna*, before the beginning of the twentieth century only nobles and some merchants used it. Instead, most people, like these two brothers, used a simpler ending with the same meaning: *-ov/-ev* or *-ova/-eva*. As an earlier traveller to Russia explained, 'the Termination of WITZ in proper Names, is a Mark of Nobility. For Instance, one *Alexander*, a Man of common Extraction, whose Father's Name was *John*, calls himself *Alexander Ivanow*, (*Alexander, John's Son*); but if he is of noble Birth, or ennobled, he will style himself *Alexander Ivanowitz*'.⁸ Families like the Lifant'evs, who largely maintained the simpler patronymic ending, were marking themselves as commoners, even if upwardly mobile ones. Others, like members of the Kosichkin family below, moved to using the more elevated form even retroactively, implying a long family history of prosperity.

The two brothers had roots in the area that reached back to Gatchina's first years as a town. Their father, Dorofei Lifant'ev, had been living in the Gatchina region as early as 1794. In that year, he presented a petition to Baron von Bork, the overseer of the Gatchina estate. Lifant'ev described himself as a merchant from the nearby town of Sofiia who was trading on the estate and wanted permission to open a drinking house and to build a stable with a blacksmith's outfit to serve passing carriages.⁹ It is unclear from this document whether he was given permission, but later files suggest he was. The journals of the Gatchina town administration mention a merchant named Lifant'ev twice, in connection first with a shop in 1798, and then with a tavern in 1799.¹⁰ In that second case, he was fined 50 roubles for 'observed indecency' in his tavern, for not having clean rooms and food for travellers, and for allowing peasants into the tavern (another tavern keeper in the town, the merchant Seleznev, was fined 100 roubles at the same time).¹¹ This was a lot of money, more than the yearly salary

⁷ 'O zapiske v chislo kuptsov gatchinskikh meshchan Ivana i Fedora Lifant'evykh' ('On the registration of the Gatchina townsmen Ivan and Fedor Lifant'ev into the number of merchants'), TsGIASPb, f. 696, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 1–4.

⁸ F. C. Weber, *The present state of Russia*, vol. 1 (London, 1723), unpaginated foreword.

⁹ 'Prosheniia raznykh lits na imia glavnoupravliaiushchego g. Gatchina barona fon Borka' ('Petitions of various individuals to the main administrator of Gatchina, Baron von Bork'), Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive), St Petersburg (RGIA), f. 491, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 15–15ob.

¹⁰ 'Zhurnal zasedanii GGP' ('Journal of the Gatchina town administration's sessions'), RGIA, f. 491, op. 5, d. 289, l. 9ob.

¹¹ 'Zhurnal zasedanii GGP', RGIA, f. 491, op. 5, d. 307, l. 104.

of some of those who worked at the palace, but earlier in the year such a sum might have been well within his reach – at least, someone with the family name Lifant'ev purchased five silver table spoons and five silver table forks from an estate sale in 1799, paying a total of 82 roubles.¹²

Soon Dorofei Lifant'ev sought to establish himself more firmly in Gatchina, completing his registry as a Gatchina merchant in 1799 despite the fact that he was perhaps not the most law-abiding of tavern proprietors. Two sons were registered then too, although their names were not listed in the report of registry filed in the Gatchina town administration's papers. They may have been Ivan and Fedor; a later document suggests that Ivan, at least, was born around 1794.¹³ There may have been another brother named Vasilii in the family – in a later petition, Ivan mentions that 'my brothers all are dead', implying that there had been more than one; and petitions from a woman named Mar'ia Vasil'eva (that is, daughter of Vasilii) Lifant'eva, who gave birth to a child out of wedlock in 1862, are interleaved with other papers in the file about the family.¹⁴ He may have already died by the time Ivan and Fedor asked to restore their merchant status, or perhaps there had been a falling out that led him to separate from his brothers.

In any event, the brothers spent the early years of the nineteenth century as the sons of a prosperous merchant. That prosperity did not last, however, as at some point before 1829, and perhaps much earlier than that, they had fallen into the ranks of the lower-ranking townspeople. That was not an unusual path, for if someone failed to keep up their guild dues they automatically lost their merchant status. It might have happened to their father after a business failure. Being a tavern keeper in a town where the tsarevich and later emperor regularly brought his court was clearly profitable. After Emperor Paul was assassinated in 1801 and his son stayed away from the palace, however, business may well have dried up. Or perhaps Dorofei's death in 1820 had caused problems with the business, leading the two brothers to fail to keep up their merchant dues.¹⁵ They were still young men then, perhaps not as savvy as their father, or perhaps simply dealing with the practicalities of taking over a business. And there is the mysterious Vasilii. His death or departure could easily have led to not only a familial but an economic disruption. Whatever reason had caused their fall, by the end of the 1820s the brothers had become more prosperous and were now in a position to return to their higher merchant status.

¹² 'Delo o umershem syrnom mastere Ten'gle' ('The matter of the dead cheese master Ten'gle'), RGIA, f. 491, op. 1, d. 365, l. 57; 'Uchrezhdenie goroda Gatchino: spiski chinovnikov' ('Founding the town of Gatchina: lists of bureaucrats'), RGIA, f. 491, op. 1, d. 80, ll. 3–30b (1797).

¹³ 'Vedomost' o prichislennykh, v gatchinskie kuptsy, meshchane, i tsekhovye liudiakh' ('Information on people ascribed to the Gatchina merchants, townsmen, and artisans'), RGIA, f. 491, op. 1, d. 182, l. 30b; 'O zapiske Lifant'evykh', l. 15.

¹⁴ 'O zapiske Lifant'evykh', ll. 14–14ob, 18, 20–20a.

¹⁵ 'Staroe kladbishche: spisok zakhoroneni' ('The old cemetery: list of those buried'), *Gatchina skvoz' stoletii* (*Gatchina through the centuries*), <http://history-gatchina.ru/town/nekropol/nekropol17.htm> (accessed 4 Apr. 2022).

After the two brothers returned to merchant status, Fedor almost immediately asked to be released from town status to join a monastery, and thereafter disappears from the longer archival record. The results of the request are unclear because the page has been cut off, but the fact that there are no more records about him in the *ratusha* file suggests he was allowed to leave. This was an unusual path for a young man, a bit earlier than the monastic revival of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ To push for that kind of change Fedor must have had a strong urge to the religious life – perhaps he had never felt at home engaging in trade, and perhaps that had something to do with their earlier business problems.

In contrast, Ivan settled down into family life. He was already married to a woman named Fekla Martinova, almost ten years younger than himself. They eventually had three daughters: Anna (born around 1826), Tat'iana (born in 1833 but died in infancy), and Avdot'ia (born around 1838).¹⁷ In March 1862, Ivan, who was by this time back at *meshchanin* rank, petitioned the *ratusha* to allow Anna and Avdot'ia to transfer their registry to St Petersburg because they lived and worked in the capital. His petition was refused, however, almost certainly because the Gatchina commune did not want to give up its connection to the women. Although no official reason was given for the refusal, the commune likely wanted to make sure that Ivan and Fekla were supported in their old age by their daughters. As long as their registration remained in Gatchina, the two women would have to appeal to the commune regularly for permits to live elsewhere. That gave the commune some disciplining authority over their actions toward their parents.

As it turned out, however, if the commune had hoped that Anna and Avdot'ia would support their parents, it was disappointed. In February 1868 Ivan Lifant'ev petitioned the town *ratusha* for aid. 'Because of the agedness of my years and my deafness,' he asked, 'place me in the poorhouse or give me monetary aid for sustenance from communal funds.' He went on to say that neither he nor his wife was able to work, and asked for the return of his yearly tax payments, on the grounds that other town communes freed everyone over the age of sixty from paying them. At the end, he gave a brief precis of his family: 'helpers of the male sex I do not have, only two daughters, unmarried, who exhaust themselves with work but barely are able to support themselves'. And furthermore, he noted, 'all the above years I spent in one commune': he had been a Gatchinite all his life, had paid his dues or taxes responsibly, and now in his declining years requested the town's aid.¹⁸

The Gatchina commune responded to the request by making an inquiry into whether Ivan deserved aid. First, it confirmed the ages of all family members based on records from the last tax census revision. According to those records, Ivan Lifant'ev was at the time of his request seventy-four years old and his wife

¹⁶ Scott M. Kenworthy, *The heart of Russia: Trinity-Sergius, monasticism, and society after 1825* (Washington, DC, 2010).

¹⁷ 'Staroe kladbishche'.

¹⁸ 'O zapiske Lifant'evykh', ll. 14–14ob.

sixty-five. Their daughters were forty-two and thirty. Next, it investigated the family's economic situation, and found that Ivan 'has no property and is in a poor condition'. Given these factors, the commune agreed that the family was worthy of aid. It decided to give him a grant of 3 silver roubles every month, payable on the first of each month, starting immediately.¹⁹ Two years later, Ivan petitioned yet again, this time thanking the commune for its monetary aid but asking that he instead be given a place in the poorhouse, for life on his own was becoming increasingly hard. The commune refused, giving no reason (although continuing its monetary payments).²⁰ Perhaps they felt that if he lived on his own it must have been his fault, for he had a wife and daughters.

He did live alone, for Fekla Martinova clearly lived separately from her husband. In October 1871 she sent a petition on her own behalf in which she described herself as a Gatchina *meshchanka* living in St Petersburg in Kolomna district, probably because one or both of her daughters lived there:

I, Lifant'eva, am aged and sick, I am seventy-one years old, I cannot do any kind of work. Until this time my two unmarried daughters have supported me from their labour, but now work is very scarce because of the large number of worker women, and sometimes there is no work at all, now it is hard for them even to support themselves and they suffer from great want, and they have no means other than labour.

As a result, she was asking for monetary aid. Again, the commune conducted an inquiry, and although they reported her age as different (they claimed seventy-four), they agreed to give her, too, a sum of 3 roubles a month in aid.²¹ That she had success in requesting aid but Ivan did not (or at least did not entirely) suggests that blame for their marital separation lay at Ivan's feet. There was no divorce in tsarist Russia, but living separately was one way that women (and men) got out of bad marriages.²²

Ivan eventually died on 19 September 1878, and was buried in the Gatchina new graveyard on 23 September. Fekla followed a few years later, dying on 26 January 1881, buried on 29 January.²³ The same priest signed both of their death notices, which were placed on the back of their last residence tickets. Their daughters must have submitted their papers back to the *ratusha*, but beyond that they leave no trace. Their mother's petition noted that they had once supported themselves easily but by the early 1870s their lives had been disrupted by an influx of women workers to the city. Although she does not explain why, the problem was almost certainly the end of serfdom in 1861, which marked the start of more significant movement of former

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 16–16ob, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 19, 19ob.

²² Barbara Alpern Engel, *Breaking the ties that bound: the politics of marital strife in late imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 2011).

²³ 'O zapiske Lifant'evykh', ll. 21, 22; 'Novoe kladbishche: spisok zakhronenii (D–L)' ('The new cemetery: list of those buried (D–L)'), <http://history-gatchina.ru/town/nekropol/nekropol19.htm> (accessed 4 Apr. 2022).

peasants – including large numbers of women – to towns in search of work.²⁴ Whatever the daughters' lives in St Petersburg, they were modest ones, for they never appear in the city's address books (although other women do, including women of what would appear to be modest means – like Marfa Ivanova Lifant'eva, apparently no relation but listed in the 1868 address book as a laundress).²⁵ However, they never requested aid from the Gatchina commune, so perhaps, despite their mother's worry, they managed to support themselves. Or perhaps they managed to find aid in the capital, where they had spent their working lives, separate from the place where they had been born. Almost certainly, however, they were coming to the end of the nineteenth century in a much less prosperous place than their grandfather had entered it.

II

While the Lifant'evs came to Gatchina already as merchants, the Kosichkin family story began in serfdom. In May 1864, a temporarily obligated peasant (that is, a recently emancipated serf) from Iaroslavl' province named Anisim (sometimes Onisim) Efimov Kosichkin petitioned to register as a Gatchina second guild merchant along with his large family. They already lived in Gatchina, in a building in Ingenburgskii district owned by a man named Varygin, where several families rented apartments. The petition was accepted, and the family was formally registered by the end of the year: Anisim (aged fifty); his wife, Ekaterina Semënova (forty-six); three sons: Konstantin (twenty-two), Vasilii (five), and Pavel (two); and a daughter, Aleksandra (nineteen).²⁶ There were possibly errors in this initial documentation. In 1868 Anisim requested documents that would allow Aleksandra to marry a St Petersburg merchant named Sergei Mikhailovich Ushin. In his request, he stated that Aleksandra was eighteen, which would have meant she was only fourteen at the time of her registry, not nineteen. The town authorities were confused by this, and the request has a note on the back that stated that their information suggested that she was twenty-three, not nineteen.²⁷ In addition, the family had had another son, Aleksandr, born in 1857, who died as an infant.²⁸

The Kosichkins had been established in Gatchina for several decades by this time, but presumably had not been able to formalize their residency there because they, like many other serfs, were unable to persuade their owner to free them.²⁹ According to Konstantin's birth certificate, he was born in

²⁴ Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the fields and the city: women, work and family in Russia, 1861–1914* (Cambridge, 1996).

²⁵ *Vseobshchaia adresnaia kniga S.-Peterburga (General address book of St Petersburg)* (St Petersburg, 1867–8), p. 284.

²⁶ 'O zapiske v chislo gatchinskikh 2 gil'dii kuptsov krest'ianina Anisima Efimovicha Kosichkina' ('On the registration of the peasant Anisim Efimovich Kosichkin into the numbers of the Gatchina second guild merchants'), TsGIASPb, f. 696, op. 1, d. 178, ll. 1, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 18.

²⁹ Alison K. Smith, 'Freed serfs without free people: manumission in imperial Russia', *American Historical Review*, 118 (2013), pp. 1029–51.

Gatchina in 1842, and had a Gatchina merchant wife as a godmother. At that point, Anisim was described as a peasant belonging to Count Sheremetev, which meant that he was owned by the wealthiest serf owner in all the empire.³⁰ Many Sheremetev serfs, some quite wealthy, lived away from their villages, engaging in trade and sending back rents and taxes. By the 1840s Sheremetev was willing to hear requests for manumission but expected pay-outs in return amounting to hundreds if not thousands of roubles, so relatively few were able to gain their freedom.³¹ That did not stop serfs like the Kosichkins from settling firmly in their new homes. By the time the two younger sons were born, the family had ties that reached back to their place of origin and to new relationships. Vasilii and Pavel shared a godfather: 'the Greek subject Vasilii Emmanuilov Karatsel'. Vasilii's godmother was, apparently, another sister who had either died or married out of the family by the time they entered the merchant commune: 'from Iaroslavl' province, Uglich district, Pogoreloka village, the peasant of Count Sheremetev Onisim Efimov Kosichkin's daughter Olga Kosichkina'. Pavel's godmother was a peasant's wife from the Krasnoe Selo estate near Gatchina named Aleksandra Petrova.³² Godparenthood also tied Anisim to the town in other ways: in 1866 he was named as godfather to Il'ia Bogdanov, the newborn son of Nikolai Bogdanov, who also lived in Varygin's apartment house, and transferred his registry to Gatchina that same year.³³

Anisim Kosichkin seems to have been fairly prosperous in the years around his formal registry. In 1854 he donated 3 roubles to a fund to support soldiers' families during the Crimean War (or more specifically, to fund soldiers then stationed in and around St Petersburg, for 'due to current events, a large number of soldiers for the defence of faith, the throne and the fatherland against the audacious efforts of western enemies who have brought war to Russia' had been quartered there).³⁴ This was nowhere near the largest donations of hundreds of roubles by some of the richest serf owners in Russia, but it was significantly more than the 10 or 25 kopeks that many donors contributed.³⁵ A decade later, at the time he formally registered in Gatchina, Anisim was still doing well. Even before formally registering, he held temporary trading rights as a second guild merchant, and paid 20 roubles for the right to sell snacks (*zakuski*) in Varygin's house.³⁶ A couple

³⁰ 'O zapiske Kosichkina', l. 15.

³¹ Smith, 'Freed serfs', pp. 1041–2; Tracy Dennison, *The institutional framework of Russian serfdom* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 171–6.

³² 'O zapiske Kosichkina', ll. 16–17.

³³ 'O zapiske v Gatchinskoe meshchanstvo Mosal'skogo meshchanina Nikolaia Artem'eva Bogdanova' ('On the registration of the Mosal' townsman Nikolai Artem'ev Bogdanov into the Gatchina town society'), TsGIASpb, f. 696, op. 1, d. 209, l. 6.

³⁴ 'Deistviia S.-Peterburgskogo zhenskogo komiteta v 1854 godu' ('The actions of the St Petersburg women's committee in 1854'), *Sbornik izvestii, otnosiashchikhsia do nastoiashchei voiny (Digest of news relating to the current war)*, 14 (1855), section III, pp. 1, 19.

³⁵ 'Vedomost' o pozhertvovaniakh' ('News of donations'), *Morskoi sbornik (Naval Digest)*, 23 (1856), Prilozhenie (appendix), p. 134.

³⁶ 'O zapiske v Gatchinskoe 3x g. kupechestvo Sanktpeterburgskogo meshchanina Ivana Stepanova Zorina' ('On the registration of the St Petersburg townsman Ivan Stepanov Zorin into the Gatchina third guild merchantry'), TsGIASpb, f. 696, op. 1, d. 79, ll. 59–60.

of years later, he took part in the efforts to found a philanthropic society in Gatchina, serving as one of the initial members of its council.³⁷ He also purchased a house on Baggovutovskaia Street and became a landlord himself.³⁸

The fact that Aleksandra Anisimova married a St Petersburg merchant again suggests that the family was prospering. Sergei Mikhailovich gained merchant status on his own account the same year they married, although his family had been merchants in the capital since 1847.³⁹ He came to run a cloth store in the great central Merchant Arcade – if it had been his father's, perhaps Aleksandra came to the capital to shop and they met in the store. Sergei Mikhailovich was by later evidence a prosperous, presumably well-respected figure by the end of the century. He maintained his merchant status without apparent trouble and gained hereditary honoured citizen status before 1895. He was named a church elder at the church of St Nikolai the Miracle-Worker on Gorokhovaia Street as of 1887 and was elected as a delegate to the St Petersburg Duma in 1877, holding the position into the 1890s.⁴⁰

Aleksandra, however, only saw some of this success. She and Sergei had at least three children: daughters Mariia (born around 1870) and Ol'ga (born around 1872), and a son, Sergei (born around 1874).⁴¹ She would therefore have spent her twenties in a prosperous merchant household raising children, seeing her husband find success in business and in local politics. Sergei was eventually awarded a gold medal for his service on a committee to help the poor of St Petersburg, so perhaps she took part in charitable activities alongside him.⁴² Their life had tragedies too: Ol'ga died in childhood, probably in 1877 (she is listed in an 1877 directory, but not in 1878).⁴³ Aleksandra herself died in the very early 1880s (no longer appearing in an 1882 directory).⁴⁴ Sergei eventually remarried, and then took Sergei Sergeevich into his business. The two of them were still running it in 1917, and Sergei Sergeevich, at least, survived the revolution into

³⁷ *Kratkii istoricheskii obzor sushchestvovaniia i deiatel'nosti Gatchinskogo blagotvoritel'nogo obshchestva 1867–1893 g.* (Short historical overview of the existence and activities of the Gatchina charitable society, 1867–1893) (St Petersburg, 1893), p. 9.

³⁸ 'S perepiskoi po raznym voprosam i o raznykh raspriazheniakh' ('Correspondence on various questions and of various orders'), RGIA, f. 491, op. 3, d. 256, ll. 322–4.

³⁹ *Spravochnaia kniga o kuptsakh gor. S.-Peterburga. 1895* (Reference book to the merchants of the town of St Petersburg, 1895) (St Petersburg, 1895), p. 599.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; *Adresnaia kniga goroda S.-Peterburga na 1892 g* (Address book of the town of St Petersburg for 1892) (St Petersburg, 1892), cols. 329, 375, 584.

⁴¹ *Spravochnaia kniga o litsakh, poluchivshikh v techenii 1876 g. i ianvaria mesiat 1877 goda kupecheskie svidetel'stva i bilety po 1 i 2 gil'diiam na pravo trgovli i promysla v 1877 godu* (Reference book to individuals receiving merchant evidence and tickets in the course of 1876 and January 1877 for trade and manufacture in the first and second guilds in 1877) (St Petersburg, 1877), p. 552.

⁴² *Senatskie vedomosti* (Senate Journal), 14 May 1885, p. 144.

⁴³ *Spravochnaia kniga 1878*, p. 649.

⁴⁴ *Spravochnaia kniga o litsakh S.-Peterburgskogo kupechestva i dr. zvanii, poluchivshikh v techenie vremeni s 1-go Noiabria 1881 po 1-e Fevralia 1882 g. svidetel'stva i bilety po 1 i 2 gil'diiam na parvo trgovli i promyslov v S.-Peterburge v 1882 godu* (Reference book of individuals of the St Petersburg merchantry and other statuses, receiving in the course of the time from 1 November 1881 to 1 February 1882 evidence and tickets to the first and second guilds for the right of trade and manufacture in St Petersburg in 1882) (St Petersburg, 1882), pp. 563–4.

the early 1920s.⁴⁵ That meant that he, the son of a woman born into serfdom (and also of a merchant of long standing), was a prosperous merchant at the time the empire ended – and then faced an uncertain world.

Aleksandra's brothers also lived in St Petersburg for part of their lives. In April 1871 Konstantin transferred his registry to the St Petersburg merchant commune, a definite step up that suggests he had ambitions to become something more than a provincial merchant. He lived on Boroia Street, not far from the Moscow train station, and traded in cosmetics on Nevsky Prospekt itself, the main street of the capital.⁴⁶ But he apparently suffered a setback shortly thereafter, and was reduced to a *meshchanin* along with his wife, Mar'ia Ivanova, by 1873. Three years after that, Anisim asked that Konstantin be returned to the Gatchina commune as part of his household.⁴⁷ After Anisim died in 1880, his widow, Ekaterina, and her two younger sons submitted a petition that suggests a reason for Konstantin's business problems. They requested that the younger son Vasilii take control of the family property on the grounds that Pavel was ill and Konstantin 'together with his wife are constantly in an inebriate state' and therefore not capable of handling business affairs.⁴⁸ In reality, although the petition asked that Vasilii take control, Ekaterina seems to have been the actual person in charge. When Konstantin began to rack up medical bills, Ekaterina was the one who turned to the commune for money to help pay them.⁴⁹ She was listed as the resident owner of the house in Gatchina in 1897 (possibly just before she died; although the archival file is silent about her death, she no longer appears in the city directory in 1898).⁵⁰

Ekaterina probably took charge because, by the 1890s, Vasilii, too, was living and working in St Petersburg, though not as a merchant. Instead, he held the rank of candidate of commerce, which meant that he had graduated from the St Petersburg Commercial School, and worked for the St Petersburg Town Council (*uprava*) in the accounting department as an assistant to the comptroller. (He held that job from at least 1894 until 1911.)⁵¹ In the 1890s he lived at 32 Basseinaia Street, only a block off Nevsky Prospekt. He married there too. The *ratusha* records list his wife as a Prussian woman named Emma Emilia Prints; as of 1898, an Emma Gustavovna Kosichkina is listed as living at the same address as Vasilii.⁵² It seems likely that she was the daughter of Gustav Gustavovich Printts, who was an attorney at the St Petersburg commercial court holding the rank of actual state councillor, and who lived at 34 Basseinaia

⁴⁵ *Ves' Peterburg (All Petersburg) [henceforth VP]* 1917, vol. II, p. 1527, vol. IV, p. 703; *Ves' Leningrad. Adresnaia i spravocnaia kniga (All Leningrad: address and reference book)* (Leningrad, 1926), p. 359.

⁴⁶ *Spravocnaia kniga o litsakh, poluchivskikh na 1872 god kupecheskie svidetel'stva po 1 i 2 gil'diiam (Reference book of individuals, receiving merchant evidence in the first and second guilds for 1872)* (St Petersburg, 1872), pp. 252–3.

⁴⁷ 'O zapiske Kosichkina', ll. 7, 11–14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 25–6.

⁵⁰ VP 1897, vol. III, p. 205; VP 1898, vol. III, p. 271.

⁵¹ VP 1894, [vol. I], p. 630–1; VP 1911, vol. I, p. 300.

⁵² 'O zapiske Kosichkina', ll. 45–46ob; VP 1898, vol. III, p. 271.

Street – Vasiliï seems to have married the girl next door.⁵³ It also means that Vasiliï, born into serfdom, ended the century the husband of someone with noble rank through her father's service.

Vasiliï and Emma stayed on Basseinaia until 1903, when they moved to the northern fringes of St Petersburg, to the Chernaia Rechka embankment, living in two different apartments in the area.⁵⁴ Vasiliï continued to work in the same job at the St Petersburg Town Council. But the early years of the twentieth century brought challenges. First, Emma died in 1910.⁵⁵ Then, around 1912, Vasiliï seems to have lost his job when the council underwent an internal administrative reorganization. (At least, he disappears from the list of its employees.)⁵⁶ Over the next several years he remained in St Petersburg, but never listed another place of employment or profession – surely finding a new job was particularly challenging during the years of the First World War, when refugees crowded the city. He moved several times, too, perhaps finding more and more modest lodgings. He was still listed in the St Petersburg city directory in 1917, living on Nevsky Prospekt near the Nikolaevskii, now Moscow, train station.⁵⁷

Vasiliï might have known about his last recorded residence because his niece had lived there a decade before. When Konstantin died in 1886, at only forty-four years old, he left behind two children.⁵⁸ One, a son named Vasiliï, was born in 1872 during Konstantin's time as a St Petersburg merchant. His grandmother requested information that would allow him to study at the St Petersburg Military Medical School, but there is not much more information about him.⁵⁹ Konstantin's daughter, Aleksandra, born around 1868, also studied, and earned the profession of governess.⁶⁰ That does not seem to be what she did for a living, however. Instead, in the 1890s she lived in St Petersburg in several different apartments around the Nikolaevskii station.⁶¹ According to the city directory, over much of this time she worked for the St Petersburg Town Council like her uncle, although she is not listed among the employees at the council office, so precisely what she did is unclear.

Whatever her employment up to that point, in July 1907 she petitioned the Gatchina town authorities for aid, writing out a petition in her own neat, beautiful hand:

⁵³ VP 1898, vol. III, p. 431.

⁵⁴ VP 1903, vol. III, p. 332; VP 1905, vol. III, p. 322.

⁵⁵ 'O zapiske Kosichkina', l. 76ob.

⁵⁶ VP 1912: vol. I, p. 309–12.

⁵⁷ VP 1917, vol. III, p. 344.

⁵⁸ 'O zapiske Kosichkina', l. 40.

⁵⁹ Ibid., l. 35.

⁶⁰ Ibid., ll. 58–9.

⁶¹ VP 1899, vol. III, p. 273; VP 1900, vol. III, p. 295; VP 1901, vol. III, p. 285; VP 1902, vol. III, p. 319; VP 1903, vol. III, p. 332; VP 1904, vol. III, p. 327; VP 1905, vol. III, p. 322; VP 1906, vol. III, p. 334; VP 1907, vol. III, p. 355; VP 1908, vol. III, p. 379; VP 1909, vol. III, p. 396; VP 1910, vol. III, p. 429; VP 1911, vol. III, p. 448.

As of February of this year, I find myself without an income, and not having means to support myself I suffer from most extreme need, which is why I have been forced earnestly and respectfully to request you grant me either a one-time allowance or monthly allowances until I find work. My grandfather Anisim Efimovich Kosichkin and my father Konstantin Anisimovich Kosichkin were merchants for more than forty years and paid their guild duties to the *ratusha*. I have been promised a place at one of the Petersburg chancelleries this winter but at the given time I do not even have the ability to pay for my room because everything that I have earned by my labours has already been spent and I am threatened by death from starvation. When I had an income of course it never even came into my head to ask the *ratusha* for a pension, even though I had a right to it in light of the many years that my grandfather and father paid guild duties.⁶²

Aleksandra's petition worked – to a point. The *ratusha* awarded her an allowance of 5 roubles. But at the same time, looking into her case showed that she was living in St Petersburg on a permanent residency permit due to her status as a teacher; as a result, the *ratusha* decided to exclude her from the official ranks of the Gatchina commune. This might seem to have been the end of her relationship with the commune, but it was not. Instead, she petitioned again in the summer of 1908, noting that she was ill and that her doctor suggested she 'go to the south of Russia to take *kumys*' – fermented mare's milk, a fashionable cure at the time.⁶³ The Gatchina authorities were sympathetic, and granted her a monthly allowance of 3 roubles a month. (She then asked that it be sent in two-month increments for convenience, which they agreed to do.)⁶⁴ She last appears in the St Petersburg city directory in 1911, suggesting that she either moved elsewhere permanently or perhaps, given her health problems, died – if so, she would have died young, at around forty-four, just like her father. While her cousin Sergei Ushin (did they even know each other? Their worlds seem far apart) prospered, and her uncle Vasilii found at least a modest life in the capital, Aleksandra's life was more economically precarious. Nevertheless, she ended the era as an educated, professional woman capable of seeking a fashionable cure, making her story one of a contested modernity too.

III

There is almost no precarity in the story of the Chikin family in the tsarist era – it is at first glance the most straightforwardly successful of all the family stories here, as it begins and ends with prosperous merchant industrialists – but it swerves in surprising ways involving family law and archaic estate

⁶² 'O zapiske Kosichkina', ll. 56–56ob.

⁶³ Maya Peterson, 'Steppes to health: how the climate-kumys cure shaped a new steppe imaginary', *Slavic Review*, 81 (2022), pp. 8–31.

⁶⁴ 'O zapiske Kosichkina', ll. 56–61ob.

structures. In fact, it is only due to those archaic estate structures that this is a story of Gatchina at all, for there is no evidence that any of the Chikins ever lived in Gatchina itself. Ivan Filippovich Chikin was already a merchant registered in Vilmanstrand (now Lappeenranta, Finland) when he transferred his registry to Gatchina in February 1868. In a second petition later that year, he asked that his wife, Nastas'ia Ivanova (Anastasiia Ivanovna in other documents), and daughter, Elizaveta, age nine, be added to his household.⁶⁵ For Chikin, this registry was almost certainly a matter of convenience rather than of close ties to Gatchina itself. Instead, he was linked to two different places: St Petersburg, where he at one point held temporary merchant status; and the village of Daimishche, about thirty kilometres south of Gatchina.⁶⁶

In the early nineteenth century Daimishche was part of the estate of the noblewoman Mariia Fedotovna Donaurova, who purchased it, along with several other villages in the area, in 1835. She established several new commercial enterprises on her lands, including a flour mill, a sawmill, and a metalworks located on the Oredezh river upstream from Daimishche itself.⁶⁷ The metalworks dated to 1842, and Chikin may have been the first person to run it. Although it belonged to Donaurova, he was known as its proprietor by 1847.⁶⁸ Her son Peter Mikhailovich inherited the estate in 1852 and sold the metalworks to Chikin in 1859.⁶⁹ Or rather, he may have sold it to Anastasiia Ivanova. In May 1859 Anastasiia Ivanova Chikina, 'wife of a Vilmanstrand and St Petersburg temporary merchant', was listed as the new owner of a metalworks, 'the land under it, to the amount of [170 acres], with all of the machines in the factory and all the living residential and non-residential properties and the dam on the river Oredezh', purchased with a 16,000-rouble mortgage, to be paid back in six years.⁷⁰ Because tsarist Russia had a regime of separate marital property, husbands and wives could choose who would be a legal property owner or who would take on a debt; considerations of debt may well have been behind the decision for Anastasiia to be the legal owner of the factory at this point.⁷¹

⁶⁵ 'O zapisi v chislo gatchinskikh kuptsov Vil'manstradskogo kuptsa Ivana Filippovicha Chikina' ('On the registry of the Vil'manstrand merchant Ivan Filippovich Chikin into the number of Gatchina merchants'), TsGIASPB, f. 696, op. 1, d. 220, ll. 1, 3, 6.

⁶⁶ *Kniga adresov vsego Sanktpeterburgskogo kupechestva i inostrannykh gostei, s oboznacheniem roda ikh torgovli, promyshlennosti, i fabrichnykh i zavodskikh proizvodstv* (Address book of all the St Petersburg merchantry and foreign guests with a note of the sort of their trade, manufacture, and factory production) (St Petersburg, 1858), p. 219.

⁶⁷ Nikolai Kul'baka, *Istoriia dvorianskogo roda Donaurovykh* (History of the noble Donaurov family) (Moscow, 2013), p. 30; *Opisanie Sanktpeterburgskoi gubernii po uezdum i stanam* (Description of St Petersburg province by district and region) (St Petersburg, 1838), p. 25.

⁶⁸ L. K. Ezioranskii, *Fabrichno-zavodskie predpriiatia Rossiiskoi imperii* (Industrial enterprises of the Russian empire) (St Petersburg, 1909), no. 1726; 'Uchenye obshchestva. Imperatorskoe mineralogicheskoe obshchestvo' ('Scholarly societies: the Imperial Mineralogical Society'), *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* (St Petersburg Journal), 24 Jan. 1847, p. 84.

⁶⁹ Kul'baka, *Istoriia dvorianskogo roda Donaurovykh*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ *Senatskie ob'iavleniia o zapreshcheniakh na imeniia* (Senate notices of prohibitions on names), 8 July 1859, p. 2787.

⁷¹ Sergei Antonov, *Bankrupts and usurers of imperial Russia: debt, property, and the law in the age of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), pp. 176–88.

The Chikins seem to have been doing very well at the time they entered the Gatchina merchant society. Their daughter, Elizaveta, was born around the time they became legal owners of the factory. At some point they built a manor house – Chikino – near the factory, as well. In February 1860, an imperial hunting party stopped at the factory for breakfast (and a monument was later erected to commemorate that visit).⁷² In 1866 the factory employed thirty-eight masters and workers (all men) and produced 75,731 roubles' worth of goods.⁷³ At the 1870 All-Russian Manufacturing Exhibition in St Petersburg, Ivan Chikin received a silver medal for the quality of his metal wares.⁷⁴

In 1876, however, Ivan petitioned the *ratusha* to bring a significant change to his family:

Over the course of more than thirty years I have had in my possession a copper smelting factory, near the village of Daimishche, in Tsarskoe Selo district, Rozhdestvenskii township. Considering by right this factory to be my own creation, the result of many years of my hard work and attention, I would like to keep it in my family. Due to not having sons, I have had to find and take in another child to educate. My choice has stopped on Ivan, the young son of Anna Vasil'eva, a peasant woman from the village of Daimishche, who I propose to give an education and upbringing appropriate to him taking on the factory business in the future.⁷⁵

The *ratusha* investigated the case and met to decide whether to allow the adoption. Anna Vasil'eva had agreed in the presence of a police officer that she was willing to 'give Chikin all parental rights and duties' regarding her two-year-old son, so at first they agreed to the plan. Soon, though, complications arose. In February 1877 Chikin was asked to provide a statement that Ivan was not his own illegitimate child. And then, in July of the same year, another wrinkle appeared in the case: because Chikin had a daughter, he was not allowed to adopt – tsarist law stated that only childless couples might adopt children.⁷⁶

By February 1878, a very different story had emerged. Ivan Filippovich submitted another petition, this time asking not to adopt but instead to legitimize his own sons born to Anna Vasil'eva: Ivan and Aleksandr. Aleksandr had presumably been born out of Chikin's continued relationship with Anna. In other

⁷² Nikolai Kutepov, *Imperatorskaia okhota na Rusi. Konets XVIII i XIX vek (The imperial hunt in Rus': end of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century)*, vol. 4 (St Petersburg, 1911), p. 135nn; Sergei Glezerov, *Predmest'ia Sankt-Peterburga. Byt i nravy nachala XX veka (The outskirts of St Petersburg: everyday life and habits at the start of the twentieth century)* (2nd edn, Moscow, 2009), p. 498.

⁷³ *Fabriki i zavody v S.-Peterburge i S.-Petersburgskoi gubernii v 1866 godu (Factories in St Petersburg and St Petersburg province in 1866)* (St Petersburg, 1868), p. 40.

⁷⁴ *Otchet o vserossiiskoi manufakturnoi vystavke 1870 goda v Sanktpeterburge (Report on the All-Russian manufacturing exhibit of 1870 in St Petersburg)* (St Petersburg, 1871), Prilozhenie (appendix), p. 54.

⁷⁵ 'O zapisi Chikina', l. 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 9–9ob, 14–15, 16; K. Shmatkov, *Uzakonenie i usynovlenie detei (Legitimizing and adopting children)* (St Petersburg, 1894), p. 68.

words, Ivan Filippovich admitted that he was the father of the two boys and asked that their birth be legitimized even though he was not married to their mother. Ivan's birth certificate showed a yet more complicated set of relationships: he had been baptized on 4 February 1874, in St Petersburg at the Nikolo-Bogoiavlenskii Naval Cathedral, near the Mariinskii Theatre; his godparents were a St Petersburg second guild merchant's son named Dimitrii Prokopiev Zmeev and an artist of the Imperial St Petersburg theatres named Khristina Ivanova Rozenshtren.⁷⁷ Perhaps Anna and Ivan met not in the countryside but in St Petersburg around the theatres?

Ivan Filippovich also fell from the merchantry to common town status that same year, implying either an economic setback or distraction. Given that he had had two children with a woman other than his wife, and that his wife may have been the legal owner of the factory he ran, one can only imagine the possible complications that faced the business and his personal life that year. After the legitimization was finalized, Chikin returned to the first merchant guild within the next couple of years, though he did go back and forth between the first and second guilds several times before his death in 1892.⁷⁸ These events may also have caused a permanent rift between Ivan and Anastasiia. In the 1890s (so possibly only after Ivan's death) she was living in Volkovyshki, now Vilkaviškis, Lithuania, though she still needed to receive documents from the *ratusha* as the widow of a merchant registered there.⁷⁹ Perhaps her daughter had moved there for work or for a husband's work and Anastasiia followed. Or perhaps Anastasiia had taken her daughter away with her after falling out with Ivan.

In any event, the boys were formally added to the family on 31 March 1878. Their father's temporary fall into the *meshchanstvo* caused later problems for Ivan Ivanovich, however, because of the persistence of legal estate status. In 1881 Ivan Ivanovich began to study at the gymnasium in Tsarskoe Selo but, when his father looked in to sending him to the Commercial School in 1885, they ran into a problem. According to the St Petersburg Provincial Administration, the school refused to accept him 'because he, as one adopted by Chikin when he was in the *meshchanstvo*, does not have the rights of adoption during Chikin's time in the merchant guild'. There was a protest, and soon thereafter the provincial administration agreed that the two boys should have received the rights of merchant's sons when their father regained his merchant status.⁸⁰ Still, it was a stark reminder of the role that official legal status still held in individual lives, even for the privileged, and even in 'modernizing' late nineteenth-century Russia.

Despite that temporary setback, Ivan and Aleksandr fulfilled their father's wishes and continued to operate the factory after his death in 1892. Although Ivan failed to send in his guild dues and was demoted to townsman in 1902, it seems to have been a momentary lapse rather than a significant

⁷⁷ 'O zapisi Chikina', ll. 20, 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 20, 27, 43.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 54–5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 39–41.

downturn in their economic status.⁸¹ The factory was listed in guides to Russian industry in 1899 and 1912. According to the later guide, they had branched out to producing aluminium goods as well. The factory employed 217 workers and produced 963,000 roubles' worth of goods a year.⁸² The following year the company went public and the new joint-stock company was renamed the Siverskii metal factories, 'formerly I. F. Chikin'.⁸³ The issue may have been that Aleksandr left the business; in 1914, a manufacturing directory did not list him as among the board of directors. Ivan was still there, and with the move to a different financial footing the company had grown even larger, employing 350–400 workers, and with yearly production of 1,500,000 roubles' worth of goods.⁸⁴

All this growth did not come without a cost, however. In 1888 the factory overseer, a *meshchanin* named Nikolai Iur'evskii, was found guilty of violating child labour laws in many ways. He hired local peasant boys younger than age twelve, he kept them at work from six in the morning until eight at night, and he put them at work for which they were not properly trained. The case came to greater attention when a child labourer lost several fingers in an industrial accident. Although the court was initially unsure whether to blame Chikin or Iur'evskii, in the end Iur'evskii was sentenced to a fine and a month and a half in jail.⁸⁵ There is no evidence of further wrongdoing on the part of the factory, and the case was unusual enough to get picked up by a St Petersburg paper, but clearly the company's success was not a storybook one.

The lack of oversight may have come about because Ivan Filippovich was distracted around this time. At least, several later sources mention a woman named Ekaterina Ivanovna Chikina, born in 1886, and linked to the factory (one later source gives her birth year as 1896, but as she married in 1909 the earlier date is more likely).⁸⁶ Given the ages of the two Ivans in this family story, she must have been the child of the elder, and the sister (or perhaps half-sister) of the younger. Who her mother was is unclear. Anastasiia had given birth around 1859, which means it would have been technically possible for her to have had another child in 1886. She was living elsewhere by the 1890s, however, so it seems unlikely. It is more likely that Ivan Filippovich had another child with Anna Vasil'eva or another woman. In any event, the arrival of a new child in his waning years could easily have pulled his mind away from business.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, I, 65.

⁸² *Vsia Rossiia: Russkaia kniga promyshlennosti, torgovli, sel'skogo khoziaistva i administratsii* (All Russia: Russian book of industry, trade, agriculture, and administration), vol. 1 (St Petersburg, 1899), p. 503; *Spisok fabrik i zavodov Rossiiskoi imperii* (List of factories of the Russian empire) (St Petersburg, 1912), p. 252.

⁸³ *VP* 1914, vol. III, p. 723.

⁸⁴ F. A. Shober, ed., *Fabrichno-zavodskie predpriiia Rossiiskoi Imperii (iskliuchaiia Finliandiiu)* (Industrial enterprises of the Russian empire (excluding Finland)) (2nd edn, Petrograd, 1914), 2377B.

⁸⁵ 'Dopushchenie maloletnikh k neposil'noi rabote' ('Allowing underaged children to heavy labour'), *Peterburgskii listok* (Petersburg leaflet), 4 Nov. 1888, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Iuri Mazanov, 'Pushkiny v Narve' ('Pushkins in Narva'), in *Pushkinskii al'manakh. Vypusk 18–19* (Pushkinian almanac, issue 18–19) (Novosibirsk, 2014), p. 249; *Pushkiny. Genealogicheskaia entsiklopediia* (Pushkins: genealogical encyclopaedia) (Moscow, 2020), p. 394.

Ivan Ivanovich eventually moved to St Petersburg around 1907, first to a building on the Fontanka (no. 127) and then around the corner to 6 Nikol'skii Square, a handsome area near the Mariinskii Theatre and the Griboedov embankment, and the church in which he had been baptized (he was on the telephone, too).⁸⁷ Chikino, the family estate near the factory, was still part of the brothers' lives, however, and attracted visitors, including reportedly the great operatic bass Fedor Chaliapin. Fishing was a great lure, for the estate had a special fish hatchery where they cultivated trout. The writer Aleksandr Kuprin apparently used a holiday trip to Chikino as the setting for one of his short stories. In it he describes being invited to see a Christmas tree, and no ordinary one. Instead, it was to be a living tree in the forest decorated with electric illumination, as modern as modern could be.⁸⁸ Vladimir Nabokov's family had several estates along the Oredezh too, and the woods of the area gave him some of his earliest memories, including his first forays into lepidoptery. Perhaps the two families interacted.⁸⁹

The end of the tsarist era first brought even more success to the Chikin family because their business profited from the First World War. Even before it began, they were doing well. Both the company board and Ivan Chikin separately donated funds (500 and 100 roubles, respectively) to the war effort in 1914.⁹⁰ But then the war brought even more business and even greater economic success: the company's archives include correspondence with military authorities and armaments factories, and references to producing grenades.⁹¹ As a result, the Chikin brothers probably ended the tsarist era in as prosperous position as they could be.

The revolution, though, must have shattered their lives. What happened to Ivan and Aleksandr is unclear; scattered poorly referenced internet sources claim that Aleksandr, at least, died in 1917, but there are few other traces of either man. Neither was still listed in the new Leningrad city directory in 1926, though one or both may have retreated to Chikino, or emigrated, or been killed. What happened to their sister, Ekaterina Ivanovna, may, however, give a different vision of a possible fate for such a family. In 1909 she married a man named Aleksandr Anatol'evich Pushkin, the great-nephew of the famous Russian poet, and soon had two daughters and a son. Aleksandr died fighting against the Bolsheviks during the civil war, and in 1919 Ekaterina left Chikino and went to Narva – about to be in newly independent Estonia. (Her son, another Aleksandr, was ill so could not leave; as a result he stayed with relatives in Daimishche, which perhaps meant at Chikino.) After the Second World War, Ekaterina and one daughter ended up first in a displaced persons camp in Germany, before emigrating to Picton, Ontario. Ekaterina lived there with her daughter until the age of 104, reading Russian novels and watching soap

⁸⁷ VP 1907, vol. III, p. 724; VP 1911, vol. III, p. 975; VP 1912, vol. III, p. 984.

⁸⁸ Glezerov, *Predmest'ia Sankt-Peterburga*, p. 498.

⁸⁹ Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: the Russian years* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), pp. 44–7, 68–85.

⁹⁰ *Russkii invalid (Russian invalid)*, 2 Apr. 1915, supplement.

⁹¹ TsGIASpB, f. 1224.

operas, most of which must have paled in comparison to the upheavals of her own life.⁹²

IV

If the Chikin family story was one of more or less continuous success in trade and then a sudden diversion, the Shubin story involved peasant origins and a life changed through education. In 1851 a woman named Fekla Egorova Shubina registered in Gatchina as a *meshchanka* along with her four children: Gavriila, Egor, Pavel, and Ekaterina.⁹³ All but Pavel had been enserfed peasants from the village of Rozh[d]estveno, thirty kilometres to the south, owned by a nobleman named Efremov and very close to Daimishche and the Chikin factory. Already this is a story with less prosperity at the start than even that of the Kosichkins, also originally serfs, for entry into the *meshchanstvo* simply required freedom, not any financial status that would suit a family for the merchantry. Unlike the Kosichkins, somehow the Shubin family got itself freed a decade or so before Emancipation, possibly upon their owner's death – in 1853 his heirs put the entire estate up for sale.⁹⁴ Their manumission document showed that they had been freed in a family group along with Fekla's husband, Petr, and mother-in-law, Avdot'ia, but those two had either died or chosen to register elsewhere after manumission. Pavel was born after the family received their freedom.⁹⁵

There is scant information about most of the family, but their place of origin suggests some possibilities. Rozhdestveno, as it is now known, had a long history with Gatchina. It had been a town in the eighteenth century but, shortly after Paul elevated his own village of Gatchina to town status, he turned Rozhdestveno into a village. As a result, the merchants and townspeople of Rozhdestveno found themselves legally registered in Gatchina.⁹⁶ In 1838 there were 194 Gatchina-registered merchants and townspeople living in Rozhdestveno, alongside 592 peasants.⁹⁷ The family may well have remained in Rozhdestveno after registering in Gatchina. Fekla, at least, lived another quarter of a century as a townswoman, dying only in 1878, at the age of seventy-two. At least some of her children had long been married by that point. Given the proximity of Rozhdestveno and Daimishche, perhaps some

⁹² Pushkiny, p. 394; V. M. Fridkin, *Propavshii dnevnik Pushkina: Rasskazy o poiskakh v zarubezhnykh arkhivakh* (*The missing diary of Pushkin: stories of searches in foreign archives*) (Moscow, 1991), pp. 247–8; Alan Capon, 'At 104, still watches daytime soaps', *Whig-Standard*, Kingston, ON, 28 Nov. 1990, p. 1.

⁹³ 'O zapisi v chislo gatchinskikh meshchan vol'nootpushchennoi krest'ianki Fekly Shubinoi' ('On the registration of the freed peasant Fekla Shubina in the number of Gatchina townpeople'), TsGIASPB, f. 696, op. 1, d. 47, l. 1.

⁹⁴ 'Prodazha imeniia' ('Sales of estates'), *Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti, Pribavlenie* (*St Petersburg Journal, Supplement*), 15 July 1853, p. 370.

⁹⁵ 'O zapisi Shubinoi', TsGIASPB, ll. 1, 2, 7.

⁹⁶ 'O pereimenovanii myzy Gatchino i sela Pavlovsk v goroda po vysochaishemu povelenniu, ravno I o pripiske k sim gorodam kuptsov' ('On renaming the village Gatchina and the village Pavlovsk as towns by highest order and also on registering merchants to these towns'), RGIA, f. 491, op. 1, d. 315.

⁹⁷ *Opisanie Sanktpeterburgskoi gubernii*, p. 25.

of the children or their descendants even ended up among those hired to work in the Chikin factory.

Gavrila, the oldest of the four children included in the initial registration, had at least one daughter, born in 1862 (but not registered formally until after her father's death in 1879), and two sons, Fedor and Nikolai. The two sons, in particular, had distinctly different fates. The younger, Nikolai, appears to have been in trouble with the Gatchina police in 1891, when they are recorded as looking for him, but apparently that trouble passed. The archival file includes his passport from 1898. He was at that point thirty-three, worked in trade, and had a daughter, Varvara, then aged five. The passport also represents a family tragedy. Its original form notes that Nikolai was married to a woman named Mariia Illarionova. But pencilled marks have her name crossed out, and 'widower' added above his marital state. The back of the passport includes her death notice, signed by a priest; she died only weeks after Nikolai received the passport.⁹⁸ His seems to have been a story of trouble in his early twenties, then settling into a modest married life altered by a family tragedy.

Fedor, on the other hand, led a life transformed by education. In 1881 he began to study at the Imperial St Petersburg Historical-Philological Institute, a post-secondary institution founded to train teachers.⁹⁹ He would have been one of the very first to train there as a teacher of geography, a course that was only added to the programme in 1882.¹⁰⁰ He graduated in 1885, and left the Gatchina commune when it agreed to exclude him from their ranks so that he could enter state service as a teacher.¹⁰¹ His first job at the Vologda Gymnasium gave him not only a job but a formal rank in the state bureaucratic system. Initially he taught both history (in years 5–8) and geography (in all classes). There must have been challenges for him as a young teacher. He was the son of a serf but most of his students – 69 per cent of the entire school body in 1886–7 – were of noble background. (Another 20 per cent were sons of merchants or townspeople, and only eighteen students – 7.5 per cent of the total – were of peasant origins.)¹⁰² Nonetheless, he seems to have done well there. At the end of 1890 he received an award for his service as a teacher at the Vologda Gymnasium: the Order of St Stanislaus, third class.¹⁰³

Fedor's success in Vologda likely helped him return to St Petersburg. In 1892 he began to teach at the Larinskaia Gymnasium on Vasilevskii Ostrov, and for the next two decades he worked at a series of different secondary schools around St Petersburg, often more than one at a time, as a geography

⁹⁸ 'O zapisi Shubinoini', ll. 38, 51–51ob.

⁹⁹ Ibid., ll. 20, 28; *Neskol'ko slov ob Imp. S.-Peterburgskom istoriko-filologicheskom institute (Several words on the Imperial St Petersburg Historical-Philological Institute)* (St Petersburg, 1909), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Neskol'ko slov ob Imp. S.-Peterburgskom istoriko-filologicheskom institute*, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ 'O zapisi Shubinoini', ll. 34–35.

¹⁰² V. I. Tuzov, *Otchet o sostoianii vologodskoi gimnazii za 1886/87 uchebnyi god (Report on the status of the Vologda gymnasium for the 1886–7 school year)* (Vologda, 1888), pp. 8–11, 23.

¹⁰³ 'Ukazy kapitulu Rossiiskikh imperatorskikh i tsarskikh ordenov' ('Decrees on Russian imperial and tsarist orders'), *Senatskie vedomosti*, 19 Oct. 1893, p. 451.

teacher.¹⁰⁴ At various points he taught at the Larinskaia Gymnasium, the Elizavetinskii Institute, and the Pavlovskii Institute (the latter two being schools for girls). In 1895 he took a post at his alma mater, the Historical-Philological Institute, as a head tutor of geography, and two years later he also began to teach at the gymnasium affiliated with the institute.¹⁰⁵ At the same time he rose through the ranks of the state bureaucracy. In 1893 he held the rank of court councillor.¹⁰⁶ On 1 January 1895, he was given the Order of St Anna, third class, and at some point in 1894 or 1895 he was promoted one rank to collegiate councillor.¹⁰⁷ By 1898 Fedor had been promoted yet again, to state councillor.¹⁰⁸ He may have had a setback around 1900 – in the city directory for that year, he is listed as holding the rank of collegiate councillor again, and only teaching at the Larinskaia Gymnasium – but either that was an error or he was back on track by 1901. In that year he was again listed as a state councillor and teaching at three different schools.¹⁰⁹

Fedor moved house several times, but consistently lived on Vasilievskii Ostrov, near several of his places of work; in 1894 he lived at no. 15, 6th line – on the premises of the Larinskaia Gymnasium. By 1896, he had moved to no. 30, 7th line, apparently renting a room or rooms from Ivan and Sofii Miliugin; and in 1900 he lived at 19 Malyi Prospekt, renting from the merchant Shmuilo Movshevich Kibal'skii.¹¹⁰ As of 1903 he had moved just down the street, to no. 21, perhaps because he needed more space for a new, expanded household: in 1903, Evgeniia Nikolaevna Shubina, wife of a state councillor, lived there, too.¹¹¹ In 1907 they had moved to a new apartment on the 14th line, no. 33. Fedor was still teaching at several schools, now including the Vasilevskii Ostrov women's gymnasium. Evgenia now also had an occupation listed: masseuse.¹¹² In 1911 Evgeniia Nikolaevna had either moved out or moved her place of practice, to 42 Petergofskii Prospekt (now Staro-Petergofskii Prospekt).¹¹³ The following year, however, both had moved to a new address back on Vasilevskii Ostrov, back to the premises of the Larinskaia Gymnasium.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁴ *Uchitel'skie instituty zapadnoi Sibiri. 1902–1920 gg. (Educational institutes of western Siberia, 1902–1920)* (Tomsk, 2005), p. 222.

¹⁰⁵ *Pamiatnaia knizhka Imp. S.-Peterburgskogo istoriko-filologicheskogo instituta za 1902–1912 gody (Memory book of the Imperial St Petersburg Historical-Philological Institute, 1902–1912)* (St Petersburg, 1912), p. 9; VP 1897, vol. III, p. 443.

¹⁰⁶ *Adresnaia kniga goroda S.-Peterburga na 1893 g. (Address book of St Petersburg, 1893)* (St Petersburg, 1893), vol. I, p. 450, vol. II, p. 315; VP 1894, [vol. I], p. 269.

¹⁰⁷ 'Nagrady' ('Honours'), *Senatskie vedomosti*, 6 Jan. 1898, p. 7; VP 1895, vol. III, p. 258.

¹⁰⁸ VP 1898, vol. III, p. 595.

¹⁰⁹ VP 1900, vol. III, p. 265; VP 1901, vol. III, p. 664.

¹¹⁰ VP 1894, vol. III, p. 269; VP 1895, vol. IV, p. 156; VP 1896, vol. III, p. 356, vol. IV, p. 145; VP 1900, vol. III, pp. 265, 650, vol. IV, p. 217.

¹¹¹ VP 1903, vol. III, p. 752.

¹¹² VP 1907, vol. III, p. 808; VP 1908, vol. III, p. 860.

¹¹³ VP 1911, vol. III, p. 1016

¹¹⁴ VP 1912, vol. III, p. 1026.

The Shubins took part in the wider world of voluntary associations then developing in the capital.¹¹⁵ At the time they married, Evgeniia was a member of the Society for the Protection of Young Girls – an anti-sex-work philanthropic society. Fedor, meanwhile, not only taught geography but also published several short pieces and gave public talks on the subject, possibly through his long-standing membership in the Imperial Geographic Society.¹¹⁶ That membership may even have led him to one of his apartments. The building on the 14th line was owned by Evgeniia Mikhailovna Semënova (she also owned the building next door). Her husband was Dmitrii Petrovich Semënov-Tian-Shanskii, who was at this point not only a member of the society but the president of its statistical bureau, as well as a state servitor and member of the St Petersburg Town Duma.¹¹⁷ Fedor was also a long-standing member of a mutual aid society: the burial account associated with the St Petersburg Pedagogical Mutual Aid Society. In 1895, he served as its treasurer.¹¹⁸ One might assume that he was also part of the larger mutual aid society, but that may not have been the case, given what seem to have been his political leanings. The society leaned left, discussing not only the material well-being of teachers but larger questions of civic activism.¹¹⁹ Fedor, however, had a distinctly conservative bent. In 1907 he spoke at a meeting of a would-be ‘right block’ that tried to unify three right-leaning parties including the notoriously anti-Semitic Union of the Russian People. Fedor clearly sympathized with the union’s extremist views. In his speech he blamed Jews for all of the ills facing the empire. According to a newspaper account of the meeting, his speech was not well received by the audience, with workers in attendance in particular trying to shout him down.¹²⁰ He must have felt increasingly ill at ease in the revolutionary capital.

Perhaps that is why Fedor made a huge move in summer 1912, when he took on the initial directorship of the Omsk Teacher’s Institute.¹²¹ This was a bold decision, accepting not only a job with significantly more responsibility than he had previously held but also one in a very different place, a colonial boom town. Omsk had been growing extraordinarily quickly as interest in settling Siberia developed along with the Trans-Siberian railway. It swelled from

¹¹⁵ Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary associations in tsarist Russia: science, patriotism, and civil society* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

¹¹⁶ F. G. Shubin, *Chto dolzhna dat' geografiia dlia obshchego obrazovaniia. Neobkhodimost' ratsional'noi postanovki prepodavaniia geografii* (What geography should give to a general education: the necessity of rational formulations in teaching geography) (St Petersburg, 1900); F. G. Shubin, *Moi otvet zashchitnikami rutiny v shkol'noi geografii* (My answer to defenders of routine in school geography) (St Petersburg, 1902).

¹¹⁷ VP 1907, vol. III, p. 637, vol. IV, p. 202.

¹¹⁸ *Adresnaia kniga goroda S.-Peterburga na 1895 g.* (Address book of St Petersburg, 1895) (St Petersburg, 1895), col. 1142.

¹¹⁹ Christine Ruane, *Gender, class, and the professionalization of Russian city teachers, 1860-1914* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1994), pp. 97–101.

¹²⁰ ‘Sobranie pravogo bloka v narodnom dome Nobelia’ (‘Gathering of the right block in the Nobel people’s house’), *Peterburgskii listok*, 3 Feb. 1907, p. 2.

¹²¹ *Pamiatnaia knizhka Imp. S.-Peterburgskogo istoriko-filologicheskogo instituta*, p. 17; *Uchitel'skie instituty Zapadnoi Sibiri*, p. 222.

37,470 residents in 1897 to 133,280 in 1912.¹²² The Teacher's Institute was a new school, founded to help meet the growing demand for teachers in the wider region.¹²³ The number of schools in the four regions of western Siberia increased 167 per cent between 1894 and 1910 – in Akmolinskaia Oblast alone, the increase was even higher, from 123 schools to 432. In keeping with the growing population of Siberia, they served ever more students – 4,353 in 1894, up to 27,171 in 1911.¹²⁴

The move seems to have been a success for Fedor. The new school in Omsk was tiny at first – it lacked its own building so held classes for its initial group of twenty-three students in rented rooms. It nonetheless had the potential to make real change in their lives. Those students came from varied backgrounds: ten were peasants by origin, five townspeople, five cossacks. The remaining three came from 'privileged' backgrounds – one from the church, one from the bureaucracy, one from the nobility. The students were not yet able to take part in 'practical activities' (student teaching) because Omsk did not yet have a secondary school. This was scheduled to open the following year.¹²⁵ More students came, however, and Fedor worked to move the institute into better quarters and to get more teachers in budgeted positions. One of the students at the institute, E. G. Beiman-Pautova, remembered him well, describing him as 'an erudite man, a scholar ... we loved his interesting lectures, he had apparently travelled a lot, and he always so clearly, vividly, and concretely described the countries where he had been'.¹²⁶ On 1 January 1915 Fedor was elevated in rank once more, to actual state councillor – the fourth rank, which brought with it hereditary nobility – the best security possible for an upwardly mobile subject of the tsar, and a definitive recognition of his having transcended his father's birth in serfdom.¹²⁷

Of course, this was also only shortly before the entire system in which he had succeeded came crashing down around him. While the First World War probably brought profits to the Chikins, it created nothing but problems for Fedor. In 1915 he began to send reports noting that the cost of living in Omsk had skyrocketed since the start of the war, which meant that students in particular were hit hard, living as they did on meagre stipends. He continued to write to authorities seeking better funding for his students.¹²⁸ And then, for Fedor, the end of the tsarist system that had brought him nobility clearly brought fear rather than hope. In 1917 first the tsarist government fell and

¹²² *Putevoditel' po Velikoi Sibirskoi zheleznoi doroge (Guide to the great Siberian railway)* (St Petersburg, 1914), p. 340.

¹²³ On the founding of the new school in 1912, see N. S. Iurtsovskii, *Ocherki po istorii prosveshcheniia v Sibiri (Essays on the history of education in Siberia)*, vol. I: *Obshchii khod razvitiia shkol'nogo dela v Sibiri. 1703–1917 gg. (The general course of development of educational matters in Siberia, 1703–1917)* (Novo-Nikolaevsk, 1923), p. 108.

¹²⁴ Iurtsovskii, *Ocherki po istorii prosveshcheniia v Sibiri*, pp. 145, 147.

¹²⁵ *Uchitel'skie instituty Zapadnoi Sibiri*, pp. 52–8.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹²⁷ *Biograficheskii slovar' vysshie chiny Rossiiskoi imperii (22.10.1721–2.03.1917) (Biographical dictionary of the highest ranks of the Russian empire (22 October 1721–2 March 1917))*, vol. IV (Moscow, 2019), p. 562.

¹²⁸ *Uchitel'skie instituty zapadnoi Sibiri*, pp. 67, 181–2.

next the Bolsheviks seized control, bringing civil war to the empire. Omsk turned out to be at the centre of one of its fronts: the famed and feared White general Aleksandr Kolchak based his alternative Russian state in the town. Given Shubin's political leanings, he may well have supported Kolchak's regime. Clearly, too, Shubin knew that the Bolshevik regime would bring him nothing good and took steps to avoid it. On the day Kolchak left the city in 1919, Fedor committed suicide, shooting himself in his office at the institute, much to the shock of students and staff.¹²⁹

V

The history of the Russian empire's nineteenth century has often been written with a consciousness of its end in revolution and therefore a focus on factors that either led to revolution or failed to prevent it. The collapse of the Soviet Union made that narrative seem less pressing, and instead scholars have come to focus on the Russian empire among other empires, or on topics that seem far removed from the revolutionary world. The family histories here demonstrate how difficult it is, however, to write the history of the nineteenth century without the revolution as an end. On one level it should not be hard: there is little in these family histories that hints at the coming end of the tsars. Most of the individuals seem to have been simply living their lives, affected by tsarist social regulation but generally not in ways that troubled them. Politics only show up once, and in a conservative, not revolutionary, form. But the fact that I have only been able to find traces of two of these many individual subjects of the empire (and one only as a single entry in an address book) after the revolution, and have uncovered the shocking death of another during the civil war, shows the ways in which the revolution was a true disruption in everyday lives that resonated even in documents themselves. The new Soviet state abolished *sosloviia* – an act that removed privileges and restrictions based on birth and also changed the ways that lives were documented. There will certainly still be records for some, if not many, of the Kosichkins, the Chikins, and the Shubins in archives or elsewhere (probably not of the Lifant'evs, given that the last we know of them is two unmarried daughters), but the ruptures of the revolution have detached them from their tsarist past.

These histories also show the ways in which the Russian empire fits awkwardly into general narratives of Europe's long nineteenth century, and not only because its final cataclysm brought even greater change than the First World War did elsewhere. Those narratives generally involve both a transformation of technology and culture and also a shift away from a world of autocracy and rigid social stratification to one of greater democracy and the rise of the middle class (at least in imperial metropolises).¹³⁰ The Russian empire saw many of the global changes of the nineteenth century: railways, new art forms, advertising, and striking workers. And, as these family histories show, it had

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 202–3.

¹³⁰ Christopher Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: global connections and comparisons* (Malden, MA, 2004); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The transformation of the world: a global history of the nineteenth century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, NJ, 2014).

middle-class people of all sorts.¹³¹ At the same time, however, it retained many features that seemed obsolescent, if not downright archaic. It both started and ended the century, long or not, as an autocracy; it both started and ended with social estates that placed restrictions on individual lives; it both started and ended as an empire.¹³² As Alexander Martin noted in a roundtable dedicated to the question ‘What is the nineteenth century?’ in Russian studies, this could be read as meaning that Russia skipped the nineteenth century entirely, moving from an eighteenth-century Old Regime directly to the twentieth century, or it could mean that it was a century of ‘co-existence’ of what were distinct eras in other parts of Europe.¹³³

In the histories of the Lifant'evs, the Kosichkins, the Chikins, and the Shubins, this co-existence comes through clearly. The very origins of their stories as reconstructed here are in the demands of the ‘archaic’ structure of social estates. Individuals came up against the limits of that structure in requests to be allowed to go to school, or to leave their status to take on a new professional life. They also made use of the potential benefits of that structure in requests for charity, some of which were met. At the same time, the individuals in these families all reflected the wide range of lives possible in the empire’s middling classes: industrialists made more wealthy by new technologies and the engine of war, trading merchants, teachers, bureaucrats, clerks, tavern keepers, low-wage workers. Looking at these individuals as part of family histories also gives a sense of the larger picture of the nineteenth century. Only the Chikin story is a clear and obvious tale of family success and prosperity, but as it begins with prosperity it is hardly a bootstrapping narrative like those popular at the time.¹³⁴ Nor do any of the histories represent a Buddenbrooks-like tale of bourgeois degeneration, though that concept, too, was part of late imperial discourse.¹³⁵ Instead, the family

¹³¹ Louise McReynolds, *Russia at play: leisure activities at the end of the tsarist era* (Ithaca, NY, 2003); Laurie Manchester, *Holy fathers, secular sons: clergy, intelligentsia, and the modern self in revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 2008); Lynn M. Sargeant, *Harmony and discord: music and the transformation of Russian cultural life* (New York, NY, 2011); Mark D. Steinberg, *Petersburg fin de siècle* (New Haven, CT, 2011); Sally West, *I shop in Moscow: advertising and the creation of consumer culture in late tsarist Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 2011); Anna Fishzon, *Fandom, authenticity, and opera: mad acts and letter scenes in fin-de-siècle Russia* (New York, NY, 2013); Ekaterina Pravilova, *A public empire: property and the quest for the common good in imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ, 2014); Tricia Starks, *Smoking under the tsars: a history of tobacco in imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 2018); Susan Layton, *Contested Russian tourism: cosmopolitanism, nation, and empire in the nineteenth century* (Boston, MA, 2021).

¹³² Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of power: myth and ceremony in Russian monarchy from Peter the Great to the abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, NJ, 2006); Jane Burbank, *Russian empire: space, people, power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington, IN, 2007); Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia’s empires* (New York, NY, 2017).

¹³³ Alexander Martin in NYU Jordan Center, *What is the 19th century?*, 24 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAYPnxpoDOM>, at 11:10–12:34.

¹³⁴ Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia learned to read: literacy and popular literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, NJ, 1985).

¹³⁵ Kate Holland, ‘The Russian *Rougon-Macquart*: degeneration and biological determinism in *The Golovlev family*’, in Katherine Bowers and Ani Kokobobo, eds., *Russian writers and the fin de siècle: the*

histories reflect the ways in which Russia's nineteenth century saw archaic and modern institutions and trajectories co-existing.

There is one final question to take from these stories of everyday lives in tsarist Russia: their sudden end in revolution is surely particularly Russian, but what else about them is? Or, to put it another way, is the fact that actual family histories do not quite align with either fictional or historians' visions of the nineteenth century a peculiarity of Russia, or something that might hold true in any effort to recreate life stories in this way? In her recent exploration of the history of a family in France over the long nineteenth century, Emma Rothschild finds many similar features: prosperity and precarity, more success through state or church service than through the market. She describes this as a history that is 'disconcerting ... in relation to large presumptions about modern times'.¹³⁶ Perhaps this would be true in most efforts to trace out real lives: few if any grand narratives, and instead a multiplicity of variants of the experience of the century.

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twilight of realism (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 15–32; Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: the human sciences and the fate of liberal modernity, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 2008).

¹³⁶ Emma Rothschild, *An infinite history: the story of a family in France over three centuries* (Princeton, NY, 2021), p. 12.

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