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THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL REPRESSIONS ARCHIVE (1918-1956) is open on weekdays (except Fridays), 11:00 am - 5:00 pm
The Reading Room is open on weekdays (except Wednesday), 11:00am - 5:00pm

THE HISTORY OF DISSENT IN THE USSR ARCHIVE is open every day, 2:00pm - 6:00pm. Access is by appointment.

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THIS BOOKLET WAS PUBLISHED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE JACKSON FUND
The "MEMORIAL" international organisation for history, education, human rights and charity

The "MEMORIAL" resource and education centre

the memorial society archive
The archives of the Memorial Society began to be developed when the organisation itself came into existence (in 1989), when victims of repressions, or their relatives and friends, started to give members of Memorial documents, photographs and manuscript memoirs from their family papers. The objective of our archives is to document the history of our country. We collect historical documentation of the periods of government terror and its victims, of the resistance to terror and of the difficult conditions of Soviet life for ordinary citizens in order to not allow this all to be forgotten. Memorial’s archives consist of a number of separate thematic sections (collections): The History of Political Repression in the USSR Archive (1918-1956), the History of Dissent Archive (1953-1987), the "Polish Programme" archive (repressions of ethnic Poles and Polish citizens), the Victims of Two Dictatorships (the fate of the "Ostarbeiter" – eastern workers – in Germany and the USSR), the "Man in History: Russia – XX Century" school competition Archive and video archive. The Memorial archives also include an oral history and biography centre, which aims not only to compile and work with interviews, but also to co-ordinate regional activities in this area.

As well as collecting and sorting documents, "Memorial" archivists are involved in a wide-rang of educational activities, they respond to queries from regional chapters of Memorial, as well as other community and government organisations, and provide research materials to historians and journalists. The archive is an integral part of the activities of Memorial Society other research, educational and social programmes. For instance, the materials for some of the online projects run by Memorial, such as "Women's Memory of the GULAG", "Archive studies" and others are provided from the archives. Material from the archives is also often used in Memorial exhibitions in Russia and abroad, and appears in scholarly and popular publications.

Memorial archivists conduct seminars, tours and conferences for wide public but primarily for particularly interested groups: schoolchildren and students, teachers, victims of repressions and their families). They also prepare research papers and deliver reports and lectures at various events.

In its work, the "Memorial" archive is supported by a network of over 80 regional chapters of the International Memorial Society in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Germany, Italy and France, and in turn serves as a resource centre for these chapters. Regional Memorial chapters are provided with guidance on working with historical documents, exchanges of information and copies of documents.

Visitors are received at the archive where they are provided with advice and assistance in tracing relatives who were victims of repression and in establishing the location of their execution and burial, as well as assistance in obtaining legal rehabilitation documents and benefits.

The archive’s collections are open to the public and to researchers. All queries are dealt with and all requests to view documents granted (unless otherwise stipulated by conditions on which the documents were given to the archive for safe-keeping). Publication of materials is by agreement with the original owners of the documents.
The core of the archive is the collection of personal files of those who were victims of repression: those executed by firing squad, sentenced to terms in labour camps or exiled, or who had become victims of “de-kulakisation”. Over 60,000 files have been collected (f. 1, catalogues 1-4).

These files provide the fullest collection of documents directly related to the mass repression during the Soviet period. They contain originals and copies of official documents, such as orders for arrest, records of searches conducted, pages from various files (state archive files, criminal files, labour-camp files, legal supervisory files), sentences, death certificates and records of release and legal rehabilitation. They also contain personal documents: lists of parcels sent or handed in to prisons or camps, appeals for review of cases by relatives and prisoners. There are prison documents: letters of commendation, character references, poetry, posters for labour-camp amateur activities, hand-made postcards, musical scores, personal notes and letters. Of particular interest is prisoners’ correspondence with relatives. Letters from labour camps fall into two categories, of unequal proportions. Most of them are official, authorised letters, checked and often containing deletions by the censor. There are a smaller number of letters sent away from prison illegally - notes sent back from transit trains, notes written on fabric or on cigarette paper, hidden in seams or buttons.

Personal files usually also contain documents relating to private and public life before arrest: birth certificates, school and university records, membership cards of various organisations, employment records, awards and merit certificates, letters, family- and work-related photos, etc. Among “post-release” materials of particular interest are letters and memoirs recalling the person’s arrest, imprisonment, their struggle for legal rehabilitation and their life after prison.

1. Socialist-Revolutionary Party membership card, 1917
2. Photo from family archive, 1938
3. Letter on fabric from Taishetlag Camp, 1939
4. Letter from labour camp, 1940
The Memoirs and Literary Works Collection (f. 2, catalogues 1-5) contains about 600 items, and provides unique personal records and evidences of life in the USSR in the 20th century: of arrests, investigations, labour-camps and internal exile. All the history and geography of the GULAG is reflected here - from the Solovki camp of the 1920’s, to Dubravnoe Camp Authority (“Dubravlag”) in the 1960’s, from Vyaz’ma to Kolyma and Chukotka camps. Alongside memoirs as such, the archive includes a selection of letters, diaries, articles and papers, bibliographies and literary and journalistic pieces. Most texts are unpublished. An extremely valuable part of this collection are the diaries and literary works written in the camps themselves. Among them is the hand-written satirical almanac, “The Cat’s House”, created by doctors at a Kolyma camp hospital in the years 1943-1954 (compiled by F. K. Langeld); an anthology of poetry written down from memory in the Orlovo-Rozovo camp in 1945-1947 (V. F. Berseneva, S. S. Potresova); a collection of reminiscences by those who took part in OGPU’s Ukhta expedition of 1932 (compiled by V. Nadezhdn). Of special note are memoirs and reminiscences by employees of the penal system, both those who later became victims of repression themselves (M. P. Shreider), and those with successful careers (Ya. Kuperman). A unique document of its kind is the 1934-1936 diary of I. P. Chistyakov, a guard at BAMlag (Baikal-Amur labour camp).
The archive is continually receiving new material. Additions to the archive have been especially boosted by our thematic projects. As a result of our oral history programmes, including "Women’s Memory of the GULAG" and "The History of the Family in the XX century", we have accumulated a considerable fund of materials from the 1930’s and 1940’s, relating to the fate of “ChSIRs” ("Close Relatives of Traitors to the Motherland"): documents concerning the guardianship of children after their parents’ arrest, character references and photos of children brought up in orphanages. Of particular interest is are the children’s drawings, diaries and letters to their mothers in the camps which are collected here.

Aside from personal files and memoirs, the archive includes several separate collections: the editorial portfolio of "Pamyat" (Memory) (compiled in Leningrad), a 1970’s "samizdat" historical compendium; "Zven’ya" (Links in the Chain), a historical almanac prepared by "Memorial" in the late 1980’s; documents of Tolstoyan communes from 1920-1930 (the private papers and memoirs of Ya. Dragunovskiy, D. Morgachev, I. Bautin, B. Mazurin and others). A considerable part of the materials relates to the inception and activities of "Memorial" from the end of the 1980’s.

Since 1994 we have been working on creating an electronic database alongside our hard copy card catalogue. "The Electronic Archive of the History of Repressions" now contains over 85,000 names. The Electronic Archive database has over sixty main fields, reflecting biographical data, professional and social activity and data relating to repression. The database, which also functions as the archive’s catalogue, allows us to respond to the many thematic queries we receive from researchers.

Archive administrator: A. G. Kozlova

1. Letter from brothers to their mother in the Akmolinskiy women’s camp, 1942
2. A schoolgirl’s letter to Stalin, 1946
3. Children’s photos from an orphanage, in a frame made by their mother, Karlag, 1940
4. Letter to a mother in the Akmolinskiy camp, 1942
The "Polish Programme" archive

The materials in this archive were collected during Memorial’s Polish Programme, a programme to carry out research into repression against ethnic Poles and Polish citizens in the 1930’s and 1950’s. The programme has been run in cooperation with the KARTA Centre in Poland. The programme’s electronic archive contains around 130,000 biographical files.

Programme director: A. E. Guryanov.

"Man in History. Russia - XX Century" school competition archive

Since 1999, Memorial, in cooperation with the Union of Russian Regional Studies Specialists, the Department of Regional History and Studies at the Russian State University of Humanities (Moscow), and the D. S. Likhachev Fund (St-Petersburg), have organised an annual national historical research competition for senior high-school pupils called: "Man in History. Russia - XX Century". This competition is a part of The History Network for Young Europeans EUSTORY. The best entries are published in annual collections.

The competition archives contain around 20,000 entries, by pupils from 87 Russian regions. The students have collected unique documents from public and family archives and recorded thousands of pages of reminiscences by witnesses of and actors in historical events. Their work is often supplemented by audio and video materials.

An archive database is available, organised thematically and by author.

Archivist: A.G. Papovyan
"Victims of Two Dictatorships": programme archive

This collection contains materials gathered during the Victims of Two Dictatorships programme, which was dedicated to documenting the fate of Soviet citizens transported to Germany for forced labour during the Second World War. The archive is comprised of over 400,000 files on former Ostarbeiter (“Eastern workers”), many of whom were repressed or harassed by the authorities on their return to the USSR.

The files contain biographical information, Ostarbeiter letters and memoirs, documents issued by the German authorities (identity cards, employment records, official letters, travel documents etc); filtration camps documents issued on return to the USSR; information from the state and government agency archives of the USSR, and from the tracing service of the International Red Cross; personal documents (photographs, letters and postcards from Germany and from filtration camps).

Based on the material stored in the archive, we have compiled a personal database, which contains, amongst other data, information on the locations where the Ostarbeiter lived and worked when in Germany.

Programme Co-ordinator and Archivist: S. N. Tsibul’skaya
Memorial's collection of documents on the history of dissent during the post-Stalin era is the largest in Russia, and one of the largest such collections in the world. It includes 67 sections and categories, as well as a photo archive and a collection of rare small-volume publications. The archive now contains around 250,000 pages.

The archive originally grew around the following collections:

- "The papers of journalist and human rights activist, Chronid Lubarsky were donated by him to Memorial in 1992 (f. 103). The collection comprises materials from the "Strana i mir" (Country and world) journal, "Vesti iz SSSR" (News from the USSR) reports, and the publication "List of Political Prisoners in the USSR".

Since 1993 this collection has continued to grow through additions of private papers and documents from various dissident organisations: e.g., documents relating to the "Committee for Human Rights" (f. 168), the Moscow-Helsinki Group (f. 166), the "Fund for Assistance to Political Prisoners" (f. 161), the "Working commission for investigation of the use of psychiatry for political purposes" (f. 163), and the "Christian Seminar" of A. Ogorodnikov and V. Poresh (f. 169).

This archive has a representative selection of materials from "samizdat" periodical publications, including a complete collection of back copies of the Chronicle of Current Events (Khronika tekuschikh sobytiy) (f. 153) and other "samizdat" almanacs, reports and journals: "Sintaksis" (f. 118), "Summa" (f. 151), "Politicheskii Dnevnik" (Political Diary) (f. 128), "Obvodnyy Kanal" (f. 152), "Poiski i Razmyshleniya" (Seekings and Thoughts) (f. 159), as well as copies of early literary and journalistic collections: "Vskhody", "Feniks", "Sfinksy", "Bumerang" (f. 156), and journals of the 1970's and 1980's - "Veche", "Moskovskiy Sbornik", "Tarbut-Kultura" etc (ff. 156, 160).
Memorial has a collection of "samizdat" material collected by the International Institute for Research in Humanities and Politics and donated to "Memorial" in 1998 by V. Igrunov, the Institute's director (f. 129), and a collection of rare publications and materials from Radio Liberty (f. 158).

This archive also includes around twenty personal collections of documents and personal archives which contain letters, diaries, memoirs and reminiscences, drafts of articles and other work from the papers of A. Amal'rik, Yu. Galanskov, P. Prigorenko, A. Esenin-Vol'pin, A. Kosterin, V. Krasin, Yu. Kiselev, A. Marchenko, V. Nekipelov, F. Svetov and others.

The personal files collection (f. 155) includes individual documents concerning more than 350 persons who were involved in dissident activities.

The archive also contains photocopies of around 13,000 official index-cards records of political prisoners in the Mordovia and Perm' prison camps and the Vladimir prison (ff. 167, 171), regarding persons sentenced between March 1953 and 1986 for political and dissident activities. This collection is a uniquely complete set of data and an important resource for those doing research on opposition activity and repressive policies in the Soviet Union in the 1950's - 1980's.

There are "samizdat" and other materials connected with dissent of various kinds and formats: typewritten documents, photocopies, home-made illustrated albums. We have some unique items: a letter sent by a person in internal exile printed on fabric, a tape recording made secretly in a labour camp, and others. There are also around 5,000 photographs in the collection.

*Archive Director: T. M. Khromova*
The Oral History and Biography Centre collects, researches and publishes oral historical material. The centre is mainly concerned with the history of political repression in the USSR and in the Third Reich, the history of “everyday life”, and historical gender studies. The centre also runs methodological and educational seminars. Staff from the centre take part in national and international conferences and projects. Materials collected by the centre are transferred to the Memorial archives.

At present, the centre is conducting a number of research projects on the lives of victims of Soviet and Nazi totalitarian regimes. As part of two projects, "Women’s Memory of the GULAG" and "Children of ALZhIR" (Akmolinskiy Camp for Wives of Traitors to the Motherland), we have recorded around 200 interviews and collected thousands of documents, photographs, memoirs, letters and diaries, which document the fate of women married to “traitors to the Motherland” and sent, without trial, to the labour camps, and of their children, who were forcibly placed in children’s homes. The materials collected and, first and foremost, the oral testimonies, allow a researcher to follow the fates of those mothers who found themselves in the GULAG, to observe how their fate affected the lives of their children; and to reach a new understanding of the traumatic experience of the Soviet family.

1. Record of a search conducted on a minor. The Danilovsk reception center for children, Moscow, 1938
2. A letter to an investigating officer from a female prisoner, 1937
3. Annotation to a photo with grandma: a photo for a mother in a camp, 1939
4. Letter from an orphanage to a mother in the camp
Two projects, “Mauthausen Survivors” and “Forced Labour in Nazi Germany”, are dedicated to the collection of data on persons transported to Germany for forced labour. During the past few years, we have made over 270 audio and video-recordings of interviews, with former concentration camp inmates and Ostarbeiter (Eastern workers), which reflect not only the tragic circumstances of these people’s lives during the war years, but also the long period of discrimination against them after the war.

The audio and video archive was formed in the early 1990’s, and numbers over 2,000 items. It holds materials on the activities of “Memorial”, interviews with historians and former political prisoners, social activists and politicians. An electronic catalogue is available.

Archivist of the audio and video archive: Yu. V. Reifshneider
Director of the Centre: I. L. Scherbakova