

Scientific article

УДК

929.52+930.85+930.25+93/94+930.253+930.255+374.3+374.71+379.82+379.825+379.822+929.52+908+394.014+615.01+615.014+771.2+771.3+771.13

doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2023-3-861-875

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Photographic Heritage of the Kazan Pharmacist Arnold Brening: History and Composition of the Collection (1904–37)

Abstract

The article presents results of studying photographic heritage of the Kazan pharmacist Arnold Brening (1879–37). Its first part examines his biography drawing on documents from the State Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan and on private archive of his granddaughter Tatyana Brening. Close attention is paid to the professional development of A. Brening, from his apprenticeship at the Brening Heirs Pharmacy to obtaining a pharmacist's degree at the Imperial Kazan University, from tenant to owner of the pharmacy at the corner of Bolshaya Prolomnaya (Bauman street, since 1930) and Universitetskaya. In the same part, the history of formation and development of his photographic practices is revealed. Brening's passion for photography began during his military service in Harbin in 1904–06. Having returned to Kazan, he continued taking photographs. He subscribed to photographic literature, experimented with retouching and technologies, bought new equipment. Brening regularly cultivated his skills during his walks with camera, "photographic excursions." He took pictures of architecture, street scenes, town events. After his marriage, his photographic repertoire expanded to portraits of his wife. Brening not only showed his photographic results to a close circle of friends, he sent them to photographic journals and exhibitions in Moscow. After the Russian Revolution, his family lived in Siberia about three years. Upon his return, Brening continued to work in the field of pharmaceuticals and to take photographs of the city and its suburban area. In the 1930s, he worked at Osoaviakhim and later at the Institute of Chemical Technology. In 1937 he was arrested and shot. Among incriminating evidence was his photograph taken in 1917. The second part of the article presents the history of Brening's photographic heritage. It establishes current location of its disparate parts: at the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, the State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Zelenodolsk Museum of Historical and Cultural Heritage, personal archives of citizens; and briefly demonstrates some items. Until late 1980s, Brening's photographs remained forgotten. They were preserved thanks to the efforts of his wife, children, and granddaughter, and actualized in active work of local historians, journalists, museum specialists in the 1990s–2000s. This article is one of the first steps in scientific understanding of Brening's photographic heritage.

Keywords

Historical sources, photodocument, photographic collections, photography studies, amateur photography, Arnold Brening, Kazan.

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Submitted 1.02.2023, published (for citation):

ABILOVA, R. O., KIRILLOVA, Ya. Yu. Fotograficheskoe nasledie kazanskogo aptekarya Arnol'da Breninga: istoriya i sostav kollektzii. 1904-1937 gg. [Photographic Heritage of the Kazan Pharmacist Arnold Brening: History and Composition of the Collection (1904–37). In Russ.]. IN: Vestnik arhivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2023, no. 3, pp. 861-875. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2023-3-861-875

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