

Scientific article

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2026-2-607-622

For citation

Mironova, E. V. (2026). Socio-economic portrait of female employees of the postal and telegraph department of the Kazan province, based on archival documents from the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries, Herald of an Archivist, no. 2, pp. 607-622. DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2026-2-607-622

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Socio-economic portrait of female employees of the postal and telegraph department of the Kazan province, based on archival documents from the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries

Abstract

The article examines the social and economic status of female telegraph and telephone operators in the Kazan province in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Drawing on service records of local postal service providers, as well as memorial books and address calendars from the Kazan province, it presents the proportion of women employed by the postal and telegraph service, as well as the requirements for their educational level, marital status, and age. It also examines working conditions and workplace challenges, identifies factors influencing staff turnover, and identifies changes in labor legislation regulating the rights of postal and telegraph service employees, particularly women. In analyzing the financial situation of female employees, the author identifies factors influencing wages (taking into account career advancement, penalties, and incentives), and compares these wages with those of their male colleagues, as well as women in other professions. A separate article explores their participation in certain socio-political events in the Russian Empire in the early 1900s. It concludes that women played an increasingly important role in the development of telegraph and telephone services as a tool for modernization in the provinces. Despite their small share of the workforce, telegraph and telephone operators held numerous rank-and-file positions. They were the ones responsible for connecting subscribers and listening to complaints about poor service. Despite these costs, their wages allowed them to lead independent lives, provide for their own household, and even support close relatives financially, making this work a sought-after profession among educated women. The study is based on previously unpublished archival materials. The use of service records as the primary source of research necessitated the use of methods for analyzing and synthesizing the data contained in the forms. Since the structure of the records remained virtually unchanged, this made it possible to compare data

from different decades and compile a comprehensive portrait of female postal and telegraph employees based on key socio-economic parameters. This type of source is quite informative and allows not only to present the general characteristics of telegraph and telephone operators, but also to study their professional qualities - the ability to handle equipment, proficiency in foreign languages, and building relationships with subscribers and administration.

Keywords

Post-reform period of the Russian Empire, female labor, women serving in the Russian Empire, information and communication infrastructure, telegraph operators, telephone operators, service lists, province, modernization.

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The article was received in the editorial office on 24.3.2025, recommended for publication on 20.03.2026

You can read completely article in the russian historic-archival magazine “The Herald of an Archivist”. Read more about terms of subscription [here](#) .

Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .