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Journey of the USA Citizen Frank Whitson Fetter to the USSR: History of the Foreign
Photographic Collection in the Duke University Library (1930)

Abstract

The article presents the results of studying the Whitson Fetter (1899-1991) photo collection on Fetter's visit to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1930. He spent six days in Moscow and six weeks in Kazan, then took a trip down the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. In his journey, Frank W. Fetter took about 330 photographs, which are currently stored in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University (Durham, North Carolina, USA). The article reconstructs the origin of the photographic collection (USSR, June-August 1930) and its life in the family archive of Frank W. Fetter (USA, 1930-1991). In 1992, according to his will, the entire archive, including photographs, was transferred to the library of the Duke University. Thus, the attention is focused on the library activities in acquisition, storage, accounting, and usage of Frank W. Fetter's photographs (1992 - present). In this context, 2008 is of particular importance: it is then that the photographs were scanned and published on the website. The study is based on content and discourse analysis of the photographs; it uses comparative method for studying Frank W. Fetter paper collection at the Duke University library and materials from Russian archives, interviews of participants in the documents transfer to archival storage and photographs digitization. Thus, in a first time case-study of a single photograph collection, the authors trace the route of photographs from their creator to their researchers. Using photographs taken in the USSR, but stored outside Russia, is to supplement the historiography with valuable information on the history of photograph collections and to consider photographic documents on the history of Soviet Russia as an item of storage in foreign archives. The article may be of interest to historians, archivists, museum specialists, curators, and all researchers studying photo documents as objects of storage.

Keywords

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, manuscripts in the Duke University library (Durham, North Carolina, USA), Frank W. Fetter photographs, digital photograph collection, preservation and conservation of photographs, Soviet Union, Kazan, Ernest Zitser: digital collections "Americans in the Land of Lenin: Documentary Photographs of Early Soviet Russia."

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