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Revisiting the History of Centralization of the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire: 1865-1918

Abstract

The article reviews the history of the General Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire. Its history remains little-studied. The archive was created in 1865 as a result of consolidation of the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs central agencies. It was created as a part of the General Affairs Department. The attempt to centralize the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was inconsistent. The current archives of the Department for Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions and the Zemstvo Department were preserved, although their “old years” materials were transferred to the General Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The archive of the Police Department also remained separate. In the early 19th century, the director of this department offered to transfer its archives to the General Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but it was called off due to lack of space. The main obstacle to successful centralization of the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was insufficient funding and space. Construction of a building to house the archives did not help. In the early 20th century the staff of the archive consisted of three people. The General Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs deposited files for storage, provided their expertise and description, as well as reference files. There was no research or publication. The archive did not gain status of an independent institution within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This situation persisted until 1917. But despite all the difficulties the General Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs successfully carried out its work on the storage of archival documents, as well as reference work in the interests of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The procedure adopted for receiving, organizing, and storing files in the archive complied with the principle of provenance and promoted later adoption of this principle in the Russian archives. The efforts of archival staff preserved documents of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Empire until in 1918 they were included of the Unified State Archival Fond of the RSFSR.

Keywords

General Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire, General Affairs Department, archive of the Department for Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions, archive of the Zemstvo Department, Police Department, centralization of archives

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