

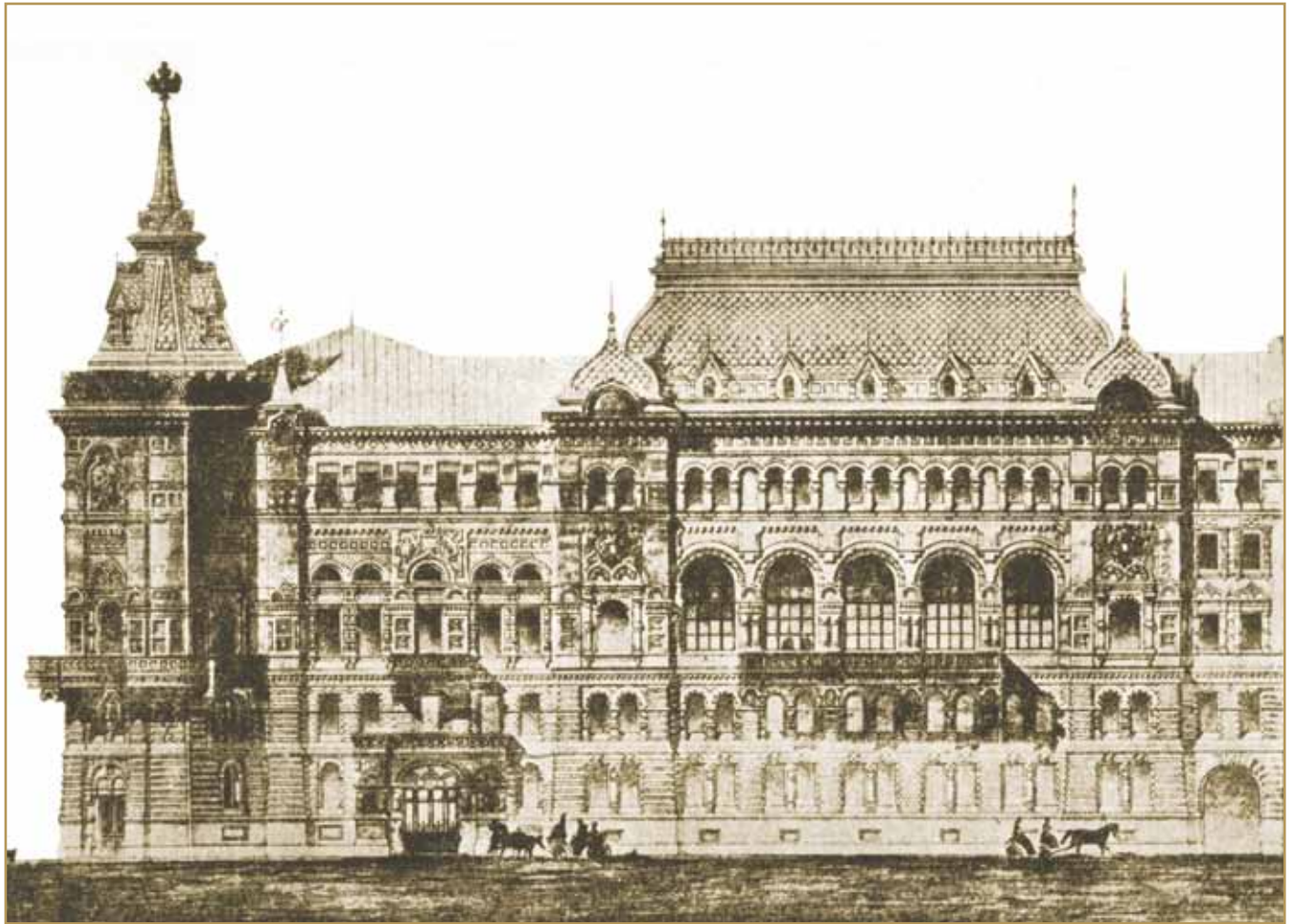


*Officer Assembly
House*



S. Kononov

Officer Assembly House





n the very heart of St. Petersburg, at the intersection of Liteyny Prospekt and Kirochnaya Ulitsa, there is a majestic old building with an extravagant facade and a high corner tower.

This is the former Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy, as officially titled at the time of construction. Since then, the name has changed several times, eventually transforming into the current Russian Federation Ministry of Defense Order of the Red Star Officer Assembly House of the Western Military District.

This building and the institution it houses have a unique history. St. Petersburg used to be the military capital of the Russian Empire. The indications of this former role are scattered all over the city in the form of several surviving barracks of the Guards regiments, cadet corps, military schools, hospitals and headquarters. Some of them have been converted into residential houses, shops, museums or state agencies, but others still serve as military schools and various facilities of the modern army. In most cases, the purpose of each such building has changed since the pre-revolutionary times, which is quite understandable in view of the ongoing advancements and upgrades in military weapons, tactics, strategy and composition of the army. However, the building designed for the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy has retained its original purpose and is still used for recreation, education, advanced studies and for raising the team spirit of Russian officers.



*The Emperor Alexander III,
by unknown artist,
1890*



Throughout the entire history of the Russian Empire, Russian officers have always been the core of the regular army and navy, as well as the most tight-knit, educated, patriotic and heroic part of the Russian society. Officers have always represented the army as a whole and have been indicative of the state of the armed forces. In various epochs, the sovereigns, as the supreme authority, and the higher command have always encouraged unity among officers, both when on duty and not. In 1718, Peter I introduced in St. Petersburg the so-called “assemblies”, evening meetings of the upper and middle class involving dancing, games, small talk and open discussions. Officers of the Guards were also expected to attend these meetings. With certain reservations, this may be regarded as the emergence of officer assemblies in Russia.

In the XVIII century, several special clubs were opened, where army and naval officers could gather for recreation and companionship. This initiative was encouraged due to the unsettled state of the officers’ life and the need to distract young single officers from aimless pastime and mischief. However, at that point, such institutions were very few.

In the first half of the XIX century, it became more urgent to arrange special venues so that officers of each regiment could spend time together, when away from duty. In St. Petersburg and its environs, in the stationing area of the Guards, the duty room was generally used for these purposes. This was the name of the place of service of the duty officer of the regiment in the barracks. It was common practice to arrange the duty room in a spacious hall and provide it with the best available furniture. There were sofas for accommodation, cabinets for the regimental library and paintings to decorate the walls. Where possible, separate rooms would be allocated for libraries, serving as lounge areas for officers. The composition of books in all regimental libraries was regulated by the command.

At least half of them had to be serious literature contributing to the improvement of military skills and proficiency in sciences.

By the 1870s, it became common to allocate several rooms, such as a library, a billiard room, a card room, a dining room and, later, ballrooms, for the recreation of officers in each regiment of the Guards. Respective venues were referred to as officer assembly houses.

Before that, there were no centralized cafeterias for officers. Simple meals for the soldiers were distributed at soldiers' canteens in the territory of the barracks. The meals were provided at the expense of the funds allocated by the state, which also covered the costs of company associations. However, officers were left in charge of their own meals. Young officers would dine in taverns or at homes of their hospitable acquaintances. Many of them would fail to correctly allocate their salaries and would be long out of the money or in debt by the next salary payment. Senior officers and generals, being respectable adults with families and much higher salaries, dined at own state apartments in the territory of the barracks. The regimental commander, as a hospitable host, would often invite officers to dine at his quarters. Back in the 1820s, in certain regiments, officers would form associations in order to jointly solve their household issues. One or two dozen people would collect their money to dine together daily and thereby ensure the much required savings. In the 1870s, canteens for officers were also arranged in the regiments. These were intended not only to provide officers with inexpensive quality meals, but also to rally a united family of officers at a common table. Therefore, officers would not have to leave the barracks, deserting their soldiers for extended periods of time.

In this manner, officer assembly houses, initially spontaneous and self-funded, developed into official venues funded by the state and attended by the military command. Compulsory charters were formulated for such houses, with the first published back in 1874. The tradition was thereby converted into an official law. The purpose of such officer assembly houses was to improve the team spirit, establish and maintain comradeship, promote the development and improvement of military education, provide financial assistance to officers and organize recreation and leisure. Each officer assembly house was part of the respective regiment and was managed by the regiment commander. All regimental officers were always members of the assembly. Regimental doctors and officials were not included as official members, but were allowed to attend assembly meetings. Women were allowed only upon special authorization, usually for balls and regimental celebrations. In the Guards, apart from the regi-



Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, by Ilya Repin, 1910

Officer Assembly House



*Anton Antonovich
Kersnovskaya —
Russian publicist,
military historian*

mental assembly houses in the barracks, summer assembly venues were also arranged near the village of Krasnoye Selo, during the camping periods. These were wooden buildings, not unlike country cottages.

And yet, such regimental assemblies were not enough. Each regiment was something of a self-contained family with own traditions, while the state was aiming to achieve actual unity between officers of different regiments, different kinds of troops and various specialties, between the Army, the Guards and the Navy. The exchange of opinions and experience on military matters and joint recreation and leisure activities were to develop the atmosphere of brotherhood and partnership, which is one of the cornerstones of the military power of any state.

This problem in the life of officers of the turn of the XIX-XX centuries was mentioned by military historian A.A. Kersnovsky as follows:

“Russian officers were far from united. You would not refer to them as to a state within a state, as they called the Prussian-German officer corps. Neither could they boast of the comradely spirit of the Austrians, who had always been on a first-name basis, field marshal to ensign, since the times of the ‘Thirty Years’ War. Being extremely diverse in origin and education and the most “democratic” in the world in terms of its composition, the Russian officer corps was united only by their loyalty to the tsar and by their sacrificial love for the Motherland...

A more or less united “regimental family” was a usual phenomenon, but there was no such thing as a “common officers’ family”. Discord and alienation had established between various types of troops and even between separate units of a single type of troops. Guardsmen treated army men with cold arrogance. In response, insulted soldiers envied the guardsmen and had no fraternal feelings towards them. Cavalrymen would look down upon infantrymen. Moreover, there were no warm feelings within in the cavalry itself either, between the regular troops and the Cossacks. Both artillerymen and sappers had their own isolated communities. And all combatants jointly hated the General Staff. When all three types of troops were stationed in a provincial garrison, there would always be three separate assembly venues: for the infantry, for the cavalry and for the artillery.”

The creation of the general Officer Assembly House in St. Petersburg was also prompted by the poor living conditions of military officers. At the end of

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the XIX century, only one half out of 2,500 officers of the St. Petersburg garrison served in their regiments and attended regimental meetings. The other half served in different main departments and military institutions, where no such meetings were conducted. In addition, over 3.5 thousand officers a year would visit the capital on official business. Their accommodation was a serious problem due to excessively high costs.

Officers and regimental ladies in the Colonel's meeting, 1907-1914



The transfer of the banners on Kirochnaya street, 1911

*Count Dmitry Milyutin
(1816-1912),
War Minister —
(1861-1881)*



The idea to rally the entire officer corps of the Russian army at a single assembly house, where anyone would feel as a welcome member of a united family, was supported back in the 1870s by the Military Minister of that time, D.A. Milyutin.

Its implementation was hampered by the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, followed by a surge of activity of revolutionary terrorists, the death of Emperor Alexander II in 1881 and the intensification of the struggle against the internal enemy. These events ultimately delayed the establishment of a unified officer assembly by a total of two decades.

The successful practices of regimental assemblies and numerous requests on behalf of military officers and generals prompted Emperor Alexander III to establish a general assembly house for all Russian officers. A significant role in this was played by the supreme generals and by Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, brother of the emperor, commander of the troops of the Guards and the St. Petersburg Military District. The resolution was issued in 1893, however Alexander III was not destined to live up to see its outcome.

In 1894, the new emperor, Nicholas II, realizing the importance and urgency of uniting the army, fully upheld the project of his uncle Vladimir Alexandrovich and ordered the Military Minister, Infantry General Petr Vannovsky, to appoint a special commission, select a venue, draw up a plan and allocate the required funds. The building would have the following facilities:

- the actual Officer Assembly House, as a place for rest and useful activities;
- rooms for accommodation of visiting officers (a hotel);
- the Economic Society of the Army and Navy (stores, uniforms and shoemakers' shops, food stores).

The last function was due to another urgent problem. The life in St. Petersburg was so expensive that



*The Emperor Nicholas II,
by Lipgart*

officers could barely afford proper clothes and uniforms. While soldiers received uniforms and ammunition from the state, officers were expected to purchase all of the above at their own expense. Soviet and post-Soviet people often believe that guardsmen and staff officers (and indeed almost all other officers) of the Russian army were rich aristocrats, counts and princes, wallowing in luxury and spending all their free time in sprees or throwing money around. In fact, only few officers could afford extravagant

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*P.S. Vannovsky,
by Alexey Korzukhin, 1890*

*P.P. Pavlov, engraving by I.
Matyushina from P. Borel*



living. Most of them had to count every penny of their modest salaries, since they had no other income.

This problem was partially solved with the creation of a corporate joint-stock company in St. Petersburg, where all Guards officers of the local garrison could acquire a certain share. Officers and officials of the Navy and Army were also allowed to contribute and acquire a share, thus becoming the so-called "annual subscribers". The Economic Society of Officers of the Guards Corps was established in 1891 with the following aim, as stated in its Charter: "To supply its consumers with the required items... mainly uniforms, equipment, shoes and underwear of good quality, at the lowest possible prices". The resulting number of shareholders was near four thousand people. The largest of them were the Grand Dukes serving in various Guards regiments. Emperor Alexander III personally donated 25,000 rubles, which formed the emergency working capital of the company. In company stores, any officer could afford a complete set of proper quality inexpensive clothes, since all goods were supplied directly from the manufacturers. Branches of the stores were opened in Peterhof, Gatchina and Tsarskoye Selo, where the Guards regiments were also quartered, and in Krasnoye Selo, where the Guards camped every summer. It was also decided for the main store to be combined with the Officer Assembly House.

For the construction of the Assembly House, Military Minister Petr Vannovsky established a special commission, chaired by Infantry General Platon Pavlov. By resolution of the commission, a land plot owned by the military telegraph department and located at the intersection of Liteyny Prospekt and Kirochnaya Ulitsa was selected for the construction projected. Since the beginning of the XIX century, the land plot had been occupied by a wooden house built for the office of military settlements associated with the name of Count A.A. Arakcheyev. As estimated by the commission, the treasury would have to spend 1,200,000 rubles for the erection of the new stone building, 110,000 rubles for respective facilities and equipment and 35,000 rubles for its

maintenance during the first year of operation, summing up to a total of 1,345,000 rubles. Subsequent operation would also require state funding, since the Assembly House was not to bring any income to the treasury due to its expected affordability and accessibility for all officers. The Assembly House was not intended as a profitable enterprise, but rather served a higher purpose that was beyond any monetary issues. Ultimately, the security of the country and its very existence depended on the cohesion and unity of the officer corps and on the level of their knowledge and skills.

Nicholas II, having secured the support of the military and finance ministries, approved all respective expenses, fully understanding their obvious urgency. When in emigration, A.A. Kersnovsky, greatly impacted by the collapse of the Russian Empire and the revolutionary turmoil, wrote the following:

“Nicholas II regarded the military as his family members, instinctively guessing that officers were the most reliable safeguard for the state. Seeing all the falseness and scheming flourishing in his court, the emperor would spend the last years before the World War seeking the company of officers and would attend their assemblies without ceremony”.

This refers to both the regimental assemblies of St. Petersburg and its suburbs and the assemblies of the army and navy, the favorite projects of Nicholas II, to which he had been a generous sponsor and a frequent visitor.



*Liteynaya street. View
of the Arakcheev's house,
photo 1890*





Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich entrusted the construction of the Assembly House to the chief architect of his court, Alexander von Hohen, a well-known and talented master, an academician, an architecture teacher at the Baron Stieglitz Central School of Technical Drawing, the Nikolaevsky Engineering Academy and the Institute of Civil Engineers. The most famous buildings designed by von Hohen in the late XIX and early XX centuries currently include the A.V. Suvorov Museum on Kirochnaya Ulitsa, the building of the Nikolaevsky Academy of the General Staff on Suvorovsky Prospekt, the residence of K.A. Vargunin on Furshtatskaya Ulitsa, the mansion of M.F. Kshesinskaya on Troitskaya Ploschad, as well as other remarkable and original mansions of the center of St. Petersburg.

The preliminary design of the building was developed by architect von Hohen and professor of the Nikolaevsky Engineering Academy, Colonel-Engineer Viktor Ivanov. The respective detailed design was then prepared by a group of military engineers, consisting of a friend and colleague of von Hohen, Colonel Wilhelm Gauger, and captain Alexander Donchenko, with the advice of a group well-known architects, including L.N. Benois and A.O. Tomishko.

The construction began in September 1895. The work was carried out under comprehensive government support, in the quick and well-regulated manner inherent to all military, without any bureaucratic delays. However, this was barely due to the military discipline. The urgency of completion of the Assembly House was evident, since it was eagerly expected by a large number of people. The construction process involved the application of the most advanced technology of the century, including the creation of a power plant, a boiler house, a steam heating system and a ventilation system.

The building was designed in the “Russian style”, very popular in the 1860-90s, which emphasized the national character and the Russian patriotism and resembled old Russian fortresses and churches of the XV-XVII centuries. The main rooms, opening to the grand gallery (on the third floor), consist of a large hall, a ladies’ parlor looking out on Liteyny Prospekt, the study of the Assembly House Manager in the

*Alexander
von Gauguin*



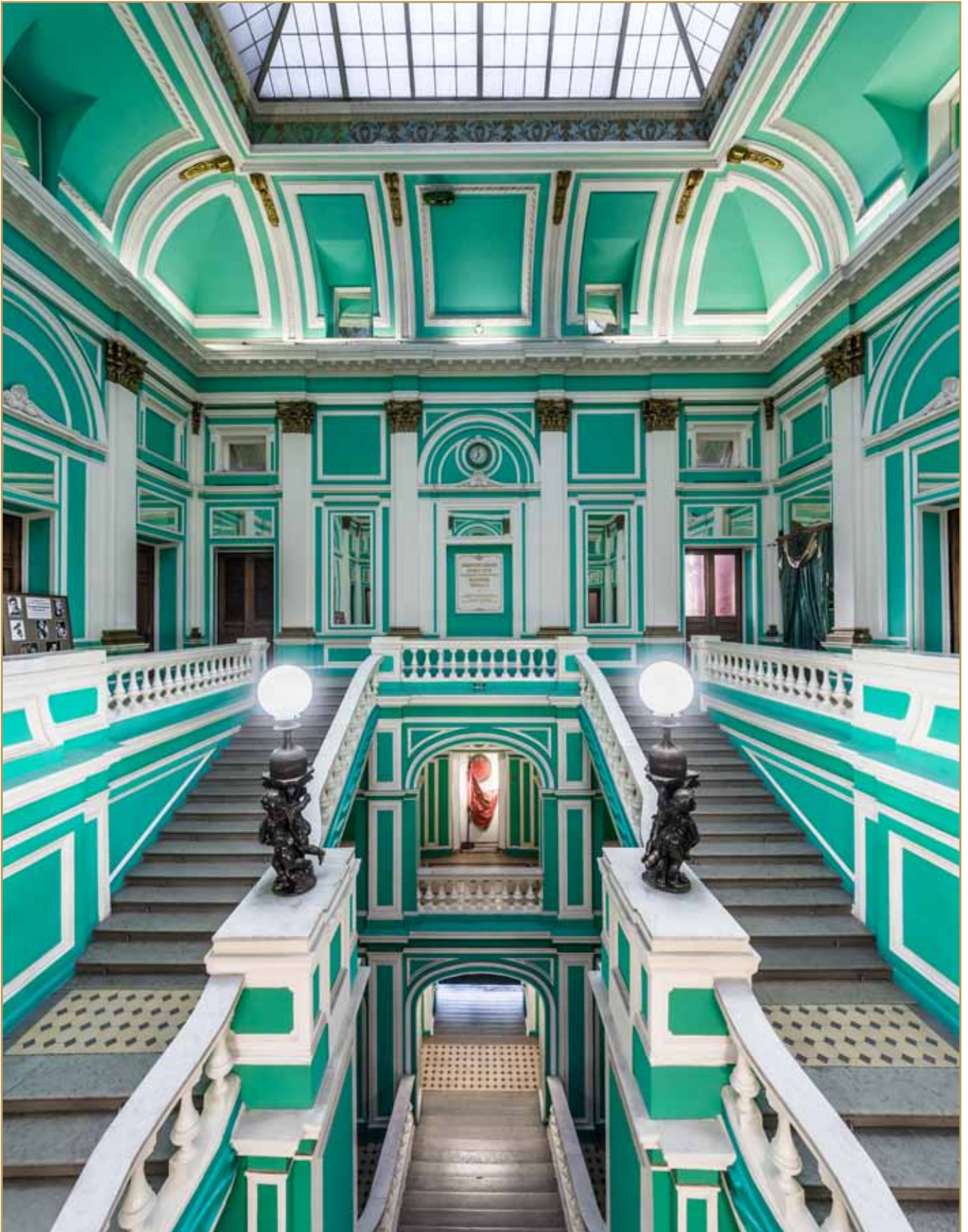
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*Officers Of The General
Staff Academy.
Graduation 1914*



*The main stairs of the Officers
'Assembly of the army and
Navy with a sculptural group,
the salvation of the banner,
engraving by A.B. Schlipper
from photograph, 1898.*



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*Fragment of the façade,
2000*

corner tower, a card room and a small dining room overlooking Kirochnaya Ulitsa and a large dining room with windows facing the courtyard. The most interesting premises of the second floor include a library and a billiard room. The layout of the building is well-elaborated, with perfectly arranged natural lighting and interiors richly decorated with molding.

The main staircase is illuminated from above with a huge lantern and a system of overhead windows and mirrors, providing the nearest rooms with bright daylight. The entire layout of the building is arranged so as to provide its interiors with as much daylight as possible. Unlike the typical tightly-closed courtyards of St. Petersburg, the minimum width of the courtyard of the Officer Assembly House exceeds the height of the building, which ensures that the yard is well-lit and its air remains fresh. A special place on the walls of the staircase is allocated for a memorial plaque, reading that the Assembly House was built by order of Emperor Nicholas II, indicating the dates of its establishment and consecration. The other side of the same gallery includes a sculpture titled “Defending the Banner” by V.M. Pashchenko (lost in the early 1920s).

In the course of the facade restoration in 2000, the experts discovered previously unknown images of two-headed eagles with laurel trees on the main facade overlooking Liteyny Prospekt. These unique majolica panels were simply painted over in the Soviet times. During the restoration of the panels, the following signature was found: “E.Ya. Kremer, St. Petersburg, 1898.” (In the 1890s, E. Kremer was a full-time majolica art teacher at the Baron Stieglitz School.)

The foundation stone of the building was laid on November 9, 1895, and the ceremonial opening of the Assembly House was held on March 22, 1898, with the participation of Nicholas II. A week before that day, the sovereign personally inspected all premises, and, on March 22, the solemn ceremony with a prayer service was conducted. A group of high military officers, headed by the tsar, was guided through all the halls by Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich. The architects von Hohen, Gauger, Ivanov and other designers of the building were highly praised by the distinguished guests and readily answered all related questions. The magnificent staircase, incredibly luxurious and beautiful, with galleries on all floors

*Officers' Assembly
of the army and Navy,
photo 1898*



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and rich decoration of the main halls, became the subject of special admiration. Retired Engineer-Colonel Nikolay Smirnov, the main contractor and the direct supervisor of all construction, managed to fulfill all the tasks assigned to him, while additionally saving 112,000 rubles of the immense amount of funds allocated for the construction. The Emperor was extremely pleased and ordered to spend this balance on the necessary economic improvements.

The order for the Military Department published that day reads as follows:

“On Sunday, March 22, in the presence of the EMPEROR, the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was officially opened in St. Petersburg, built by the command of HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY with the aim of improving the living conditions of officers, both residing in the capital and visiting on temporary business. The EMPEROR expressed his confidence that the new Assembly House would contribute to comradely communication among officers and would further unite them into a single friendly family of the Army and Navy, which have always been gloriously displaying their inherent valor.”

*The big hall of the Officers ‘
Assembly of the army
and Navy, engraving
by A.B. Slipper from
photograph, 1898*





In the heart of the entire Assembly House, there was the Great Hall, a two-storey room measuring 30 to 21 square meters, with minstrels' galleries and a large portrait of Nicholas II in a molded frame crowned with the imperial crown. The term "minstrels' galleries" refers to balconies that surround the hall. These had a width of about 4.5 meters and were supported by pillars (indoor columns) and pilasters (columns protruding from walls). The minstrels' galleries could be accessed from the top floor, while the entire hall occupied the space of three floors. Five huge windows looking out on Liteyny Prospekt and the courtyard and 24 smaller windows were provided above the galleries. There was also a large summer balcony overlooking Liteyny Prospekt.

The big concert hall

During the balls, the minstrels' galleries were occupied by musicians, making the entire floor of the Great Hall available to the dancers and spectators. For official meetings and proceedings, rows of chairs would be arranged in the hall and on the galleries, providing numerous additional seats. On such occasions, the hall could accommodate up to 560 visitors, with additional 70 seats available on the galleries. The walls and the ceiling were decorated with rich military-themed molding. The ceiling was suspended from metal rafters on the shaped part of the roof and provided with gilded electric chandeliers with crystal ornaments. The central chandelier was the largest, counting 90 light bulbs, while the side chandeliers were smaller, with only 30 bulbs each.

Men's and ladies' rooms were provided near the Great Hall. At that time, these terms were not used to refer to water closets, but indicated parlors where gentlemen and ladies could smarten up throughout the events, especially during balls, in between dances. Ladies would tidy their hair, adjust their outfits

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Ladies' lounge of the army and Navy Officers' Assembly, engraving by A.B. Schlipper from photograph, 1898

and jewelry, refresh their makeup and apply perfume. Men, streaming with perspiration after the dancing, could take off their woolen uniform jackets, gather breath, change their lower shirts and apply cologne. The men's room was additionally provided with a smoking area, while the ladies' room was a cozy parlor, with furniture of bent wood and thin woolen upholstery.

The Great Hall is currently a large concert hall with 700 seats, with the portrait of the tsar and the minstrels' galleries completely removed. After the Soviet reorganization of 1934, a stage and an amphitheater were constructed here. The minstrels' galleries were dismantled. A small window for the film booth was provided in the wall opposite the stage for demonstrating motion pictures. The central chandelier disappeared without a trace.

If you exit the Great Hall to the gallery of the third floor, you can enter the Rose Hall, indicated on the floor plan of the building as the Small Hall. The hall has retained its appearance and looks exactly as it did in the late XIX century, when it was referred to as the Ladies' Parlor. The "rose" in its name was due to the pink color of the walls. The room was used by ladies visiting the city for receptions, balls and other events of the Officer Assembly House, when their participation was allowed. They were officers' wives and



daughters. In this hall, ladies could conduct secular conversations, play music and rest.

The decorations of the Rose Hall have been impressing its visitors for over century with their elegance and beauty, executed in a style imitating the baroque of the XVIII century. The word “baroque” in Italian means “graceful, pretentious, and curved”. This version of baroque is also referred to as “the style of Louis XIV”, the French king, whose reign was marked by unprecedented luxury in decoration of palace interiors. While the appearance of the building, with its extravagant roof top, the projecting corner capped with a spire and fancy elements of the facade, bears the impress of the ancient Russian serf and church architecture and is executed in the so-called “à la Russe” style, the interiors are more eclectic and carry signs of various architectural styles and elements thereof. The latter include, among others, the imitation of baroque, also referred to as neo-baroque due to its derivative nature in architecture.

The walls and the ceiling are decorated with elegant, but moderate molding. The hall includes a beautiful expensive baby grand piano, manufactured by the famous Becker factory. The factory had the title of “the official supplier of the court of His Imperial Majesty”, as well as of the courts of Grand Dukes. The

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*Grand Duke Nikolai
Nikolaevich Junior, 1914*

term “Becker piano” was self-explanatory and implied the highest quality of materials, execution and sound. All furniture in the hall was gilded, elegant, in the style of neo-rococo, supposedly manufactured by the Meltzer factory, which was also an official supplier of the imperial court. The factory produced exclusive furniture for mansions of Grand Dukes and for the Winter Palace. Every element of the interior, including the screens and mirrors near the transverse walls, armchairs, sofas, chandeliers, wall bracket lamps and a large carpet covering the entire room, was screaming of perfect taste and luxury. Most of the decoration of the hall has been preserved up to date. There used to be a painting by N.N. Grisichenko, titled “Arrival of the Russian Squadron to the Toulon Raid on October 1 (13), 1893”, donated by the emperor to the Assembly House during its construction. Now, the walls are decorated with original paintings of the late XIX and early XX centuries, such as “Fisherman” by V.V. Vereshchagin, “Storm in the Mountains» by A.A. Kiselev, and “Winter Evening” by Yu.Yu. Klever.

The Rose Hall leads to the study, used as the office of the Assembly House Manager and located on the third floor of the projecting corner of the building. On the floor plan of the building, this room was designated as the “Office of His Imperial Highness”. Starting from 1898, the position of the Manager was held by Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich. After his death in 1909, it was taken over by the uncle of the emperor, Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, serving as the commander of the troops of the Guards and the St. Petersburg Military District since 1905. It was a small but extremely elegant neo-baroque room. The walls and the ceiling featured decorative molding with numerous concealed matte electric bulbs. On its three sides, the study was surrounded by an extensive balcony overlooking the landscapes of Liteyny Prospekt and Kirochnaya Ulitsa. A luxurious marble fireplace was provided opposite to the windows. The furniture, manufactured by Schmidt, consisted of a wooden and bronze writing desk, an armchair, two corner sofas, gilded chairs, a soft sofa and a round table. The floor was carpeted, similarly to the ladies’ parlor. All furniture was lined with plush and velvet. The walls were covered with dense silk fabric wallpaper.

This was the most honorable room in the Assembly House, visited personally by Emperor Nicholas II. According to one of the legends, he would receive officers not quite as a sovereign, but rather as a higher-ranked former comrade-in-arms, with whom one could speak informally, share his thoughts and prob-



*Cabinet, contemporary
photograph*

lems, or ask questions. This study is currently furnished with a ladies' ballroom furniture set made of rosewood. It is also decorated with two large antique-themed white marble sculptures of "Venus" and "Ganymede". The doors of the study lead to the Blue Hall.

The Blue Hall or the Card Room was a vast drawing room with four large windows and a balcony overlooking Kirochnaya Ulitsa, intended for gentlemen only. In the Russian Empire, pink had long been the ladies' color, while blue was the color of men. This system dated back to colors of the ribbons of the orders of St. Catherine and St. Andrew the First-Called, given out at birth to all members of the royal family. The room was decorated in an austere style, reminiscent of classicism. Mahogany panels were fitted along all the walls. All furniture was also made of mahogany with green morocco upholstery. In the daytime, the room was used for educational sessions for officers of the Guards and the St. Petersburg Military District. In the evenings, chess and card tables would be set up here, and the Blue Hall would be converted into a game room. This explains its second name, the Card Room. Only games of skill were allowed at the Assembly House, where the win depended on the player's skill and intelligence. All gambling, driven by the blind fate or scam, was strictly forbidden.

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*The card room,
contemporary photograph*

The Blue Hall is currently filled with antique furniture and lit with crystal chandeliers. These are called the “singing chandeliers” because of their melodic response to high pitch voice. In the Soviet era, two monumental paintings of the 1950s by artists of the studio named after M.B. Grekov were added to the room, “Varyag Cruiser” by P.T. Maltsev and “Black Sea Landing Attack in Feodosia in 1941” by S.F. Babkov. Interesting paintings of the late XIX and early XX centuries, such as “Winter Forest” by S.F. Fedorov and “Forest” by Lunev, beautifully complement the interiors. The Blue Hall was followed by the Small Dining Room, another room with windows overlooking Kirochnaya Ulitsa.

The Small Dining Room or the coffee room had two balconies. One of the balconies was insulated and could be used in winter, and the other was only intended to be used in summer. There was a cupboard with a wide counter covered with red marble. This was one of the few rooms where smoking was allowed. At the Assembly House, smoking was only permitted in dining rooms, in the card room, in the billiard room and in the library, as well as in specially equipped smoking rooms.

The Small Dining Room is currently decorated with antique furniture, marble sculptures of “Apollo and Daphne” (a copy of the work by Bernoulli), “Apollo” and “Young Bacchus” (copies of antique originals and works of the



*Small dining room,
contemporary photograph*

XIX century) and white marble busts of “Woman with a Diadem”, “Hera”, and “Innocence”. There were also paintings by battle painters of the Grekov studio, such as “Frontline Friends”, “The Breath of Spring”, “Winter Road”, “Lonely Accordion”, etc. The Small Dining Room was connected to the Large Dining Room, located in the back of the building.

The Large (Ceremonial) Dining Room of the Officer Assembly House was also referred to as the Oakwood Hall for its decoration in the Flemish style, distinguished by its solidity and severe simplicity. Oakwood panels were fitted along all walls. One of the walls had a clock in a handmade molded frame. The furniture of the Large Dining Room was massive, made of oakwood and upholstered in brown morocco, with the monogram of the Assembly House embossed on the back of each chair. It was illuminated by a large, three-by-five-meter, stained-glass window overlooking the inner courtyard. (In the Soviet era, the window was bricked.) The stained-glass window was embordered with a wide strip decorated with a gentle floral ornament in the style of Art Nouveau, fashionable at the time. Several windows under the ceiling open onto the front staircase. The opposite wall, for the sake of symmetry, is provided with a row of mirrors of the same size and shape as the windows.

The Oakwood Hall has barely changed since that time. However, the furniture has not been preserved. In the Soviet era, the hall was decorated with

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*Large dining room,
contemporary photograph*



Большая столовая

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portraits of great Russian commanders A.V. Suvorov and M.I. Kutuzov, copies of paintings by George Dawe from the Hermitage gallery executed by Soviet painter A.S. Bantikov in 1942-1943. This room is currently used for chamber concerts, conferences, assemblies and anniversary meetings.

On the second floor, below the Great Hall, one can find the library, the reading room and a smoking room. These used to be furnished with solid bookcases of polished walnut wood, tables, armchairs and bent beech chairs. The library of the Officer Assembly House is decorated in the Russian national style. It resembles pre-Petrine royal chambers, with low semicircular arches and ceilings painted in Russian folk patterns. The ceiling paintings have been restored, and this vast room currently houses a canteen.

From the gallery of the second floor, one could enter the billiard room, located right below the Large Dining Room. The room included two large billiard tables, manufactured by the famous St. Petersburg factory of A.I. Freyberg. Freyberg billiard tables were highly valued throughout Russia, as well as in Europe and North America. Furniture made of bent wood, with leather upholstery, was provided along the walls of the room. The billiard room also included a separate coffee room. Billiards was one of the favorite games of Russian officers. At present, this hall is used as a conference room. All billiard tables have been preserved and serve faithfully to admirers of this beautiful game.

The kitchen with all the necessary facilities was located at the basement level, below the dining rooms, and communicated with them via a hoist and a special service staircase. It was equipped with items manufactured by the



*Officers of the guards
artillery at the game
of Billiards*

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*The kitchen of the Officers
Assembly of the army
and Navy, engraving
by A.B. Schlipper
on photography, 1898*



well-known San-Galli equipment factory. Its capacity enabled preparation of meals for 500 people simultaneously, to be served on all floors.

Approximately one fifth of the total area of the Assembly House was occupied by hotel rooms for visiting officers, located on the second, third and fifth floors. A total of 84 rooms ranged from luxurious suites to inexpensive simple rooms. Over one-third of the total area was allocated to the Economic Society of Officers of the Guards Corps. These were mostly the premises in the wing overlooking Kirochnaya Ulitsa and in the outbuildings (inner courtyard buildings, hidden behind the front facades and not visible from the main streets). These premises were used by the Board of the Society, as offices for its employees, stores, warehouses, laundry and ironing rooms, workshops for the manufacture of uniforms, shoes, linen and other “officer goods”, as they used to call the items of ammunition.

Shortly after the opening of the Assembly House, its administration requested the tsar to allow weapons that were unsuitable for combat to be released from artillery depots for decoration of the premises. The respective permission was granted and, in 1899, the walls of the Assembly House were decorated with sets of military items. Similar decorations of armor, banners, cannons, rifles, broadswords and helmets had long adorned the facades of barracks and triumphal arches in the form of sculptural bas-reliefs and could be found on title pages of books in the form of drawings. The Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was richly decorated with actual ancient weapons, placed on the walls.

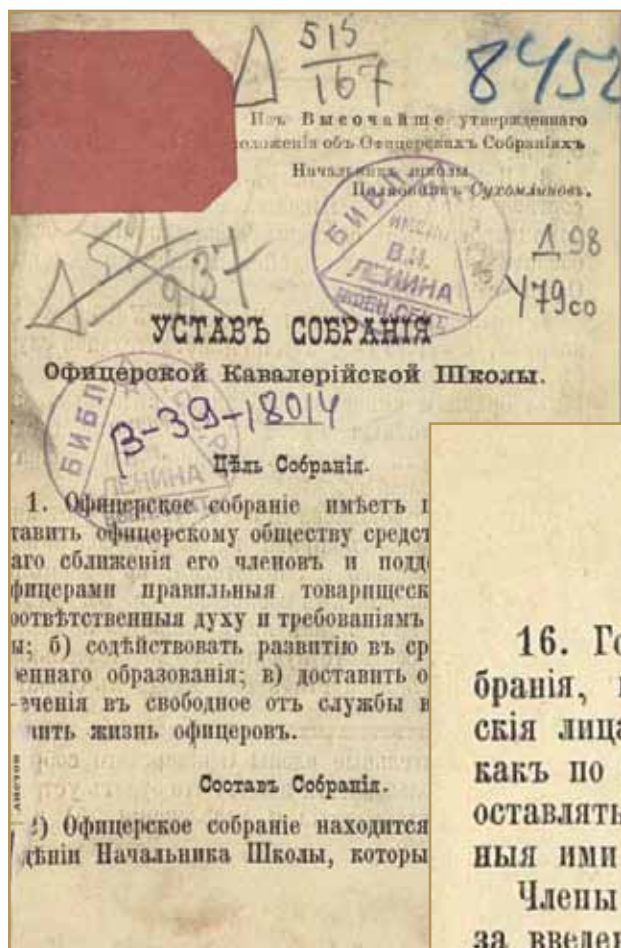
The Charter of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was developed and approved as early as at the stage of construction of the building. This document was based on the charters of regimental, garrison and naval assemblies, additionally taking into account all specific features of the general assembly.

The Officer Assembly House was governed by the Manager, appointed by the sovereign. The Manager was the supreme leader in charge of all general activities of the Assembly House and entitled to finalize all issues that went beyond the scope of the Charter. The Russian army of that time included the position of colonel-in-chief. This was, so to speak, the earthly patron of the regiment, the defender of regimental interests, the benefactor providing comprehensive assistance and support to the regiment. Colonels-in-chief of various regiments included the emperor himself, other members of the royal family, well-known and respectable generals. The Manager played approximately the same role for the Officer Assembly House. The “founding father” of the Assembly House, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, became its first Manager. Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich was the second Manager.

Immediate management was entrusted to the Assembly Chairman, appointed by the Manager from among the senior generals. This position was akin to the position of a unit commander. It was followed in rank by the positions of the Assembly House Host and his assistant. The position of the Host roughly corresponded to the post of service support commander (in the Russian army, referred to as the supply manager). The Host and his assistant were appointed by the Chairman and approved by the Manager. The first Assembly House Chairman was Lieutenant-General Eugen Maximilianovich, Duke of Leuchtenberg, subordinate to the Commander in Chief of the Guards and the St. Petersburg Military District. The first Assembly House Host was Artillery Commander of the St. Petersburg Military District, Lieutenant-General Alexander Onoprienko. The first Assembly House Host Assistant was Commander of the Second Brigade of the Second Guards Infantry Division, Major-General Evgeny Bibikov.

The Manager was in charge of the Council of Honorary Master Sergeants, while all daily operations and duty service at the Assembly House were managed by active master sergeants. It should be noted that there can be no comparison between master sergeants of that time and the Soviet military rank of sergeant-major. The title of an honorary master sergeant was assigned to generals and admirals on active duty with the rights of division commanders or

Officer Assembly House




Pages of the Charter
of the Assembly of the officer
cavalry school. The Charter
Of the Assembly of the officer
cavalry school,
by A. Pozharova,
1887 (16, 21 p.)

*Duke E. M. Lekhtenbergskiy**A. V. Onoprienko**E. M. Bibikov*

higher, if they were members of the Officer Assembly. Active master sergeants (a total of 40 people) were selected from among generals and staff officers (colonels and lieutenant-colonels), members of the Assembly. Some of them worked in the Steering Committee, aimed at further improving the life of the Assembly House; others would take duty shifts in the premises, supervise the order, monitor observance of the established rules and suppress any violations. For all officers of the Officer Assembly, the word of the duty master sergeant was law; all his orders had to be followed rigorously and without fail.

Numerous provisions of the Charter governed the rights and duties of honorary and active master sergeants, honorary, active and temporary members of the Assembly, as well as visitors and guests, established respective internal regulations, regulated the use of rooms for visitors, the canteen, the library and the billiards, and set out the payment terms for the Assembly contributions. The contributions paid by members of the Assembly were very low and depended on the rank. Generals were to contribute 12 rubles per year; the rate for staff officers was 9 to 6 rubles; and company officers had to pay 3 rubles.

The first Charter was issued in 1898, as a temporary document, with the expectation that the life of the Assembly in the next few years would dictate the required changes. In 1903, a new Regulation on the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was adopted. In this version, all master sergeants were removed, and the Assembly consisted only of honorary and active members, and visitors. Instead of the duty master sergeant, the duty staff officer was to supervise the order in the building. The duty staff officer would be appointed daily by order of the St. Petersburg commandant from among members of combat units of the garrison, of both the Army and the Navy. In 1914, the Regulation was further simplified and specified. Under the new procedure, the Assembly was managed by the Manager, the Assistant Manager, the Host with two assistants, a librarian and an accountant.



The life of the Officer Assembly House was very busy, as it was extremely popular in St. Petersburg. The Assembly would arrange lectures on various topics, friendly discussions, military games, conferences and solemn congresses; speeches would be given, demonstrations of new weapons and accessories for military equipment conducted, interest groups and societies on shooting, hunting, music, drama, chess, etc., would be created with educational and recreational purposes. This was a popular meeting place for classmates and graduates of various military schools of St. Petersburg, who had not seen each other since the graduation.

However, the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy did not replace the regimental assemblies, since they pursued different goals. For the Russian Imperial Army, a regiment was not only a combat and administrative unit, but also represented the moral and psychological basis for the entire service. From the first days of service, especially in the Guards, soldiers would be inspired and encouraged to see their regiment was a family, their fellow soldiers as comrades-in-arms, the banner as the regimental relic, and those who had served in the regiment before as their glorious ancestors. Officers, as permanent members, were the most closely knit part of any regiment and the basis of the regimental family, and were all members of their regimental assemblies. The general Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was intended to rally all Russian officers, regardless of the place of service. In order to avoid competition with regimental assemblies, membership in the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was not mandatory.

When visiting St. Petersburg on service business, army officers would stay in the building of the Assembly House, in its affordable and comfortable rooms. There were both simple affordable rooms and luxurious suites, so that everyone could select the perfect room for their demands and resources. All guests could use the dining rooms, the library, the reading room, the billiard room and other rooms of the Assembly House. The atmosphere was friendly but patriarchal, since any officer having traveled a long way from a remote corner of Russia was to feel at home here, as if at his regular regimental assembly, among his fellow comrades-in-arms. This facilitated the making of new acquaintances. In general, all of the above contributed to the implementation of the Emperor's aspirations to rally all officers of the Army and Navy and unite them into a single military family. Stores of the Economic Society, combined in a single complex with a separate entrance, offered all necessary items of uniforms and

Officer Assembly House

equipment at affordable prices. Both local and visiting officers were allowed to make purchases and orders.

In 1900, the personality and leadership skills of A.V. Suvorov became the main topic of reports presented at the Assembly, which was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of his demise. Professor of the General Staff, Major General Nikolay Orlov made a report on "Tactics of A.V. Suvorov". In 1907, upon the establishment of the Imperial Russian Military Historical Society, the Assembly invited its members for a solemn meeting and a friendly dinner, which marked the beginning of successful cooperation between the two organizations. In 1909, the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava was celebrated, with reports made on the epoch of Peter I, his reforms and victories.

The newly created Society of Zealots of Military Knowledge operated within the walls of the Assembly House. Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich was elected Honorary Chairman of the Society; the position of Chairman was occupied by Major-General E.M. Bibikov, succeeded in 1902 by Cavalry General, Baron F.E. Meyendorf. All serving officers of the Guards, Army and Navy, as well as military doctors could become active members of the Society; all those entitled to enter the Assembly House could become its associate members. The

*A.Z. Myshlaevsky**F.E. Meyendorf**Officers in the library*

Officer Assembly House



*Officers at the ball,
1914*

first report was made on January 2, 1899, dedicated to the Pruth River Campaign of Peter I of 1711. The speaker was Colonel Alexander Myshlaevsky, a well-known historian of the Petrine era, a future general and the founder of the Russian Military Historical Society. During the 15 years' history of the Society of Zealots of Military Knowledge, a total of 330 meetings were held, attended by approximately 70,000 people. During this period, the Society counted approximately 40,000 members, including those in St. Petersburg and in its branches in other cities. Reports of the Society covered the military art of the past and the present, the progress of military equipment and weaponry, and the course of the current wars of that time. These were the Spanish-American and the Anglo-Boer wars, the Chinese Boxer Rebellion, the Russo-Japanese, the Italian-Turkish and the Balkan wars. The Society offered foreign language courses, released two magazines and published books on military science. In 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, the Society of Zealots of Military Knowledge ceased to exist, as all its members went to the front.

The library of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was one of the richest in terms of composition. Its basis was laid by the military-themed private library of General Petr Menkov, which consisted of books, albums and military maps. Lieutenant-General Menkov, who died in 1875, served in the General Staff, was the author of a number of military publications, worked as the editor-in-chief of the *Voyenniy Sbornik* (Military Collection) magazine and

of the Russkiy Invalid (The Disabled of Russia) newspaper. The library of the Officer Assembly House was regularly updated and replenished with new books; the reading room was supplied with newspapers and magazines. In its comfortably furnished premises, one could find out the latest news, expand his knowledge of military history, read memoirs of officers and generals about their service and participation in military campaigns or familiarize oneself with old and new military theoretical works. The library was the perfect place for studies, completion of exercises or compilation of own military historical and theoretical papers.

The period between the late XIX and the early XX centuries was the height of Russian military history. Educated Russian officers created serious papers, often in many volumes, on the development of the Army as a whole, on its different epochs, on the history of wars, as well as biographies of commanders and colorful and detailed descriptions of the history of various regiments. All these high-quality, luxuriously published books with skillful illustrations, maps, tables, portraits, clothing patterns and battle scenes are written in a serious but lively and elegant language, remain relevant up to this day and continuously gain value with the years.

Concert programs with the participation of famous artists were a regular form of entertainment at the Assembly House. The great Russian singer F.I. Chaliapin performed here several times. Concerts, parties, dancing nights, musical and family evenings were organized, various performances were staged here.

*Ball in St. Petersburg,
1913*



Officer Assembly House

Officer Assembly balls were always splendid and memorable. It was impossible to image the life of the Russian upper-class society since the times of Peter the Great without careful preparation, the efforts of the hosts and participants, a string of coaches at the front entrance, a doorman in a gold-embroidered livery, guests coming up the front staircase with a growing sense of celebration, a hall filled with lights, extravagant officers in ballroom uniforms, beautiful ladies in luxurious ball dresses and jewelry, an orchestra on the minstrels' galleries, lackeys with soft drinks, the older generation as eager spectators, a succession of dances, sighs of admiration and, of course, scheming and intrigues. These were the ballroom traditions that Russian officers and ladies carried over with them into the XX century.

There were private balls, arranged by private persons in their homes, and official balls, held in imperial palaces and other public institutions, including in assembly houses. All balls held at the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy were official. All such balls were of great importance, since these were not mere entertaining events, but also rituals for celebrating public ceremonies and festivities. All ballroom rituals were established in special charters and approved by the sovereign.

Except for the hosts and the most distinguished guests, the steward was always one of the main persons at any ball. This person managed all movements of gentlemen and ladies during the dances through commands, traditionally given in French. At official balls, especially in such a serious institution as the Officer Assembly House, this was a particularly important position. The Rules of Secular Life and Etiquette, published in St. Petersburg in 1889, included an entire chapter on behavior of the steward, including the following provisions:

"...the duty of the steward is not limited to the compilation of various figures and includes the fulfillment of numerous other obligations. The main task of the steward is to bring the society closer together, to ensure that everyone is cheerful and animated, to entertain and keep them busy, while considering all relevant circumstances...

The steward must have musical knowledge and understand the complications of prolonged performances, especially for the wind instruments. Therefore, at a ball featuring performances of a military orchestra, the steward must show understanding for the position of the musicians and try to make the dances as short as possible...

The steward must always remain in good spirits, or at least seem so, since it is his obligation to set the example of cheerfulness and animation that encourage dancing. His carefree cheerfulness, graceful courtesy and perfect wit must infect the society and set the mood for the entire ball."

Meetings of graduates of cadet corps, military schools and academies, held at the Assembly House, were referred to as dinner parties. A dinner, held in the Oakwood Hall, the dining room of the Assembly House, was always the

*Cadets at the lecture*

central event of such a party. A dinner party was one of the few exceptions when men in civilian clothes were allowed into the otherwise strictly military assembly. These were all retired officers. The oldest graduates of respective institutions were honored the most. For example, during the meetings of graduates of the Mikhailovsky Artillery School and the Mikhailovsky Artillery Academy, in the 1900s, the oldest graduate was Lieutenant-General Mikhail Mazing, who graduated from the academy in 1858. He was a St. George Cavalier, a hero of the Turkestan campaigns and the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878. The atmosphere at such dinner parties was friendly, relaxed and far from official. The below description of such a meeting of graduates of a cadet corps, compiled in 1899, contains no indication of the venue, but conveys perfectly the atmosphere of these events:

“Young people, who had gathered here in advance, were glancing curiously at the wide staircase covered with a thick carpet, leading to a spacious dining room. Here is one of the oldest cadets, General A., the head of one of the central institutions, looking unemotional and reserved. After crossing the threshold of this hall, he seems to turn younger, more cheerful, friendly and approachable. Here is General B., a well-known expert in military life and a talented and inexhaustible narrator. His arrival causes a flutter

Officer Assembly House

of excitement, since the afternoon conversation will most likely be interesting.

The hall quickly fills up and becomes colorful, with a mixture of civilians (former cadets) and military officers. There are warm encounters, exclamations and inquiries; the entire room is filled with a soft hum of friendly greetings. A civilian governor recognizes a shy army headquarters officer as his former corps friend and gives him a warm greeting. A respectable general shares a walk with a less successful comrade. Diminutive names, special phrases and nicknames can be heard that are only understandable to graduates of this certain corps...

After a common prayer, solemnly sung together by the old and the young, everyone sits down at the table, seated according to their years of graduation... Despite the friendly spirit, the dinner is conducted in strict compliance with the rules of decency and etiquette. Even after the wine has been served, no awkward jokes are made, no one displays any uncereceremonious treatment of higher-ranking or older officers or even thinks to hint of patronage, which is deemed *mauvais ton*, not appropriate for any officers in this corps. The actual conversation begins after the dinner, in separate groups, over a glass of liquor. The leader gathers young people around and makes them laugh to the point of exhaustion by telling anecdotes from the life of the corps. This laughter is so contagious that two high-ranking generals and one academy professor, sitting nearby, interrupt their serious conversation, perhaps, on subjects of state importance, and begin laughing with the young people...

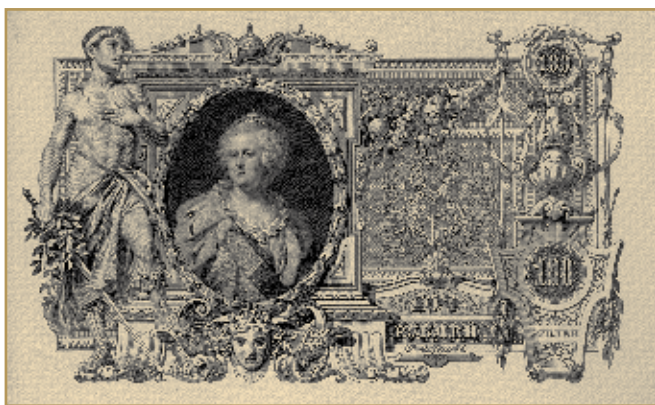
In most groups, serious conversations are held, gradually developing into heated arguments. A lot of interesting and instructive stories may be heard at these dinners. Many facts and opinions are expressed here in the open, without embarrassment, as if at home. Critical principles and ideas are eagerly defended. And all of this is heard by the young people, who are left greatly affected and inspired."

The dining rooms of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy played a huge role in the daily life of its members and visitors. All food products for the kitchen were purchased by the management of the Assembly House in the same building, from the Economic Society, at the most preferential prices. While serving as the Manager, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich demanded that all food be refined, of the highest quality and, at the same time, inexpensive and affordable. The low prices offered by the dining rooms could not but please the officers, especially the youngest and the poorest of them. A breakfast of one or two courses cost 30-50 kopecks, a lunch of two courses and a dessert cost 50 kopecks, a lunch of five-six courses would cost up to 1 ruble 50 cents; the price for a bottle of white or red foreign wine was 1 ruble; top of the range, most expensive wine for wine enthusiasts cost 4 rubles 50 kopecks. It was common to drink vodka with shot glasses before dinner; a glass of good Russian vodka cost 5 kopecks. The prices were set by the Steering Committee; the price lists were put out in the dining rooms, signed by the Host. All settlements were in cash only; no loans were allowed.

From 1860, the remuneration of officers of the Guards infantry had been as follows: an ensign received annually (!) 312 rubles; second lieutenants were

*Lunch
at the Officers' Assembly*



Officer Assembly House

*Coin marks
of imperial Russia*

paid 339 rubles; lieutenants were entitled to 366 rubles; staff captains received 441 rubles; captains were paid 531 rubles; and colonels were entitled to 687 rubles per annum. The Guards did not include majors and lieutenant-colonels; the rank of ensign was canceled in 1884 for the peacetime. Company commanders and staff officers (colonels in the Guards) were entitled to a messing allowance in the amount of 138 to 369 rubles a year. In order to provide financial support to officers, in the 1860s, the messing and lodging allowance amounts were increased, as well as their daily allowances for trekking, camping and guard duty. The emperor himself granted 300,000 rubles for the annual payment of half-year salaries to Guards officers. However, these measures were not sufficient to cover all expenses and ensure relatively comfortable living conditions for the officers, since the life was getting more and more expensive every year, especially in St. Petersburg. The army salary was even lower. Out of those who did not have other income sources except for the service, only colonels and generals were more or less comfortably off.

Along with the rise in prices in the 1880-90s, the financial situation of officers deteriorated, the messing and lodging allowance was not saving them from poverty and lack of funds. As a result, the officers' class was becoming less prestigious, and the popularity of military service was going down. Military Minister P.S. Vannovsky once stated, with sincere indignation, that a bartender in a tavern had a higher salary than a military officer. In 1898, A.N. Kuropatkin, his successor, issued an order to increase the lodging allowance and, in 1899, the salary and the messing allowance were increased, primarily for junior officers.

In 1906, under the new minister, A.F. Ridiger, the salaries of officers were again raised. A second lieutenant of the Guards would now receive 720 rubles a year as the salary, 360 rubles as his messing allowance and 308 rubles 50 kopecks for lodging purposes; a lieutenant would be entitled to 780 rubles, 360 rubles and 308.50 rubles, respectively; the rates for a staff captain were 900 rubles, 360 rubles and 308.50 rubles; the amounts for a captain were 1080 rubles, 360 rubles and 544 rubles; a colonel (not a battalion commander) would receive 1200 rubles, 360 rubles and 780 rubles; and a battalion commander colonel would be provided with 1200 rubles, 660 rubles and 780 rubles, respectively.

Unlike the current ruble, the Russian money of that time was of a much higher value. For example, 60 rubles was enough money to buy a cow; with 100 rubles, one could afford a coach horse; 150 rubles was enough for a good riding horse. A car, the new, rare and elite vehicle of the time, would cost 2000 rubles.

Q Starting from late January 1904, the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War became the subject of active discussions at the Assembly. Forecasts would be made as to its progress and whether the Guards were to be dispatched. When it became clear that the Guards Corps would not be sent to the war, many officers began requesting transfers to those army regiments that had been assigned for the campaign against Japan. Commander of the troops of the Guards and the St. Petersburg Military District, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, fully committed to his idea of uniting all Russian officers, striving to eliminate the isolation of the Guards from the army and of separate regiments from each other, gave the following order to the Guards Corps:

“No extraregimental employment of any Guards officers to the troops of the Far East shall be allowed. No exceptions shall be made.

For a Guards officer wishing to participate in the campaign in the Far East, the only available option is that of transferring to the valiant active army. His first duty, in this case, will be to wear the uniform of the com-



*«Cruiser Varyag»,
by P. T. Maltsev, 1955
On the display
in the Blue room*

Officer Assembly House



*Barricades
on Liteyny Prospekt*

batant unit with which he will share the work, the hardships and the eventual military glory as a full member of the new family, but not as a temporary guest, with no connection to the unit.”

According to the respective additional order, each Guards officer joining the army for the period of the war was granted a guarantee that he would be allowed to return to his original Guards regiment after the termination of the hostilities.

The hardships of the war were then aggravated by the revolution of 1905-1907. The troops stationed in St. Petersburg had had no rest until complete order was restored in the capital, its surroundings and neighboring areas. It was common at that time for no combatants to be seen in the barracks. Staff and headquarter officers would also spend most of their time at their duty stations. The halls of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy were filled with anxious discussions, exchange of news and assumptions with regard to the war, the revolution and further development and fate of the state. There was an opinion that it was the revolution that backstabbed the Russian army and became the main cause of the failure to win the war.

The monumental building at the intersection of Liteyny Prospekt and Kirochnaya Ulitsa remembers both the revolutionary crowds in the streets and the provocateurs who would shoot at the troops to cause them to fire back. Within these walls, those articles in democratic newspapers and magazines that were fouling the name of the army and referred to soldiers and officers as to executioners were always discussed with indignation. In 1905, members of the Assembly had the early opportunity to read *The Duel* by A.I. Kuprin, a recently published novel that caused a strong and controversial reaction in the military circles. Without denying the writer's talent and fair criticism of many shortcomings, the officers believed that the novel smeared the entire officer corps and the entire armed forces of Russia. Unfortunately, for our contemporaries, this novel, written in the wake of the anti-army hysteria, is almost the only source of information about the life, service and combat spirit of the Russian army at the turn of the XX century, regardless of the fact that it is noted in the very text of the novel that it describes one of the worst regiments.

In 1907-1908, the trial of Lieutenant-General A.M. Stessel, Chief Commander of all troops in Port Arthur and Governor of the Kwantung Military District, was held at the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy. The general was found responsible for the surrender of the fortress of Port Arthur and sentenced to death. However, it then turned out that the culpability of general Stessel was greatly exaggerated. Emperor Nicholas II ordered to substitute the death penalty by a 10-year imprisonment, and a year later, also at the behest of the emperor, the general was released. The pardon of general Stessel was welcomed by many defenders of Port Arthur.

The peace period between the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War was marked by significant changes in the Russian army. The attempts of its geopolitical competitors to undermine the power of Russia through the Russo-Japanese War and the revolution had a certain detrimental effect. The prestige of the army dropped. The most suggestible part of the society would look down upon soldiers and officers; the military service was becoming something unworthy of a civilized, decent and educated person. Those unfamiliar with the army would judge about its life only by the stories depicted in *The Duel* by A.I. Kuprin and by mocking articles in magazines. They were led to believe that only worthless and incapable losers would join the army.

The Bosnian crisis of 1908-1909 reminded of the dangerous situation that Russia was in. Neighboring states were ramping up their military power, dem-

Officer Assembly House

*Meeting of the Supreme
military criminal court
in the case of the surrender
of the Japanese fortress
Port Arthur*

onstrating more and more boldness and aggression, while Russia seemed unprepared for war. The threat of a war with Germany and Austria-Hungary stirred up the patriotic forces of the country, serving as a wake-up call for the society. The most successful young people, gold and silver medalists, would enter military schools, which soon recovered the quality of the officer corps. After the government managed to suppress the first revolution with the help of the army, the country started experiencing an economic growth. Soon, the military class in Russia began regaining its former standing; the society would again hold soldiers and officers in respect.

At the Officer Assembly House, conversations during reports of military professors and military games, as well as regular private conversations of officers when reading newspapers and discussing the current news, reflected the development of the Russian military thought and the evolution of opinions on the military policy of Russia as a whole.

The conventional philosophy, ignoring the military science, established during the longstanding stagnation as far back as under the command of Petr Vannovsky, remained predominant among the elderly generals holding high positions and was shared by the staff careerists. They were supported by an honorary member of the Assembly, Cavalry Minister of War V.A. Sukhomlinov.

The party of innovators sought to overcome Russia's military underdevelopment by copying elements of modern German and French military doctrines. For their assertiveness, they were nicknamed the "Young Turks" by analogy with those radical Turkish officers that started the military coup in Turkey in 1908. The Russian "Young Turks" were supported by the Manager of the Officer Assembly, Commander of the Troops of the Guards and the St. Petersburg Military District, Grand Duke Nikolas Nikolaevich. The "Young Turks" introduced the scientific method to the military science and were striving to broaden the horizons of military officers. Despite Sukhomlinov's efforts to remove undesirable military professors, their ideas were still gaining popularity.

The third group consisted of those referred to as "the classics", supporters of a revival of the Russian national military art on the basis of national doctrines. Prominent representatives of "the classics" included the already mentioned General A.Z. Myshlaevsky, Professor of the Nikolaevsky Academy, Chief of the General Staff, and General A.K. Baiov, professor of the Nikolaevsky Academy of the General Staff at the Department of Russian Military Art History. The idea behind the Russian national military doctrine implied the pre-

Officer Assembly House



dominance of spirit over matter. It was based on the Russian national and religious pride, with the phrase of A.V. Suvorov “We are Russian. God is with us!” serving as the motto.

Despite the official routine, the nearest future of the Russian army was to be shaped by the “Young Turks”, and its long-term development was to be determined by “the classics”. In the prewar years, both generals-professors and their students, officers of the General Staff, attended the Assembly.

*Meeting of the Supreme
military criminal court
in the case of General
A.M. Stessel*



*The trial of General
Sukhomlinov,
September 1917*

*Officers and lower ranks
of the guards infantry
in the dress and ordinary
uniform,
1909-1914*



The appearance of visitors also varied throughout the history of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy. At the time of its opening, the Russian army had simple and modest military uniforms in the Russian national style, introduced at the beginning of the reign of Alexander III. This idea was good, but it was received without joy, as it crossed out the established traditions of military attire. The uniform consisted of a low lambs wool hat, a jacket in the form of a buttonless caftan (with hooks) and wide trousers. In their spare time, officers preferred wearing frock coats with two rows of buttons on the chest. The summer uniform was more elegant: a white shirt for soldiers and a white uniform overcoat for officers, with a white half-cover for the service cap.

After the Russo-Japanese War, the uniform was reformed to take into account the modified combat conditions. In

1907, soldiers' shirts and officers' uniform overcoats were changed to khaki color, with subsequent introduction of camouflage-color caps. At first, officers regretted parting with white overcoats, but soon grew accustomed to khaki uniforms, comfortable and practical everyday clothing for any season. In 1908-1909, changes were also made to full-dress uniforms. Gloomy à la Russe caftans were replaced with elegant uniforms with rows of shiny buttons, colored lapels and other bright details. Shiny shakos (upward expanding hats, as used in 1812) with feather plumes and helmets with horsehair plumes were also added. Infantry officers were wearing chest badges covered in gold and silver, as in the old days. In many regiments, instead of simple officers' tabs, collars and cuffs would be decorated with gold or silver embroidered intricate floral ornament. All this was done in order to compensate for the bitter defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, to raise the morale of every soldier and officer and to recall the glorious victories of

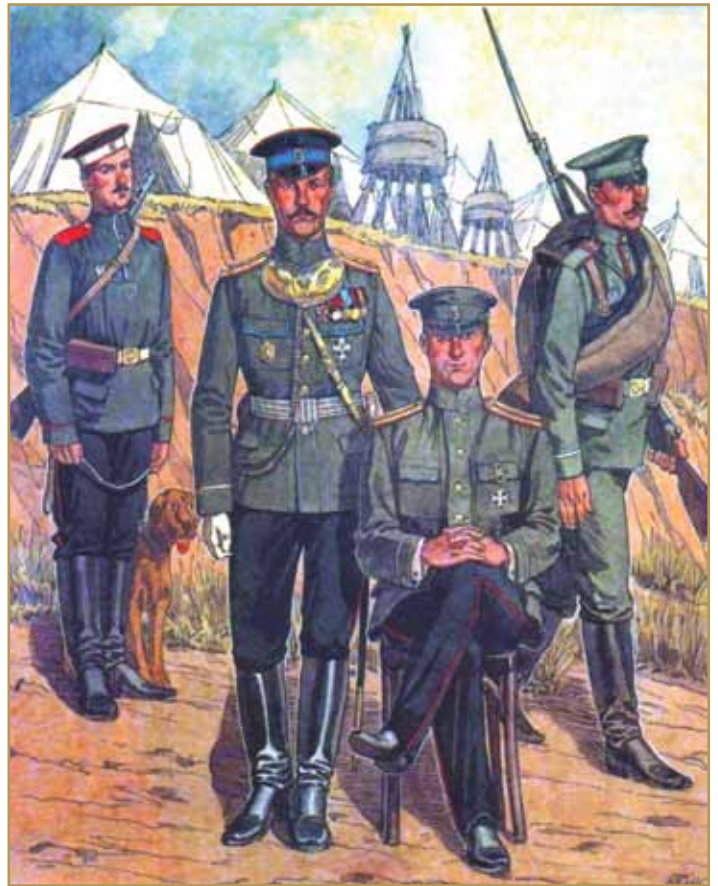
the former years of the height of the Russian Empire.

The new dress uniforms were used for balls and ceremonial meetings at the Assembly; for their daily studies, officers would wear the new overcoats or their traditional coats, in the style that had not changed for almost a century. The navy uniforms were less prone to changes and remained more conservative. Naval officers would wear open black frock coats with white shirts and black ties, a uniform that has barely changed since the mid-XIX century.

The new uniform transformed the appearance of the Russian army, especially the Guards, making officers as eye catching in the streets of St. Petersburg, as in the old days, thus raising the prestige of military service. All these garments naturally required significant expenses. Officer of the Life Guards of Semenovskiy Regiment Yu.V. Makarov recalls this:

“The prices for officers’ uniforms were approximately the following: a shako, a chest badge and a checker cost 20 rubles each. Fortunately, one had to buy those once in a lifetime. However, the uniforms, frock coats and overcoats had to be regularly renewed. In the prices of the Economic Society, these cost 50-60 rubles on the average. High boots cost 20-25 rubles; ankle boots cost 12 rubles; the average prices for trousers and long pants amounted to 12-15 rubles each. Epaulets cost 6 rubles; a cap, a pair of shoulder straps, a scarf, a sword belt and a pair of white suede or brown gloves would cost approximately three rubles. In total, this was quite an amount. Please note, that a second lieutenant of the Guards was issued by the treasury 86 rubles a month as the salary. A lieutenant of the army was paid five rubles less.”

In 1907, the Economic Society of the Guards, independently, without the aid of the treasury, launched the construction of a separate building at the intersection of Bolshaya Konyushennaya Ulitsa and Volynsky Pereulok. The new store was opened in 1909 (and re-established in the Soviet times as the House of Leningrad Trade (DLT)).



Officers and lower ranks of the guards infantry in marching and service uniform, 1909-1914

*Grand Duke
Nicholas Nikolaevich
Junior*



By 1914, the Russian army had already restored excellent officer corps. One third of all officers had combat experience after the Russo-Japanese War. While this experience would only dishearten the high-ranking commanders, it encouraged the younger generation to be more energetic and efficient, to correct all shortcomings, to recover the morale and to improve the training quality of all troops. The army was rapidly regenerating and improving through the efforts of those young officers who were not indifferent to its fate. Their energy was also transferred to graduates of military schools of 1908-1914. These strong military forces, free from the stagnation of the older generation, with high-quality training and education, patriotic and faithful to the tsar and the fatherland, were ready to lead Russia to glory and grandeur. In 10-15 years, this new generation of Russian officers could have lead the army, occupying the highest positions in the state. However, they did not have these years, as a military thunderstorm was approaching, and the Russian armies, corps and divisions were commanded by stiff, stagnating generals. Brilliant officers leading excellent regiments, battalions and squadrons were destined to parish in the fields of the First World War.

In the summer of 1914, upon the outbreak of the war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Assembly House was noticeably deserted. The Guards and their staffs were sent to the front. The Manager of the Assembly, Grand Duke Nikolas Nikolaevich was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army. Lectures on military tactics and strategy, ceremonies and cheerful dinners of schoolmates ended abruptly, interest groups were dismissed. The building would still be attended by officers visiting Petrograd for service and arriving in the capital on official business. The brilliance and variety of colors of dress uniforms gave way to modest camouflage colors of battle overcoats and shirts.



There is a photo of the war time capturing a large group of officers and generals standing on the main staircase of the Assembly House. They are all wearing battle uniforms. Along with the overcoats, these include soldiers' service shirts, worn by officers only after the outbreak of the World War.

*A group of generals
and officers on the main stairs
of the Officers' Assembly
of the army and Navy
1914-1917*

The main conversation topics covered the events at the front. The huge patriotic upsurge of the first years of the war gave way to bitterness for failure. The weariness from the prolonged war was briefly substituted by the hope of a quick victory, when Emperor Nicholas II took over the command of the army in the summer of 1915. The victorious Brusilov Offensive in the spring and summer of 1916 gave new hope to the Russian society. However, in 1917, the February Revolution and then the October Revolution lead to the dismissal of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy and the institution ceased to exist.

After the Great October Socialist Revolution, in December 1917, the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR adopted a decree on equal rights for all servicemen, under which all officer assemblies were abolished from the Russian army.

The building was converted to be used by the public authority titled the House of Workers and Peasants. One of the rooms was allocated for the mil-

Officer Assembly House



*Barricades
on Liteyny Prospekt
in February
1917*

itary commission of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and the building became one of the main organizational centers for the creation of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.

The former decency, integrity and strict order of the Officer Assembly House were gone without a trace. Its halls, rooms, corridors and staircases were filled with unbuttoned revolutionary soldiers without shoulder straps, with red bows and bandages, sailors covered in machine-gun belts, Mauser guns and hand bombs, commissars and party workers in leather jackets, paramilitary and civilian clothes. Above their heads, there were red banners, red billboards with Bolshevik slogans, propaganda posters; the floors were covered in dirt, spit, and peels of sunflower seeds; revolutionary speeches, shouting, laughter and curses were heard everywhere.

In 1918, the former Assembly House was renamed as the House of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (RKKA). The new institution was headed by Elena Stasova, a Russian revolutionary, a friend and associate of N.K. Krupskaya. The main halls and hotel rooms were converted into lecture halls and studies. The main purpose of the House consisted in training and education of the new revolutionary army. The House was used to conduct rallies, speeches of Soviet party leaders, as well as for the registration of volunteers to the Red Army.

The decree on the creation of the Red Army was signed by the Bolsheviks on January 15, however, the army was still far from actual existence. The old army was scattered and almost destroyed by the two revolutions, and the new army has not yet come to exist. Meanwhile, the First World War was in progress, and the German troops threatened Petrograd. In order to stay in power, V.I. Lenin was forced to maneuver between the demands of the Entente and those of Germany. On February 18, 1918, the armies of Germany and Austria-Hungary broke the truce and launched an offensive throughout the Eastern Front. Revolutionary sailors with their leader P.E. Dybenko fled to the rear. On February 22, the Soviet government released its notorious decree Socialist Homeland is in Danger. On February 23, the Germans faced proper resistance near Pskov and Narva only from the troops of the "former" Russian army that had escaped the disbandment and were led by officers. However, they too had to retreat under the onslaught of the Germans. On February 24, V.I. Lenin accepted all terms of the German ultimatum and, on March 3, signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Therefore, on February 23, 1918, no Red Army was actually created, no victories were won. There were a retreat and a flight from the front, panic and a split in the party troops, which resulted in a humiliating peace treaty, subsequently justified as



Stasova Elena Dmitrievna

*Registration of the volunteers
to the Red Army,
1918*



Officer Assembly House



*Rally of the 1st machine-gun
regiment, 1917*

necessary by Soviet historiographers. Still, the Soviet government needed own heroes and legends to start rewriting the history of the country and to educate future generations in the new way. Therefore, February 23 was made a great Soviet holiday. This was a special date for the House of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, since it is within these walls that the first volunteers for the Red Army were registered. An honorary place on the walls of the House is allocated for the large epic picture by a group of Soviet artists titled *The Birth of the Red Army*, depicting an attack of the Red Army men and sailors against the Germans.

One could also recall the relevant newspaper publications of those years.

The *Pravda* newspaper of February 6, 1918, read as follows: "Registration to the Workers' and Peasants' Army is open daily from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the House of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army at 20 Liteyny Prospekt. Comrades are accepted on recommendation of military public democratic organizations, standing on the platform of the Soviet power, as well as of party and professional organizations or at least two members of these organizations. When an entire unit wishes to be registered, mutual guarantees and a roll call vote are required."

Pravda newspaper issue No. 20 of 1918 read: "Today, a unification rally of comrade sailors with fellow Cossacks will be held in the building of the Work-


*Red Guards Squad*

ers' and Peasants' House (ex. Assembly House for the Army and Navy at 20 Liteyny Prospekt). The beginning is at 5 p.m."

As another example, Pravda issue No.19 of 1919 published the following announcement: "On Thursday, January 25, this year, at 6 p.m., a general meeting of soldiers and Red Guards, members of the Bolshevik Party and sympathizers, will be held at the House of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army at 20 Liteyny Prospekt. Agenda: 1. Current situation. 2. On organization of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. 3. Organizational Matters."

A new way of life was being developed and introduced in Russia. The old world was collapsing, the Officer Assembly House had to be converted for other tasks. There was no longer any need for the card room, the billiard room, the hotel and the ballroom. Paintings, sculptures and porcelain collections were considered as luxury items, subject to uncompromising elimination. Images of symbols of the old authorities were deemed displeasing.

New visitors of the House were to eliminate illiteracy and build a new army. Therefore, all premises of the House were being remodelled for these purposes.



After the end of the Civil War, people were gradually adjusting to peaceful life, and the former Officer Assembly House was rebuilding certain activities, reminiscent of its former glory. Initially, there were no soldiers or officers in the Red Army. There were only Red Army men, commanders and political workers. There were no military ranks, as these had been replaced by job titles, such as troop commanders, company commanders, assistant battalion commanders, battalion commanders, etc. However, it was still an army that required the same institutions as those represented by officer assemblies before the revolution. The difference was that these new institutions were not only intended for commanders, but were accessible to all military personnel of all units stationed in Petrograd and its environs.

On April 8, 1924, after the city had already been renamed into Leningrad, the third district party conference approved a resolution that officially established the use of this building for the purposes of cultural enlightenment and recreation for the Army and Navy. From that time, the building was renamed as the Leningrad House of the Red Army (LDKA). The resolution on the goals and tasks of the Leningrad House of the Red Army read as follows:

“The Conference is satisfied to note the organization of the Leningrad House of the Red Army as the central scientific and educational institution for Red Army soldiers, sailors, servicemen and their families and believes that its tasks aimed at increasing the political and general cultural level of the Red Army and Navy must be carried out with the active participation of members of the Russian Communist Party of the Leningrad garrison. In order to fully meet the requirements of the House, both ideologically and in financial terms, it is necessary to attract public attention and to ensure participation of party, military, Soviet, professional, economic, research and scientific organizations of Leningrad.”

In this manner, the House became a scientific, educational and recreational institution for Red Army men and sailors. A lot of lectures were held, interest groups, schools and courses were organized here. In such a way, the Leningrad House of the Red Army became a successor to the Officer Assembly House in terms of cultural, recreational and educational work for the troops of the Leningrad Military District and the Baltic Fleet. Soviet artists, writers and composers would often perform here. Interest groups and schools of the LDKA released trained rifle practice instructors, chemical defense specialists, librarians, lecturers and amateur performance professionals for the Red Army. In 1934, the Leningrad House of the Red Army (LDKA) was given the name

of Sergey Kirov, a major party leader governing Leningrad at the time.

Visitors of the LDKA of those years used to wear creaking boots and shoulder belts, caps with red stars and pointed winter helmets (budenovkas), blue riding breeches and khaki service shirts without shoulder straps, with turn-down collars adorned by embroidered colored tabs with insignia for respective army types in the shapes of squares, bars and diamonds. Later, hash marks were introduced, with angle-shapes of red cloth with gold chevrons for battle commanders and large red stars for political instructors and commissars. The blue dress uniforms of pilots and the gray-steel uniforms of tankmen were especially elegant and eye catching. Uniforms of naval commanders consisted of naval caps, black trousers, white and blue overcoats and open black pea jackets, almost as before the revolution, only without shoulder straps and with gold stripes on their sleeves.

Commanders and political workers of the Red Army would attend recreational and cultural events of the House with their families. For these purposes, drawing rooms, reading rooms, a library, a chess club, a billiard room and an evening children's room had been arranged. Famous artists of that time would often perform in the halls of the House. This was no longer a place of revolutionary equality of all servicemen. In the process of building socialism, the new huge and powerful state gradually revived those military and cultural traditions of the Russian Empire that were deemed essential. These included the creation of a new officer corps. Although the word "officer" had not been in use until 1941, personal military ranks were reintroduced as early as in 1935. By the end of the 1930s, it was decided to "recognize" the merits of great Russian generals, heroic deeds of Russian soldiers and officers of old times and the traditions of Russian patriotism. Many Soviet novels and research papers were written on this subject, feature films were created, etc. All this was, of course, already intertwined with the Soviet ideology.

During this turbulent and anxious period, commanders could gather at the House of the Red Army, listen to the radio, read newspapers and military magazines and discuss the establishment of fascism in Italy and Germany, the war in Spain, the political processes in the USSR, the Red Army victories over the Japanese at Lake Khasan and Khalkhin Gol, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the beginning of the Second World War, the annexation



*Bas-Relief Of S.M. Kirov.
Stair landing on the 1st floor*

*Political workers
of the Red Army,
1936-1941*



Officer Assembly House



*The commander
and the soldier of the infantry
of the Red Army,
1936-1940*

tion of the western Ukraine and western Byelorussia to the USSR, the heavy and bloody but victorious war with Finland in progress very close to Leningrad, the “strange war” in Europe, the occupation of France by the Germans, the bombing of England, the annexation of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR, the reorganization and rearmament of the Red Army, the intense situation at the new border with Germany, etc.

In those specific historical conditions of the pre-war period, when the war was inexorably approaching the eastern and western borders of our country, the Leningrad House of the Red Army was consistently and professionally solving its basic cultural and educational tasks.

In the collection book dedicated to the 15th anniversary of the Leningrad House of the Red Army, its commander, regimental commissar Lazarev wrote as follows: “...With each passing year, the scope of studies conducted in all sorts of interest groups, at seminars and at the stationary school had been expanding significantly.

...Employees of the House of the Red Army were eager to ensure proper cultural entertainment and recreation for each commander and his family.

...The House had trained numerous commanders for admission to academies. Over the four years, 1239 people had been trained in its classrooms and auditoriums for enrollment into various academies.

...Over the five years, 7883 lectures and reports on various topics had been organized at the House and in military units, attended by 975,000 Red Army soldiers, commanders, political workers and their army wives.

*The commanders
of the artillery
of the Red Army,
1936-1940*



...Various interest groups, courses and schools of the House of the Red Army train a wide variety of specialists, including rifle practice instructors, chemical defense specialists, military tourism professionals, librarians, bookkeepers, lecturers, Red Army amateur performance artists, etc. In the period of these last five years alone, 7,372 people have been trained. This formidable army of leaders is then enrolled in military units and academies of the Leningrad Military District.

...commanders, political workers and members of their families are enjoying cultural entertainment at the House of the Red Army named after S.M. Kirov. They have at their disposal numerous tidy living rooms with beautiful furniture, reading rooms, a library with eighty thousand different books, a chess club, a billiard room and an evening children's room.

...The best masters of the arts of our Union, such Honored Artists as Cherkasov, Pechkovsky, Preobrazhenskaya, Gorin, Goryainov, grandmaster Botvinnik and others, regularly perform in the auditoriums of the House of the Red Army. They are always excited to appear before the Red Army audience. Over the five years, 1,130,000 Red Army men, commanders and members of their families had visited various auditoriums of the House for performances, concerts and films."

The first months of 1941 turned out to be the last peaceful months. War was already creeping at the borders of our homeland. The barbarous Operation Barbarossa had already been approved, and its monstrous implementation was being prepared. The Leningrad House of the Red Army was keeping up its multifaceted cultural and educational activity. Below you may find certain excerpts from publications and headlines of the newspaper of the Leningrad Military District titled Guarding the Motherland.

"...a seminar for the heads of libraries of the Leningrad garrison was opened at the Leningrad House of the Red Army named after S.M. Kirov..."

"...Composers of Leningrad are united by a strong friendship with the Red Army. The Union of Soviet Composers arranges an evening recital at the Leningrad House of the Red Army named after S.M. Kirov with pieces by Shostakovich, Sviridov, Chulaki and other composers."

"...A literary evening for combatants and their commanders was held at the Leningrad House of the Red Army with the topic of Writers at the Front. All writers that took part in combats with the Finnish White Guards shared their experience in the front-line press. A report was made by Comrade B.A. Bialik, Comrade S.N. Tikhonov devoted his speech to the use of various genres in military newspapers, such as essays, correspondence, poetic feuilletons, etc."

"...An exhibition of art works of commanders' wives dedicated to the XXIII anniversary of the Red Army was opened at the Leningrad House of the Red Army."

"...On May 1, a festive ball will be held at the Leningrad House of the Red Army named after S.M. Kirov. On this day, a jazz ensemble to be led by honored Soviet performer Klavdia Shulzhenko will give a cheerful, festive concert for commanders and their families... A cheerful, festive concert of the ensemble of Klavdia Shulzhenko and Vladimir Coralli..."



*Commanders-pilots
of the Red Army,
1940-1941*

In 1941, with the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War and the blockade of Leningrad, the LDKA became one of the spiritual centers of resistance to the fascist invaders. Its performers would constantly visit the front. There was a propaganda team that regularly traveled around with a lecturer and a group of performers. This was in fact a visiting theater consisting of professional performers, which was regarded as a military unit and was stationed in barracks on the top floor of the House of the Red Army. Hundreds of concerts were given at the Leningrad front, serving to raise the morale of the defenders of the city. One of the basement rooms was used as the living quarters by the famous singer Klavdia Shulzhenko and her band, the orchestra of Vladimir Koralli called the Leningrad Front Jazz Ensemble. The band visited many military units, performing in trenches, front dugouts, on improvised stages made of car bodies.

When the beginning of the war was announced, the singer was on tour in Yerevan. Klavdia Shulzhenko recalls as follows: “The train stopped in Kharkov, far from the station, an air raid alert was declared in the city. Then, quite unexpectedly, we met our son in a nearby train. This was the train returning Arkady Raikin with the Theater of Miniatures to Leningrad. The theater inter-

*Klavdiya Shulzhenko
with Vladimir Koralli*



rupted its tour in Kharkov, and my relatives put our son Gosha on the train with the artists to deliver him home. As soon as I saw him, I could breathe again. All mothers will understand my feelings at the moment. The train took us further towards the war. We would already meet refugees from the western regions of Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic countries, where fierce battles were in progress. And then there was Leningrad. Everything has changed in a blink of an eye, both the city itself and its people. There were sandbags covering the windows of the former Eliseevsky Store and cafe Nord on Nevsky Prospekt, windows of apartment houses were covered with white paper crosses, large chain tongs, barrels of water and boxes of sand could be seen at each entrance to be used for extinguishing fires caused by incendiary air bombs ("lighters", as we used to call them). The city was filled with duty soldiers with gas masks on their sides, frequent air raid alerts and concentrated, serious faces of people, with no traces of panic. The city was preparing for the battle. At the House of the Red Army, we were registered as voluntary members joining the Armed Forces and provided with military uniforms. This is how I became a Red Army soldier and our band received the title of the Leningrad Front Jazz Ensemble. The command provided us with a small, beat-up bus that soon became our second home, on wheels. Our permanent home has also changed as compared to the pre-war time. We were living in the basement of an ancient building on Liteyny Prospekt, the S.M. Kirov Red Army House, which became our headquarters."

Having voluntarily joined the army, Klavdia Shulzhenko became the soloist of the front jazz orchestra of the Leningrad Military District. This



Klavdiya Shulzhenko



*Group of artists of frontline
brigade Maria Mironova,
Arkady Raikin,
Klavdiya Shulzhenko,
Leonid Utesov and others*

Officer Assembly House

ensemble, led by Klavdia Shulzhenko and her husband Vladimir Coralli, was destined to leave its mark in the history of the heroic defense of Leningrad. In the most difficult first year of the siege, Klavdia Shulzhenko gave over five hundred concerts for the defenders of the besieged Leningrad, with her songs helping people to stay strong and believe in the inevitable victory. She had to perform in trenches and under bombs, under the constant threat to life. The singer would later say the following: "We performed at airfields and railway platforms, in hospitals, at factories, barns and tents, on ice, powdered with snow, on the Road of Life. The concerts were often interrupted by enemy attacks. Our bus was riddled with bullets and shrapnel. Not infrequently, we had to make our way to the performance venue under enemy fire and advancing by bounds. Two of our musicians died of starvation. This happened in the besieged Leningrad, so requires no further explanation. Those who were lucky enough to survive have no right to complain."

It was here, within the walls of the Officer Assembly House, that the internationally famous songs were written and first performed, including *Evening on Raid* (music by V.P. Solovyov-Sedoy, lyrics by A.D. Churkin) at the end of the summer of 1941 and one of the most popular songs of the Great Patriotic War, *The Blue Handkerchief*, in 1942, found by the singer among the works of Polish composer Jerzy Petersburski. Here, K.I. Shulzhenko sang *Let's Smoke*, the song by M.E. Tabachnikov on the verses of I.L. Frenkel. In the fall of 1943, the singer went on a seven-month tour around the country. The most famous performers, including N.K. Cherkasov, Yu.V. Tolubeev and A.I. Raikin, have also always been welcome at the House.

The House itself hosted an exhibition of captured German weapons, which was constantly replenished, as well as an exhibition of works by front-line art-

Presentation of the order of «Red Star» of the Leningrad's House of the Red Army of S.M. Kirov. 1944. Accepts the award the chief of LHRA, Colonel Lazarev I. S.





Presentation of the order of «Red Star» of the Leningrad's House of the Red Army of S.M. Kirov. 1944. Accepts the award the chief of LHRA, Colonel Lazarev I.S.

ists. In 1944, the House of the Red Army was awarded the Order of the Red Star and a military banner as for a military unit.

During the war, there was a significant turn towards old Russian military traditions. It was already clear that the communist ideals alone would not be enough to defeat such a formidable enemy as the fascist Germany. The words “soldier” and “officer” would be heard more and more often; old Russian marches and songs, music of great Russian composers and Russian folk melodies would be performed. The Soviet propaganda was constantly appealing to patriotism, to the memory of our ancestors, drawing analogies between the Red Army and the Russian Army, which was no longer referred to as “former” or “royal”, but was respectfully called the “old Army”. In 1943, a new uniform was introduced, including service shirts and overcoats with upright collars, as in the Russian Army, and with shoulder straps. Battle shoulder straps were of the khaki color; soldiers’ shoulder straps were colored according to the types of troops, and officers’ shoulder straps were in gold or silver. Old military phrases and expressions were widely used. The titles of political instructors and commissioners of all ranks were abolished. Combatants and commanders were officially renamed into soldiers and officers.



Officer Assembly House

Soon after the victory, in 1946, the LDKA was given a new name, becoming the Leningrad District Officer Assembly House (LODO) named after S.M. Kirov. Its functions and purpose remained unchanged, however, the word “officer” was again officially legalized in this building. In peacetime, the House resumed its efforts to strengthen the country’s defense through cultural and educational work.

In September 1950, the Officer Assembly House was involved in certain political events: the trial of the participants in the Leningrad Case was held here. In 1948, the party leader of Leningrad A.A. Zhdanov died. He was a Stalin’s favorite, under whose leadership the city survived the siege. His competitor, L.P. Beria, decided to eliminate the entire Zhdanov’s team, left without its patron, and thereby increase his own influence in the party. An accusation was fabricated that the main Leningrad communists had been scheming to create the Russian Communist Party (by analogy with other Union republics of the USSR) that would pose a threat to the central party leadership. All major party, Soviet and economic leaders of Leningrad were arrested.

The former billiard room on the second floor of the Officer House was occupied by the visiting session of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. Prominent Leningrad party members N.A. Voznesenskiy, P.S. Popkov, A.A. Kuznetsov, M.I. Rodionov, P.G. Lazutkin and R.F. Kapustin were sentenced to execution by firing squad; other defendants in the case were sentenced to prolonged imprisonment.

N. Voznesensky

M. Rodionov

A. Kuznetsov

P. Popkov





*Yuri Gagarin examines
the exposition of the Museum
of the troops history
of the Leningrad
military district*

In December 1954, after a power shift in Moscow, the Officer House in Leningrad was selected as the venue for the trial of a group of senior officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministry of State Security), accused of falsifying the Leningrad Case. These people were also sentenced to death penalty.

In 1964, a museum of the Leningrad Military District was opened in the building. The opening ceremony was conducted in the presence of the District Commander, Army General M.I. Kazakov and the party leadership of Leningrad. The museum was dedicated to the period from the October Revolution



*Museum of the troops history
of the Leningrad military
district*

*Museum is a meeting place
for military historians,
members of the club
of the order of Alexander
Nevsky, veterans of military
operations*



and the Civil War to the respective current moment. The collection was supplemented with gifts from guests and information on further development of the troops of the Leningrad Military District. The museum occupies the area of former hotel rooms on third-floor along Kirochnaya Ulitsa.

Later, in our time, it was recognized that the history of the military district did not begin in 1917, and the first hall was provided with stands covering the history of the St. Petersburg military district in the period of 1864 to 1917. The exhibition then proceeds with items on the revolution, the Civil War, the Kronstadt rebellion, the civil construction of the 1920s-1930s and the Soviet-Finnish war. Several halls cover the period of the Great Patriotic War, including the beginning of the siege of Leningrad, the Nevsky Bridgehead, the Road of Life, the breakthrough and lifting of the blockade, the further advance of the Leningrad Front, the celebration of victory in the war, the triumphant return of Leningrad soldiers to their home city.

Albums with photographs from the times of the Great Patriotic War and old books published in the XIX and early XX centuries are of particular value in the museum collection. These reflect the history of regiments and military schools of the Russian army. In 2014-2015, the museum was replenished with mannequins reflecting the evolution of Soviet and Russian military uniforms and ammunition. Belt straps, shoulder belts, holsters, binoculars, pouches, flasks, kettles, rucksacks and gas masks are the very items used by our combatants near Leningrad during the siege.

The Leningrad Military District museum actively conducts patriotic campaigns for cadets of military schools of St. Petersburg and servicemen of the district. The museum serves as a meeting point for military historians, members of the Order of Alexander Nevsky, war veterans.



In 1991, Leningrad was returned its historical name of St. Petersburg. The name of the district, however, was left unchanged. In this regard, the Leningrad District Officer Assembly House was renamed in 1994 as the District Officer Assembly House of the Leningrad Military District and, in 2011, was again renamed as the Officer Assembly House of the Western Military District in connection with the initiative for enlargement of military districts.

The Officer Assembly House currently leads the same active life as in the old days. It houses scientific and practical conferences on military history and comradely dinners for military school graduates. Even the old tradition of officer balls has been restored. The Great Hall serves as the venue for various song and dance performances and recitals by famous St. Petersburg artistic figures. Groups of visitors are offered guided tours of the living rooms and the museum. The beauty and sophistication of the ancient interiors are the subject of great pride for the district command and employees of the Assembly House. The staircase and the main halls enrapture all foreign military delegations and distinguished domestic guests.

In addition to the current events with classical balls, the Assembly House previously used to host modern dance events, regularly organized in the period from the 1960s to the 1990s. These did not require guests to wear military uniforms, but papers were always checked at the entrance since all male participants had to be servicemen. However, in the 1990s, young people who had already served in the army would usually find a way to get around this rule. More often than not, they would simply present their military service cards, which were not particularly scrutinized by female ticket inspectors or cadets on duty at the entrance. The halls were always filled with girls dreaming of a romance with an officer or a cadet. In the Soviet era, the military profession was considered very prestigious and well paid; therefore, military men were always eligible bachelors. Two



Officer Assembly House



halls were allocated for the “recreation evenings” as they were called. Each hall had own music and a cafeteria for resting between dances and developing new acquaintances. The lower hall was located in a basement room, and the entire dancing area was unofficially referred to as the Pit. At present, the Pit no longer exists.

Lev Kalmanovich, the conductor of the Variety Orchestra of the Officer Assembly House, Honored Worker of Culture of the Russian Federation, is the original living legend of the Officer Assembly House. He devoted his whole life to this House, having worked here for over half a century. There was a time when he was extremely famous for his dancing evenings in

the Pit. Lev Kalmanovich and his band would play at every single reception for distinguished guests and every single jubilee of generals and senior officers of the garrison. His band was a frequent guest at all army events, be it a celebration or a routine army ceremony.

Lev Kalmanovich remains true to his profession, raising new musical talents for the army.



The Officer Assembly House also has its own legends. One of them is mentioned in memoirs of high-ranking military men. Chief of Staff, First Deputy Commander of the Leningrad Military District Colonel-General P.A. Labutin recalls:

“To the present day, the central place in the study of the emperor is occupied by a massive armchair, somewhat similar to a throne. During guided tours for numerous guests and delegations, the manager of the Officer Assembly House always instructs visitors never to sit down in the emperor’s chair, for there is a mystical belief that anyone who sits in the emperor’s chair will be dismissed or removed from public office. This is, of course, an anecdote to make the visitors laugh. But only to a certain point. The Officer Assembly House was once visited by Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation Viktor Chernomyrdin. After the official event, the distinguished guest expressed interest for the House and requested the manager to show him around the main interiors of the halls. During the tour, Viktor Chernomyrdin and his accompanying persons entered the emperor’s study. As usual, the manager of the Assembly House warned them not to sit down in the emperor’s chair for photos. However, Viktor Chernomyrdin, being in a good mood and wearing his unique good-natured smile, confidently, as if at home, sat down in the chair and asked to take a photo of him.



Officer Assembly House

The excursion



To a great surprise of all participants of the tour, only a few weeks later, Mr. Chernomyrdin was removed from the post of Prime Minister of the Russian Federation by Decree of the President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin. This single event certainly might be a coincidence. However, there is another story.

An ordinary event was held at the Officer Assembly House for celebration of the jubilee of one of the senior staff officers of the Leningrad Military District. Before the start of the celebration, a usual tour was conducted in the building. The manager of the Assembly House traditionally reminded the guests not to sit down in the emperor's chair. However, one of the guests, the wife of a serviceman and also a serviceman in the military rank of lance-corporal, modestly requested to be photographed in the emperor's chair. She explained that she had an insignificant position and a low military rank and could probably not be demoted any lower. She sat down and took a picture. After a short time, she was not removed from her insignificant position, but the position itself was made redundant. She and her husband, a colonel, had been searching for a new position for her for a long time afterwards.

This rumor then spread so widely and was believed to be true by so many that during subsequent tours, upon hearing the famous reminder of the manager of the Assembly House, many officials, especially those holding high positions, not only avoided sitting in the emperor's chair, but would prefer to stay as far from it as possible."

In 2013, a grandiose celebration was held on the occasion of the 115th anniversary of the opening of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy. The Great Hall was filled with guests, including the entire high command of the Western Military District, representatives of the city administration, cultural figures and people of art. A special guard of honor was on duty that day. Emperor Nicholas II with his party took the stage and gave a welcome address to the audience. The emperor was impersonated by an actor and his party consisted of members of military history



Celebration of the 115th anniversary of the army and Navy Officer Assembly

clubs. The staircases and halls of the building were filled with soldiers and officers in the uniforms of the Russian Army and Red Army of different eras, which was part of a military historical reenactment. This, symbolically, established the current Officer Assembly House as the successor of the traditions of the Officer Assembly House of the past.



Presentation of memorable signs

Please recall that, in the period from 1898 to 1917, the building of the Officer Assembly House for the Army and the Navy housed three different organizations: the Assembly, a cultural and recreational institution of the Russian Army; hotel rooms for visitors; and the Economic Society of Officers of the Guards Corps (until 1909, when it was transferred to a new building). After the revolution of 1917, the hotel rooms were eliminated, and the Assembly itself was abolished. Soon after that, their restoration gradually started, but under different names, in a different quality and for other people. One cannot build something out of nothing; traditions of the past may not be destroyed completely, especially when they are needed.



The urgency of talking about the inextricable connection between the traditions of cultural and educational work in the army of the pre-revolutionary Russia, the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, the Soviet Army and the modern Russian Army is due to the fact that, without regard for the multiple reassessments of the ideological principles of different historical periods in the life of our country, the basic principles and purposes of the army cultural and educational activities always remain unchanged. These include achieving highly patriotic education, striving for intellectual enrichment, ensuring professional military training and physical education, and promotion of the creation of strong Armed Forces, as a reliable shield for the borders of the fatherland.

The Officer Assembly House still keeps up one of its glorious traditions of supporting servicemen on the battlefields. Since the dispatch of the Russian Air Force for the fight against the terrorist groups in the Syrian Arab Republic, the artistic staff of the Officer House has repeatedly visited the places of deployment of the Russian Army in this country. In the period of 2015 to 2018, over 50 concerts were



given at various military sites there. Many of our band members have been awarded medals for their courage.

The Federal State Institution of Culture and Art Officer Assembly House of the Western Military District, being a cultural and recreational institution of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, still fulfills its main purpose of providing education and ensuring unity among all officers of the modern Russian Army.



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



The military institution of culture under consideration focuses on various cultural and educational activities. The scope of such cultural and educational activities depends on the political system, the current economic conditions and the development level of culture. Globalization can be confidently named as the main feature of the XXI century. However, the ideas of multiculturalism have failed, encouraging public interest in our national and ethnic identity and, more recently, in our state identity, which contributes to patriotic

feelings.

Patriotism holds the dominant position among the spiritual qualities of any modern state, including Russia.

Patriotism is a socio-political and moral principle that expresses the feeling of love for the motherland, concern for its interests and readiness to protect it against any enemies. Patriotism is manifested in a sense of pride in the achievements of the country, in bitterness for its failures and misfortunes, in respect for the historical past of its people and in safekeeping of the people's memory and national and cultural traditions. Patriotism is one of the core components of the Russian national identity.

Military institutions of culture are the unconditional stronghold of patriotic education for the citizens of our country. The rise in patriotic feelings in the Russian society after the events of 2014 should be noted here. Against this background, we can clearly see the heightened interest in military history, manifested by numerous military collectors and military re-enactors, military archaeologists and artists, by the phenomenon of the Immortal Regiment. Unfortunately, we also have to admit the existence of certain manifestations of nationalism, bad taste and the false aesthetics of "flag waving". This is why the most important task of the Federal State Institution of Culture and Art Officer Assembly House of the Western Military District currently consists in instilling good taste, inherent in many generations of the Russian officer corps, through the use of the full scope of its cultural and educational activities.

S. Kononov

March 22, 1898. Solemn consecration and opening of the Officers' Assembly House for the Army and Navy

January 21, 1918. First meeting of the Council of the House of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (RKKA) chaired by E.D. Stasova

April 8, 1924. By resolution of the third district party conference, the Leningrad House of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (RKKA) is established

April 11, 1934. By resolution of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Leningrad Military District the LDKA is named after S.M. Kirov.

April 8, 1944. By decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR the Kirov Leningrad House of the Red Army is awarded the Order of the Red Star. At the same time, the House is awarded with a military banner.

August 7, 1946. The Kirov Leningrad House of the Red Army renamed into the Leningrad District Officer Assembly House named after S.M. Kirov.

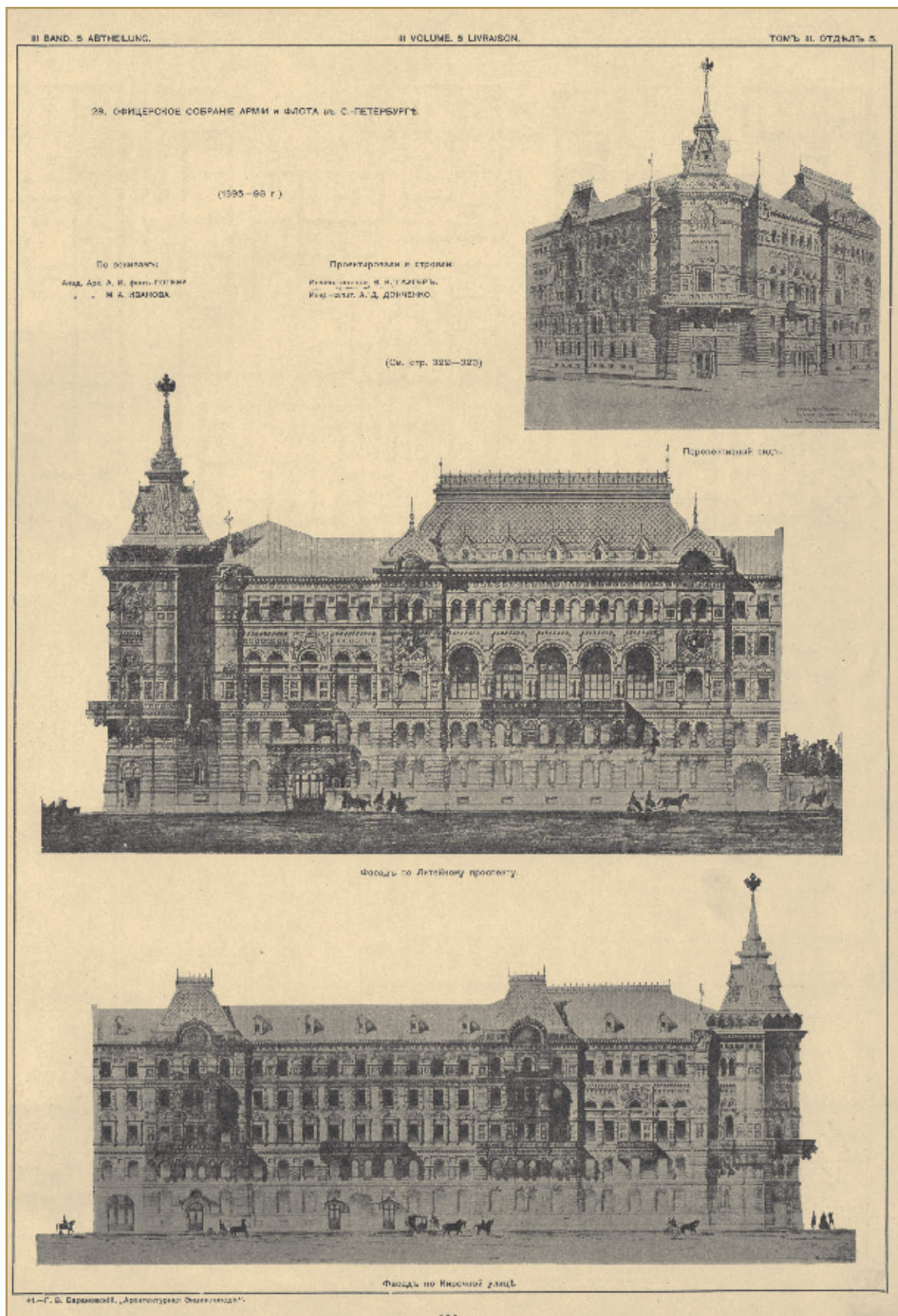
July 7, 1994. The Leningrad District Officer Assembly House named after S.M. Kirov renamed as the District Officer Assembly House of the Leningrad Military District named after S.M. Kirov.

August 31, 2004. The District Officer Assembly House of the Leningrad Military District named after S.M. Kirov renamed as Federal State Institution of Culture Officer Assembly House of the Leningrad Military District.

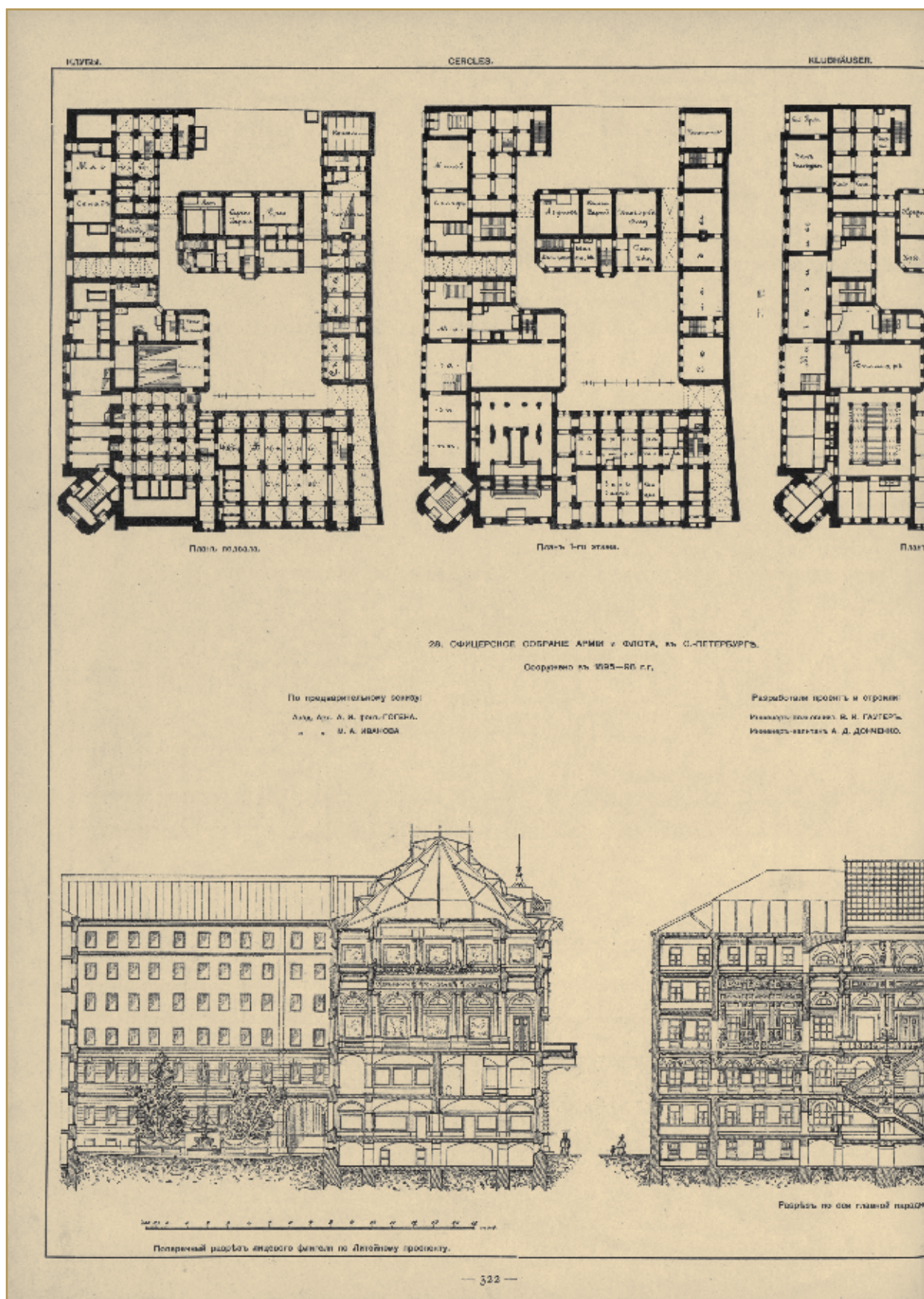
May 1, 2011. Federal State Institution of Culture Officer Assembly House of the Leningrad Military District renamed as Federal State Institution of Culture and Art Officer Assembly House of the Western Military District named after S.M. Kirov.

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Officer Assembly House





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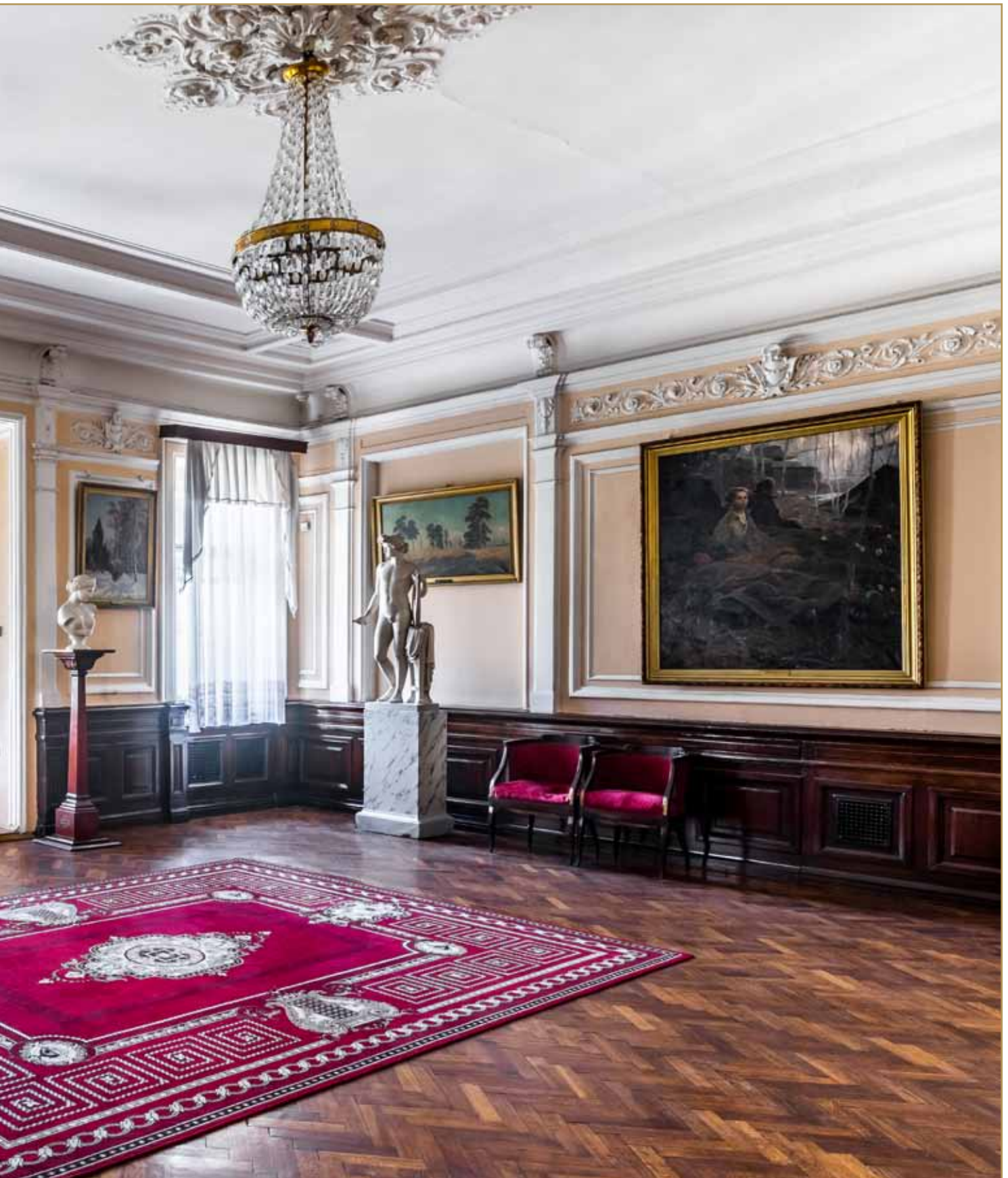
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"On Sunday, March 22, in the presence of the Emperor, the Officer Assembly House for the Army and Navy was officially opened in St. Petersburg, built by the command of His Imperial Majesty with the aim of improving the living conditions of officers, both residing in the capital and visiting on temporary business. The Emperor expressed his confidence that the new Assembly House would contribute to comradely communication among officers and would further unite them into a single friendly family of the Army and Navy, which have always been gloriously displaying their inherent valor".