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## The Imperial Russian Revision Lists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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*One of the most important resources for social and family historians researching in the former Russian Empire are the revision lists, a series of ten enumerations of the population conducted between 1719 and 1858. Listing the members of each household among taxable classes of people across the Russian Empire, the revisions lists are useful for studying historical population demographics and reconstructing family relationships. An awareness of these records and where to access them can be useful for Slavic librarians to facilitate the research of Russian historians and genealogists. This article provides an overview of the history and content of the revision lists with a survey of available collections online and offline.*

*KEYWORDS: Russian Empire, revision lists, census, social history, genealogy, family history, demographics, archives, microfilming, digitization, online databases*

The Imperial Russian revision lists will be familiar to those acquainted with Nikolai Gogol's 1842 satirical novel *Dead Souls*.<sup>1</sup> The story revolves around a scheme by one Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov to enrich himself and elevate his social status by "acquiring" souls (i.e. serfs) who are deceased, but still

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listed in the most recent revision list as belonging to their landowners. The scheme promised to reduce the landowners' tax burden by taking the serfs off their books, whereas Chichikov secretly intended to take out a large loan against his new human collateral and abscond. Of course, this fictional scenario is absurd, and the plan fails in hilarious fashion, but aside from being an apt commentary on the ills of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian society, the story is instructive about the nature of the revision lists themselves. They were a type of census conducted periodically in Russia, used for levying taxes on each "soul" or person in a taxable class, primarily serfs. Landowners were charged a tax based upon the number of eligible serfs living on their land, according to the latest revision list. As serfs died in between revisions the tax burden would remain the same until the next revision was taken.

The revision lists, or *revizkiye skazki* in Russian, are among the most important historical records of the Russian Empire. In several ways comparable to the U.S. federal censuses, but beginning seven decades earlier, they list family members by household, with information about the residence location, family relationship, social status, age and gender. Ten revisions were conducted, providing a portrait of the common population of the empire at irregular intervals, from as few as four to as many as twenty-nine years apart, starting in 1719 by decree of Peter the Great and ending in 1858, three years prior to the 1861 emancipation of the serfs decreed by Tsar Alexander II. Predating even the *metricheskiye knigi* [metrical books], church records of births, marriages, and deaths, decreed by Peter in 1722<sup>2</sup>, the revision lists are a valuable resource for studying the social history of the family in the Russian Empire, analyzing population demographics, and reconstructing family relationships for genealogical research.

For a century and half, the revision lists were merely a historical footnote giving context to a popular work of Russian literature, except for the few academics researching Russian social history and demographics. Even then, the focus was more on statistical abstracts than the actual lists of household members. It wasn't until the 1990s, as unprecedented access to the archives of the former Soviet Union coincided with growing interest in family history, that these records began to gain greater attention. Microfilming efforts by FamilySearch in the mid-nineties raised awareness of the revision lists, which became the subject of numerous articles in genealogical society publications and the object of various indexing and transcription efforts.<sup>3</sup> However, microfilming efforts stalled within a decade amidst more regressive government policies. In recent years, most of the microfilmed records have been digitized by FamilySearch and archives in the Baltics have completed a few additional digitization projects from originals, yet overall coverage remains limited, leaving researchers in most areas of the former Russian Empire no option but to access the original paper documents in archive reading rooms. That, and the fact that one must first trace family lineage several generations in order connect to the latest of the revisions in 1858, have made these a relatively underutilized record set, despite their value.

For those fortunate enough to find records for their geographic area of interest online, or determined enough to access the originals on location, the revision lists offer a unique view into family life in Russia from the time of Peter the Great to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The following is closer look at the background, content, and organization of the revisions lists, with some suggestions on research methodology,<sup>4</sup> followed by a survey of available collections online and offline.

### **Establishing the revision lists**

The revision lists were part of a series of major reforms made by Peter the Great late in his reign as Tsar of Russia, culminating in the establishment of the Russian Empire. Prior methods of tax assessment in the Tsardom of Russia included the *pistsovyye knigi* [land survey books], in effect until 1646, an inefficient system that charged a tax on land ownership based on a variable unit of land called the *sokha*,<sup>5</sup> and the *podvornnyye perepisi* [household censuses], conducted four times between 1646 and 1717, which levied a flat per-household assessment [*podvornoye oblozheniye*]. Peter the Great's imperial ambitions required him to finance an enormous military and the household census was not bringing in enough tax revenue. A loophole in the definition of a household allowed for multiple families to be counted as a single household.<sup>6</sup> The solution was to tax individuals rather than households. In 1718, Peter the Great decreed the *podushnaya podat'* [soul tax], which would exact a tax for each male person or *dusha* [soul] in the taxable classes [*podatnyye sosloviya*].

The enumeration lists used to assess this new soul tax came to be known as revision lists since they required a lot of verification and correction and thus *revisiya* [revision] became synonymous with *perepis* [census].<sup>7</sup> In fact, the root meaning of *perepis* represents essentially the same concept of rewriting. In time, the Russian government would find other uses for the revision lists, including military conscription.<sup>8</sup>

### **Compiling the revision lists**

As illustrated in *Dead Souls*, the responsibility for maintaining the list of serfs living on the estates of landed aristocracy was that of the landlord, a task generally delegated to a steward. The taxes were the landowner's responsibility as well, although this cost was passed down to the serfs in the form of work obligations or rent. In villages where state peasants lived, the lists were compiled by the *starosta*

[elder] of the village corporation. In cities, the elders of urban corporations were responsible for the lists, which included various classes of urban dwellers. Landowners and village or urban corporations paid taxes based on the number of persons living under their stewardship as listed at the most recent revision. The total amount owed did not change between revisions, even if the population of the community increased or decreased. The same administrators who compiled the revision lists were responsible for collecting the taxes, recovering arrears, and punishing delinquent tax payers.<sup>9</sup>

The revisions lists were not conducted in a day, as was the later 1897 Russian census<sup>10</sup>, or even within set period within a given year, as with censuses in the United States and the United Kingdom., but almost always took multiple years to finalize. Since the lists were the responsibility of landowners and village or city elders, rather than paid government census takers, timeliness and overall compliance were an issue. No one likes paying taxes, so enumerators were not particularly motivated to expedite the process, and often took time to work through several drafts or revisions before finalizing the lists. Even after the official revision cycle was officially ended, corrections could still be submitted in subsequent years.

Once the individual lists were completed and submitted, local government bureaucrats had the task to extract the data to assess tax liability by estate and village or urban corporation, and of course, to collect. They also compiled statistical summaries to submit to the Imperial government, for the compilation population data by social class and geography for the entire empire. While the statistical abstracts for the empire were gathered, published, and preserved in Moscow, the original enumeration lists, with the names of household members, remained in the local communities, later to be preserved in state and local archives.

## **Overview of the ten revisions**

The **1<sup>st</sup> revision (1719-1724)** was established by decree of Peter I on 26 November 1718. Data gathering began in January of the following year. The government began collecting taxes in 1721 at a rate of 80 kopecks per male person per year. This rate was calculated by dividing the estimated taxable population of 5 million by the 4 million rubles needed to finance the army. When the revision was completed in 1724, the actual taxable population turned out to be 5.4 million. As a result, the tax rate was lowered to 74 kopecks. Corrections to the 1<sup>st</sup> revision continued to be made until 1727 and in 1725, the tax rate was lowered to 70 kopecks.

The **2<sup>nd</sup> revision (1743-1747)** began after the ascension of Tsarina Elizabeth. The tax rate was lowered to 60 kopecks when the revision began, but was raised again to 70 kopecks by the end of the revision. Although the revision was officially over in 1747, returns continued to be collected as late as 1756.

The **3<sup>rd</sup> revision (1761-1767)** was the first to include females. Also for the first time, the format of the revision lists was standardized and the returns were verified by the military.

The **4<sup>th</sup> revision (1781-1782)** was the first to include Belorussia and the Ukraine. Some peasants in Belorussia were allowed to pay in kind, usually in the form of flour.

The **5<sup>th</sup> revision (1794-1795)** coincided with an increase in the tax rate in 18 provinces to 1 ruble and 18 kopecks. The remaining provinces paid for the difference in kind until 1796, when they, too, were required to pay the increased tax in rubles. The tax was increased again to 1 ruble 26 kopecks in 1797 and in 1810, under Alexander I, to 2 rubles.

The **6<sup>th</sup> revision (1811)** was not completed due to the war with Napoleon. Females were not counted and verification was done hastily.

The **7<sup>th</sup> revision (1815-1817)** was begun to complete the 6th revision, following the defeat of Napoleon. A new standard two-page printed form was established, with males on the left page and females on the right. This format would remain essentially the same through the remaining revisions. The tax was raised a full ruble in 1816 and by another 30 kopecks in 1818. Corrections to this revision were still being made when the 8<sup>th</sup> revision began.

The **8<sup>th</sup> revision (1833-1835)** was the first to verify population data by comparing them to the metrical books. Some western provinces were excluded, but data from the previous revision was included. In 1839, Nicholas I began requiring the tax to be collected in silver and the tax was converted to 95 silver kopecks.

The **9<sup>th</sup> revision (1850-1851)** did not count some western provinces, since they had been included in a separate revision between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> revisions.<sup>11</sup>

The final **10<sup>th</sup> revision (1857-1858)** counted 33,390,748 males and a total population of 67,081,167 in European Russia, Siberia, and the Transcaucasian *krai*.<sup>12</sup> It was conducted shortly before emancipation and was used in the distribution of land to freed serfs. Taxes based on this final revision, however, continued to be collected from peasants and former serfs in European Russia until 1887 and until 1899 in Siberia.<sup>13</sup> Following the 10<sup>th</sup> revision, no national census was conducted in Russia until the First National Census in 1897.<sup>14</sup>

**Social classes included in the revision lists**



The population of Russia, as enumerated by the revision lists, was grouped by *sosloviye* [social class]. These fell into two main categories: the *podatnyye sosloviya* [taxed classes] and the *nepodatnyye sosloviya* [non-taxed classes]. At the tenth revision, the taxed classes comprised approximately 89.5%<sup>15</sup> of the population and of those the vast majority were *krest'yane* [peasants].

There were numerous categories of peasants. Most, however, fell into one of two main categories: serfs and state peasants. According to a statistical study of the tenth revision published in 1861 by Aleksandr Troynitskiy, the number of serfs in European Russia in 1858 totaled 21,976,232, or 36.5% of the total population. 91.7% of these were *pomeshchich'iyе krest'yane*, that is, peasants living on lands owned by the nobility. 1,467,378, roughly 6.7% of serfs, were *dvorovyye lyudi*, domestic serfs who lived and worked in the households of landowners. These two groups, together representing 98.4% of the serf population, were under common serfdom. The rest of the serf population consisted of various categories of peasants under conditional serfdom. These numbered only 354,324 in 1858, just 1.6% of the serf population.<sup>16</sup>

Even more numerous than the serfs were the state peasants [*gosudarstvennyye krest'yane*], also called *kazënnyye* or *chërnyе krest'yane*. These were peasants living on lands owned by the government rather than the landed aristocracy. In European Russia, they numbered approximately 25 million people, or 41.6% of the total population.<sup>17</sup>

The third largest taxable group consisted of various classes urban dwellers. These included the *kuptsy*, *tsekhovyye*, *meshchane* and *posadskiye lyudi*. The *kuptsy* were upper-class merchants. They were only subject to the tax until 1775, when they began to be taxed according to their declared capital.<sup>18</sup> The upper-middle class *tsekhovyye* were members of the artisans' guilds and trade corporations. The lower middle-class *meshchane* were petty tradesmen and craftsmen. They were

made exempt from the tax in European Russia in 1863. The *posadskyye lyudi* comprised the lowest urban class, consisting of retailers, makers of handicrafts and hired workers, comprised the lowest urban class .<sup>19</sup>

The *odnodvortsy* [single-homesteaders], were the descendants of Moscow servicemen who had been granted small land holdings on the southern frontier. Although they had the right to own land with serfs, they were not part of the nobility and were still subject to the tax. Between 1740 and 1860, their numbers grew from 453,000 to 1.9 million.<sup>20</sup>

Found chiefly in the Belorussian and Baltic provinces, the *shlyakhta*, were the former Polish petty nobility. When Russia annexed lands from Poland in the latter 18<sup>th</sup> century, Polish noblemen retained their lands and titles. The most elite of these were equal in status to the Russian nobility. The lesser *shlyakhta*, however, were reduced to the class of single-homesteader after the 1830 Polish uprising.<sup>21</sup>

Both the taxed and non-taxed populations were included in the first two revisions. The *dvoryane* [landed nobility], active duty military officers and civil servants were excluded from the next five revisions but included again in the final three. Some of the non-taxed classes continued to be included in the revision lists when others were excluded. Among those enumerated in all revisions were the post drivers or coachmen [*yamshchiki*]. Beginning with the fourth revision, the clergy and retired military officers were also enumerated. Although portions of the non-taxed classes were enumerated, they were not required to pay the tax.

Other groups designated in the revision lists included Jews [*yevrei*], colonists [*kolonisty*], foreigners [*inostrantsy*], free persons [*volnyye lyudi*], and others. Some national groups were excluded from early revisions. In fact, the first mention of foreigners did not occur until the fourth revision.<sup>22</sup>

## Organization of the revision lists

In addition to being grouped by social class, the revision lists are organized by locality, arranged by *guberniya* [province] and *uyezd* [district]. Unfortunately, the organization effectively stops there. Each archive file (roughly 1000 pages on average) contains hundreds of villages from a single district.

Although the villages are usually grouped into their particular *stan*, a lesser jurisdictional level than the district, this is not very helpful since the documents identify the *stan* by name while the available gazetteers only assign each *stan* a number. Besides, there are only two or three *stany* in each district, and, therefore, over a hundred villages in each *stan*. These villages are not indexed and do not appear to be in any no particular order.

The estate, village, or city is given in the description for each list, found on a cover sheet preceding the list, or in a heading at the top the first page of the list. Starting with the 7<sup>th</sup> revision in 1815, each page also included an additional short heading repeating the locality and other information. If the list was for an estate, the name of the estate or estate owner is usually given. Other information included in the list descriptions generally includes the date the list was made and the social class of those listed. Figure 1 shows an example of a cover sheet description for a list from the 9<sup>th</sup> revision for a bourgeois family in the city of Minsk in 1850. See Figures 2 for an example of a heading at the top of the first page in the list.

**FIGURE 1** Example of a cover sheet from the 9<sup>th</sup> revision, Minsk province, 1850<sup>23</sup>

[Insert Figure 1]

Here is a translation of the example in Figure 1:

#### Revision List

The one thousand eighteen hundred and fiftieth year October the twenty-eighth day in Minsk province city of Minsk about the family of the bourgeois Mikhail Shal'kevich living in the Minsk district in the settlement of Shal'kevich of the landed proprietress Prushinskaya.

By the decision of 24 February 1851 numbered in the ranks of the bourgeoisie of the city of Minsk.

In this example, the description indicates that the list to follow is for a single bourgeois family. Families of middle and upper classes were often listed on individual lists per family. If this were a list for peasants or other lower classes, the description would typically be followed by multiple pages of names, listing all the families in the same social class living on the same estate or in the same village or urban corporation. Usually, individual revision lists pertain to a single locality. Sometimes, however, a list can include persons from neighboring villages. This was because a landowner could own land with serfs in more than one village.

Besides such cover sheet descriptions, there may be other documents included with the revision lists, such as copies of imperial decrees, corrections and additions, and correspondence.

#### **Content of the revision lists**

Except for the lists from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> revisions, which only include males, all members of each household are listed by name. The patronymic and surname are usually only given for the head of the household, although children's names can be derived. Maiden names or patronymics of women are not always provided when the woman is not a female head of household. The relationships between individuals in a household are indicated. The male head of house is listed first, followed by his wife and children, with the words son or daughter for each, except in male-only revisions, which list only the sons. Beginning with the 7<sup>th</sup> revision, the lists span two pages with males listed on the left-hand page and females on the right.

Except for the 1<sup>st</sup> revision, there are two columns for the age of each male. The first is the age of the person at the previous revision, if enumerated in the same list and the second is the current age. If a male person was born or died since the previous revision, this is also noted. In some cases, the death year is also included.

Figure 2 is an example of a list from the 6<sup>th</sup> revision from the Tver province, showing the male peasants on an estate in Tver province. This is the first page in the list and includes a description in the heading at the top of the page. This page, which includes three households is followed by more than thirty pages of peasant households from the village of Utitsyn and several neighboring villages on the estates of two brothers, Sergey and Pëtr Petrovich Mel'gunovyy. In this example, one can see that in the second household, Andrey, the son of Yakovlev Nefed was age 21 in the 5<sup>th</sup> revision in 1794 or 1795 and died in 1800. He was born ca. 1773 and died at about the age of 27 or 28. There are also several children among the households listed who are indicated as *vnov rozhdennye* [newly born] since the last revision. See Table 1 for a full translation.

**FIGURE 2** Example from the 6th revision, Tver province, 1811<sup>24</sup>

[Insert Figure 2]

[Insert Table 1]

Figure 3 is an example of a list from the 9<sup>th</sup> revision in Minsk, showing the members of the same bourgeois household described the cover sheet example in Figure 1. This revision includes males and females, listed on the left and rights sides of a pre-printed form. See Table 2 for a translation. In this example, the father was promoted in social class from peasant to bourgeois since the prior revision, and so is appearing on the list for bourgeois for this locality for the first time. This is noted, and his previous age is not given. If only his prior age were noted, it would imply that he was included on the same list in the prior revision.

**FIGURE 3** Example from the 9th revision, Minsk province, 1850<sup>25</sup>

[Insert Figure 3]

[Insert Table 2]

### **Researching in the revisions lists**

From these examples, it is clear to see the value of the revision lists for researching genealogy and social history of the family. Because they document family relationships, one can trace lineage from generation to generation as well as make comparison studies of individual families or entire

communities at different time periods. By calculating birth years and often death years or approximate years, the researcher can also reference the same individuals in the church metrical books and other record types. Social historians will also find value in the statistical abstracts of the revisions lists, with their aggregate population data by geography and social class.

For historians interested in studying examples of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century village and family life in the Russian Empire, with no particular place or family in mind, or who are interested in studying the revision lists documents for their own sake, there is plenty of material available to dive right in and select records to study. But for targeted research of a specific individual or family, the prospect is more daunting. Because the revisions lists have not been collectively indexed by name, and the few indexes that do exist are limited to small, scattered localities, one cannot search the revisions lists the same as one would search censuses in places like the United States, Canada, or the United Kingdom. A name index would be an invaluable aid to research and would add a new dimension to the use of the revision lists: the ability to locate an individual without first knowing where they lived. A locality index alone would significantly reduce the amount of time required to locate individuals.

To find a specific family or individual, the researcher can't simply type it into a search, but must first know the name of the village or city where he or she resided and then painstakingly browse through collections by locality and time-period. As only a portion of the revision lists are online, this also may entail searching through microfilm or original paper collections. Knowing the village requires prior research in other records. It also requires knowing the historic name of the place and the name of the district [uyezd] and province [guberniya] during the Russian Empire period, with the use of maps<sup>26</sup> and gazetteers.<sup>27</sup>

Once you have determined the place where the person you are looking for resided, and know the historic jurisdictions, the next task is to locate the collection that includes that place. As indicated above, collections are generally organized by the province and the *uyezd*, and then by time period. Find the collection that contains the province, then search the contents to locate the right *uyezd* and year. The resource guide below can help. In some cases, finding aids and catalogs may provide help to locate specific cities and villages, though more often, one must wade through entire volumes, or multiple ones, for a given *uyezd*, scanning the cover sheet or page header descriptions to find the specific village. Once the village is found, there may be multiple lists for the same village. You'll then need to search the lists from that village name by name. Finding a specific individual in the process can take many days of research.

If the person you are looking for was a peasant, it is a good idea to search in the revision lists from neighboring villages as well. This is because the peasant from one village can be included in the same list as the village where their landlord resided, rather in a separate list for their own village. Also, some village corporations of state peasants included other smaller nearby villages. Urban lists might also include neighboring suburbs in the vicinity. When a revision list includes multiple villages, the additional villages are usually labeled within the list, but the list description at the beginning may only name the main village, as in the example from the 6<sup>th</sup> revision in Figure 2.

When searching, keep in mind everything you know about the individual you are looking for. You may need that information to differentiate between two Mikhail Mikhailovich's, for instance, using what you already have researched about the family structure and birth information. Also, be careful when limiting your search based on the social class. Although the revisions are grouped by social class, this may be misleading. Social classes could be fluid, as the example in Figure 3



illustrates. People could change their social standing, particularly those in cities, and distinctions between some of the social classes could be somewhat grey. A Jewish merchant, for example, may be grouped with Jews, with merchants, with Jewish merchants or even with foreigners.

Given the lists are in centuries old Russian handwriting, researching them is major challenge for those who are not proficient in Russian language and paleography, yet many researchers armed with key vocabulary and a Cyrillic alphabet primer, and a lot of practice, have been successful in navigating the lists. It's a good idea to have handy a dictionary of Russian surnames and given names.<sup>28</sup> If you are searching for Poles, Jews, Germans, etc., also consult a name dictionary for those languages or ethnic groups. The more familiar you are with names, the easier it will be for you to read them in the lists.

### **Limitations**

The difficulties of finding the right village to search for without indexes have already been described, but there are some other limitations. On the one hand, it is great to have the potential to trace a family for multiple generations, from the last revision in 1858 to the first revision in 1719. However, there are significant challenges to this. For one thing, because the last revision was completed in 1858, more than a century and a half ago, one has to first establish five to seven generations before connecting to families in the revision lists. It's not like North America U.K. censuses, where people can find parents or grandparents, or even themselves.

Once the researcher has traced a family back to 1858, the revision lists can potentially help trace the lineage back several more generations. However, getting back to 1719 will prove difficult in most cases, as records from the first three revisions are rare to find and later revisions also have gaps.

Digitization and microfilming efforts of FamilySearch and others have only reached about three dozen of the more than 130 state historical archives of the former Soviet Union, and less than half of those projects have progressed far enough to include the revision lists. For the most part, the revision lists are to be found in paper format in archive reading rooms of oblast state historical archives. Some of those collections aren't complete either, as the revision lists may also be found in the *rayon* [district] or municipal archives. In addition, revision lists from some regions, notably Moscow, have not been well preserved.

Error and incomplete enumeration are inherent in any attempt to list the population of an entire country. The revisions in Russia were no exception. Because each revision took years to complete, they do not provide as clear a picture of the population at a specific time as, for example, the U.S. censuses. Verification of information in the revision lists was inconsistently administered. In some cases, such as the 6<sup>th</sup> revision, verification was done hastily, thus increasing the chance for errors to be overlooked. Because the tax was based upon a head-count, serf owners were inclined to "hide" peasants from enumerators in order to ease the tax burden. Attempts to detect this kind of tax fraud sometimes backfired as increases in penalties only served to motivate serf owners to keep uncounted peasants hidden.

Most of the omissions in the revisions, however, were not oversights. Because only males were taxed, the revision lists originally excluded females. Because they were exempt from the tax, the non-taxed classes were also incompletely enumerated and some groups were excluded entirely. In addition, some nationalities were excluded from early revisions. Various regions were excluded from some revisions. Belorussia and the Ukraine were not included in the all-Russia revision until the 4<sup>th</sup>

revision. Russian Poland and Finland were not included in any of the revisions. Other remote regions, such as Transcaucasia and Bessarabia were not included in all revisions.<sup>29</sup>

### **Accessibility**

The good news is that most of the revision list, at least from the 4<sup>th</sup> revision onward, have been preserved to high archival standards in the state historical archives across Russia and other former countries of the Russian Empire. They are accessible in reading rooms and with quality finding aids to locate the volumes pertaining to a given *uyezd* and year. In most cases, one can find the revision lists organized into a single large fond for each historic province, usually with the title *revizkiye skazki* and under the original authorship of the former provincial *kazënnaya palata* (financial office). The state historical archives generally list their holdings on their official websites, and one can look them up to find out the fond for the revision lists collection. Lists located in *rayon* [district] or municipal archives may be more difficult to find, because these archives don't generally have as much readily accessible information about their holdings, and may not be as prepared to accommodate researchers as the state historical archives.

Granted, at the state historical archives there are plenty of hurdles to cross to access the records, too. Usually, one must register with the archive, order materials in advance, endure limits on the number of files that can be ordered and fees to retrieve or copy documents, and encounter busy archivists with limited time to help with record look ups. Corresponding with archives to request lookups is hit and miss, as the time involved to search the revision lists is more than most archivists

are willing to put up with for a modest lookup fee. In most cases, researchers will need to make the trip in person, or else hire a trusted researcher to go to the archive for them.

The efforts of FamilySearch and some archives to microfilm and digitized revisions list was referenced earlier. As mentioned, these efforts have only touched the revision lists in about a dozen and half provinces of the former Russian Empire so far. A small number of archives are starting to digitize their own records of genealogical interest, including metrical books and some revisions lists. Hopefully, this will become a trend. FamilySearch is working to scan its entire collection, including all of the revision lists it once microfilmed. Most of that is complete for the revision lists.

FamilySearch is also continuing its efforts to regain access, after nearly a decade hiatus, to preserve more of these records and make them accessible through digitization. The resource list at the end of this article lists digitized and microfilmed collections of revision lists.

Other efforts to improve access to the vital information in the revision lists include small scale indexing and transcription projects by genealogical societies. The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) has sent researchers to the archives in the Black Sea and Volga regions to create transcriptions of the revision lists for whole villages by revision. They have published many volumes of these. They do not contain reproductions of the original documents, but comprehensive transcriptions of the names, relationships, ages, and status of the residents of those former German colonies. A list of their publications is available on their web site.<sup>30</sup> A number of libraries, including the Family History Library in Salt Lake City have published copies and made them available for patrons. Other examples of such efforts include revision list indexing projects for German-Russians on the site web site Odessa<sup>31</sup> and for Jews in revision lists at JewishGen.<sup>32</sup>

## **Conclusion**

After metrical books, the revision lists are the most important documents for genealogical research in the former Russian Empire. While they do not contain actual vital event information, such as birth dates, they provide valuable clues to family linkage and approximate birth and death years. They cover the vast majority (95%) of the population, especially the peasant classes. They list all persons who lived during a certain time span, not just those who were born, married or died in that time period. Where vital records of some denominations are not well preserved, such as Jewish congregations in Minsk province, the revision lists may be able to fill in the gaps. In addition to their genealogical value, they are useful to social historians, sociologists, economists, demographers and other researchers.

At this point only a small percentage of the revision lists are available online, but this will grow in the years to come. And there is always hope that current gaps in the state archive collections can be filled by locating more records in other archives, especially for the first three revisions. It could be decades before we have a comprehensive and fully-indexed collection of the revisions lists. When that happens, it will rival the best census collections in the world and will be a huge boon for research in the Russian Empire. In the meantime, determined researchers can take advantage of the records that are available online and offline. The following resource guide may be of help.

## **Revision Lists Resource Guide**

[Insert Tables 3-5]

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<sup>1</sup> First Russian edition: Nikolay V. Gogol', *Pokhozhdisha Chichikova ili Mërtviye Dushi: Poema* (Moscow, Universitetskiy Tipografiya, 1842). First English edition: Nikolai V. Gogol', *Dead Souls: or, Tschitchikoff's Journeys*, Isabel Florence Hapgood trans. (London : John and Robert Maxwell, 1887).

<sup>2</sup> Eugene M. Avrutin, *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 33.

<sup>3</sup> German from Russia genealogical groups in North America have visited archives to make transcriptions of numerous revision lists from German colonies in the Black Sea and Volga regions, and have made these available for sale, but access to the originals usually requires a visit to the archives.

<sup>4</sup> This article is a significantly revised and expanded edition of a work the author created for a small genealogical society newsletter: "Soul Searching in the Russian Censuses of the 18th and 19th Century." FEEFHS Newsletter, vol. V, no. 3-4, Fall/Winter 1997.

<sup>5</sup>Sergei G. Pushkarev, *Dictionary of Russian Historical Terms from the Eleventh Century to 1917* (New Haven: Yale, 1970), 136-137.

<sup>6</sup>Evsey Domar, preface to Aleksandr G. Troynitskiy, *The Serf Population in Russia According to the 10<sup>th</sup> National Census*, Elaine Herman trans. (Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1982), iii.

<sup>7</sup>Pushkarev, 116.

<sup>8</sup>Pushkarev, iv.

<sup>9</sup>Arnol'd F. Brokgauz and Il'ya A. Efron, *Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'*, v. 24 (S.-Peterburg: Tipo-Lit. I.A. Efrona, 1894), 126-127.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas K. Edlund, "The First National Census of the Russian Empire," *FEEFHS Quarterly: A Journal of Central and East European Genealogical Studies* 7, no. 3-4 (1999), 91.

<sup>11</sup>Information regarding the increase in the tax rate in the first nine revisions comes from Brokgauz, 123. Other information comes from Domar, vi-xvii.

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<sup>12</sup>A. Troynitskiy, *The Serf Population in Russia According to the 10<sup>th</sup> National Census*, Elaine Herman trans.

(Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1982), 63.

<sup>13</sup>Brokgauz and Efron, 128.

<sup>14</sup>Edlund, 91

<sup>15</sup>Brokgauz and Efron, 125.

<sup>16</sup>Troynitskiy, *op. cit.*, 35-63.

<sup>17</sup>Pushkarev, 47.

<sup>18</sup>Brokgauz and Efron, 124.

<sup>19</sup>Pushkarev, 55-56, 59, 161.

<sup>20</sup>Pushkarev, 73.

<sup>21</sup>A.N. Narbut, *Genealogiya Belorussi*, v. 1 (Moskva: "Anna", 1995), 24.

<sup>22</sup>Domar, vi-ix, xi, xiii, xvi-xvii.

<sup>23</sup> FamilySearch.org, "Revision lists: Minsk (province), 1795-1874",

<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TK-N9RH-7?i=774&cat=767311>, image 775 (accessed 14 Jul 2017).

<sup>24</sup> FamilySearch.org, "Revision lists: Minsk (province), 1795-1874",

<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9MM-28T2?i=79&wc=M699->

[1P8%3A224254401%2C235329501%2C235360801&cc=1929530](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TK-N9RH-7?i=776&cat=767311), image 80 (accessed 2 Jul 2017).

<sup>25</sup> FamilySearch.org, "Revision lists: Minsk (province), 1795-1874",

<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9TK-N9RH-7?i=776&cat=767311>, image 777 (accessed 29 Jul 2017).

<sup>26</sup>Harvard University's "Imperiia: Mapping the Russian Empire" at

<https://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/russianempire> is an excellent online map showing *guberniya* and *uyezd* boundaries and historic place names of the Russian Empire, layered with Google Earth maps. It includes a gazetteer and multiple layers that can be toggled on and off for various time periods.

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<sup>27</sup>The most authoritative gazetteer for the Russian Empire is *Spiski Naseleennykh Mest Rossiyskoy Imperii*, 65 v. (Sanktpeterburg: Tsentral'nyy Statisticheskyyi Komitet, 1859-1901). Some provinces are missing from this set, but there are substitutes, such as *Spiskok Naseleennykh Miest Minskoi Gubernii* (Minsk: Minskiy Gubernskiy Statisticheskii Komitet, 1909) for Minsk province. Online copies of these gazetteers can be found on the State Public Historical Library of Russia's web site at <http://www.shpl.ru/>.

<sup>28</sup>Dictionaries of Russian given names and surnames can be found in the FamilySearch Catalog at <https://familysearch.org/catalog/search>, under the place subject Russia - Names, Personal - Dictionaries. Behind the Name, at <https://www.behindthename.com/>, is a good online dictionary of given names for various languages, including Russian.

<sup>29</sup>Domar, viii-xvii.

<sup>30</sup> The revision list publications of AHSGR can be found at <https://ahsgr.site-ym.com/store/ListProducts.aspx?catid=490211>.

<sup>31</sup> The site Odessa: A German-Russian Genealogical Library is located at <http://www.odessa3.org>.

<sup>32</sup> JewishGen is found at <http://www.jewishgen.org>.