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*Original paper*



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## **A Memorandum by A.P. Maslov, the first Chief of the Siberian Gendarme District, on the Need to Establish an Institution of Higher Education in the Region (1834)**

### **Abstract**

This article presents a memorandum written by Colonel Alexander Petrovich Maslov, the first Chief of the Siberian Gendarme District, arguing for the urgent establishment of an institution of higher education in Siberia. The memorandum was composed during the second year of the District's existence, when gendarmerie officers were only beginning to familiarize themselves with the region and its population and to identify local needs that might contribute to its overall development. The question of founding an institution of higher education east of the Ural Mountains had repeatedly been raised among government officials and in public discourse during the first third of the nineteenth century. Maslov, although serving in the gendarmerie – a body that formally stood outside the regular administrative apparatus of the state – also sought to draw attention to the importance of establishing a university in Siberia. In his



view, such an institution would help address several pressing problems: raising the educational level of the region, training qualified personnel for the local administration, and reducing the outflow of government officials from Siberia. Nevertheless, Maslov's memorandum did not become a turning point in the development of higher education in the region, since the imperial government at that time showed little interest in pursuing such an initiative. At the same time, the Memorandum is an important historical source because it broadens our understanding of the activities of the gendarmerie and the range of issues it addressed beyond its traditional responsibilities, such as supervising the bureaucracy and society and conducting political surveillance. The full text of the Memorandum is published here for the first time in its original form.

### Keywords:

Gendarmerie; Gendarmerie surveillance; Siberian Gendarme District; Local administration; Staff officers; Siberia; Higher education; University

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permanent gendarmerie presence in the Siberian region began in 1833 with the formation of a gendarmerie district, which received number 7 in the gendarmerie-district structure (from 1837 on it was district 8). This district included both the original Siberian territories and neighboring regions: Tobolsk, Tomsk, Yenisei, and Irkutsk governorates, Omsk Oblast, as well

as Orenburg and Perm governorates. Each of these entities had the following structure of gendarmerie personnel: a staff officer (ranking from major to colonel), his aide-de-camp with an officer rank (from ensign to captain), and a provincial gendarmerie detachment of 34 ranks, headed by a chief with the rank of subaltern officer.

The establishment of a gendarmerie district in Siberia was motivated by several factors. Perhaps the most important was the need to oversee political exiles in the region, primarily the Decembrists. In the early 1830s, Poles, participants in the national liberation uprising of 1830–1831, also began to be exiled en masse beyond the Urals. An audit conducted by M.M. Speransky between 1819 and 1821 uncovered numerous violations related to embezzlement, bribery, abuse of office, and so on. The audit resulted in a large-scale administrative-territorial reform, which necessitated oversight of the functioning of the local government apparatus. Gendarme officers were well suited to both supervise political exiles and control the activities of officials, as they were distanced from the administrative system, subordinated only to their superiors, and defended state interests in their activities.

Colonel Alexander Petrovich Maslov was appointed the first Chief of the Siberian Gendarmerie District. His appointment was based on the following factors: he was one of the first recruits to the Gendarme Corps, and he had experience leading a gendarmerie district. Perhaps most importantly, Maslov was the first gendarmerie officer sent to Siberia in 1829 on a secret mission to investigate the status and activities of the exiled Decembrists<sup>1</sup>. Thus, Maslov was familiar with the region and was able to quickly and effectively organize the work of the gendarmes to implement the above-mentioned tasks.

From the very beginning of the establishment of a gendarmerie district in Siberia, its officers paid attention not only to political exiles and the activities of local officials. They also monitored, in one way or another, virtually all issues related to the Siberian region, reporting on these to the district and corps authorities. Such gendarmerie reports are

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<sup>1</sup> Дамешек Л.М., Кодан С.В., Шавров А.В. Материалы жандармских ревизий 1828–1832 гг. как источник изучения деятельности сибирского аппарата управления // Источники по истории общественной мысли и культуры эпохи позднего феодализма: Сборник статей / Отв. ред. Н.Н. Покровский. Новосибирск, 1988. С. 118–126.



Mikhail Mikhailovich Speransky.  
Artist: A.G. Varnek, after the original by George Dawe.  
*From open sources*

an important historical source: due to their independent status, the gendarmes represented their opinions, which often differed from those of the local administration. This information, however, was all the more valuable to the government, which used these reports to make decisions, including on personnel matters.

Educational institutions, teaching staff, students, and the overall state of education also came under the scrutiny of gendarmerie officials. In his 1835 district report, Colonel Maslov, the District's Chief of Gendarmes, noted that educational institutions throughout Siberia were in a state of "infancy", one of the main reasons for this being a lack of funds. Another problem highlighted by the Chief was the shortage of trained teachers, who, according to him, were "mostly people who had received a primary education". This latter circumstance, again according to Maslov, forced Siberians to turn to educated political exiles to act as mentors<sup>2</sup>.

In 1834, during his second year in office, Colonel A.P. Maslov, having already become well acquainted with the situation in the region, submitted a draft memo to Chief of Gendarmes A.Kh. Benckendorff, entitled *Memorandum on the Need to Establish a Higher Educational Institution or Corps for the Education of Youth in Siberia*. The uniqueness and importance of this document lay in the fact that a gendarmerie officer, having

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<sup>2</sup> Государственный архив Российской Федерации. Ф. 109. Оп. 11. Д. 17. Л. 14 об., 15.



Alexander Khristoforovich Benckendorff. Artist: E. Botman.

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recently assumed his duties, proposed the opening of a higher educational institution in Siberia, thereby demonstrating his interest in the development of regional education.

The impetus for the development of school and higher education in the Russian Empire was given at the very beginning of the reign of Alexander I, when the new Rules of Public Education (1803) and the first University Charter in Russian history (1804) were issued. In accordance with these legislative acts, six educational districts were established, each of which was to house a university. The opening of universities soon followed. The territories of the Perm, Orenburg, Tobolsk, and Irkutsk governorates were assigned to Kazan educational district<sup>3</sup>. In 1804, Imperial University was opened in Kazan. According to the legislative act *On the Organization of Schools* adopted in 1803, a university was planned to be opened in Tobolsk, the administrative center of the Tobolsk governorate, which would encompass all of Western Siberia and part of Eastern Siberia, beyond the Urals<sup>4</sup>. However, the university was never opened.

Various public and government figures repeatedly raised the need to quickly establish a university in Siberia. For example, in 1823, West Siberian Governor-General P.M. Kaptsevich, petitioning the Siberian

<sup>3</sup> «Об учреждении учебных округов, с назначением для каждого особых губерний» [№ 20598] (24 января 1803 г.) // Полное собрание законов Российской империи (ПСЗРИ). Собр. 1-е. СПб., 1830. Т. 27 (1802–1803 гг.). С. 442.

<sup>4</sup> «Об устройстве училищ» [№ 20597] (24 января 1803 г.) // ПСЗРИ. Собр. 1-е. СПб., 1830. Т. 27 (1802–1803 гг.). С. 439.



Pyotr Mikhailovich Kaptsevich. Artist: George Dawe.  
*From open sources*

Committee, argued that opening a higher educational institution could facilitate the training of personnel for the local bureaucracy, thereby eliminating the need to send Siberians to study at universities located in the European part of the country. Kaptsevich, however, did not propose a specific city for the university, only stating that it should be convenient for both Western and Eastern Siberia. Discussion of this proposal began within government circles, but the issue of establishing a university in Siberia remained unresolved, in part due to a lack of the necessary funding<sup>5</sup>.

B.A. Kurakin and V.K. Bezrodny, who conducted a senatorial inspection in Western Siberia in 1827, did not support the idea of opening a higher education institution in the region not only because of the financial costs but also because of the lack of the necessary number of current and potential students. At that time, Western Siberia had only one boys' gymnasium, located in Tobolsk. Central government officials also pointed to the issue of teaching staff in the region, which was clearly insufficient to work at the proposed university<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, the imperial authorities did not support the idea of opening a higher educational institution beyond the Urals, considering it premature and costly. They advocated the need to prioritize the development of school education, including gymnasiums, before returning to the

<sup>5</sup> Ремнев А. Университетский вопрос в Сибири XIX столетия // *Ab Imperio*. 2012. № 1. С. 122–125.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* С. 125–127.



Boris Alekseevich Kurakin. Unknown artist.  
*From open sources*

university issue. This makes the aforementioned memorandum by Gendarme Colonel Maslov all the more interesting. Its contents can be classified as visionary: many gendarme officers, having become accustomed to the area where they served, proposed reform plans to their superiors. This position and the actions of the gendarme officers demonstrate that they were not mere bystanders, as their job description required, but were interested in the results of their service, striving to improve the situation by submitting various proposals to their superiors.

Maslov's memorandum is reproduced at the end of the article. It should be noted that in this document, he directly linked the dire state of the entire Siberian education system to the shortage of personnel in local government positions, as many officials were forced to leave the region after completing their minimum term of service due to the lack of qualified educational institutions for their offspring. To remedy this situation, Maslov believed it was necessary to open a higher education institution in the region. Thus, the Colonel's ideas overlapped with those of West Siberian Governor-General Kaptsevich, as mentioned above.

In December 1834, Chief of Gendarmes Count A.Kh. Benckendorff forwarded Maslov's memorandum to the Minister of Public Education, Count S.S. Uvarov, but he received no response other than the resolution left on the first page: "M[ister] Minister has taken note". Thus, Maslov's proposals were not pursued further, further evidence of the imperial government's lack of commitment to opening a higher educational institution in Siberia. Almost half a century would pass from the date of Maslov's



memorandum before the first university opened in Siberia: in 1878, Alexander II issued a decree establishing a university in Tomsk, and 10 years later, it opened with only one faculty—medical—where 72 students were admitted to the first year<sup>7</sup>.

*Russian State Historical Archive.*

Ф. 733. Он. 83. Д. 83. Л. 1–6

### **Memorandum on the establishment of a higher educational institution or Corps for the education of youth in Siberia<sup>8</sup>**

The vastness of Siberia, its physical location, the nature of its population, and its terrifying remoteness from the Motherland constitute a barrier, hitherto insurmountable to a true understanding of this country. This has resulted in a shortage of personnel for the developing Siberia, which local authorities encounter in many essential areas, including state employees; and therefore, they are forced to employ people who are not suited to their responsibilities.

These necessities have only allowed for excessive expansion of jurisdiction without correction and have even produced disrespect for the severity of the laws.

The children of officials who serve, or who served in Siberia, and who are unable, due to remoteness, lack of resources and means, to receive a moral education, are assigned to be clerical and office servants, acquiring only the skill of uniformity of clerical ritual, and along with this, all the vices of a bad community, premature for them, poisoning the very principles of morality, with destructive impressions of debauchery and immorality for life, taking this disastrous path to raise their rank, which, with the very receipt of it, they are unworthy of.

This degeneration, so sad for humanity, of many generations, combined with the inveteracy and the multiplication of harmful examples, has turned the damage to morality and the degradation of the way of thinking into the very nature of people and with this has deprived

<sup>7</sup> Некрылов С.А. Томский университет — первый научный центр в азиатской части России (середина 1870-х гг. — 1919 г.). В 2 т. Т. 1. Томск: Изд-во Томского университета, 2010. С. 73–127.

<sup>8</sup> The spelling and punctuation have been preserved as in the original document.

Siberia of such people who, having received an education befitting their birth and purpose, could in many ways be useful to this region and replace the shortage of officials in it.

The severity of laws loses its effect where all moral and civil virtues are abandoned.

The consequences of this have created a barrier to the development of Siberia, so rich in natural resources. Necessary institutions, essential arts, even the very economy and rich branches of trade remain in their infancy and fail to correspond to the good intentions and efforts of the government, and even the beginning of the most useful projects remains blocked. How much time has been wasted in searching for what should have been stopped or implemented from time immemorial?

Finally, to alleviate the inconvenience caused by the shortage of people in the service, it was decided to give ranks to those sent to Siberia, increase their salaries, and provide travel allowances.

Time, experience, and a gradual transformation of thought revealed the need to change this measure; the results of the present day prove the truth of this. An increase in wages, based on the cost of all the necessities imported to Siberia, merely equalized them with those received in the interior governorates.

Those who have decided to sacrifice themselves for service in Siberia, upon arriving at their destination, encounter, due to the vastness of this region, a widely varied climate and health effects; numerous difficulties in fulfilling their duties; a disproportionate sacrifice made for the preliminary attainment of a single rank; and each of these, the father of a family or having become one here, is struck by parental grief, seeing their children reach an age requiring the formation of mind and morality and deprived of the means and opportunity to satisfy this most important and sacred parental duty!

Even if the relatives of many of them, residing in the inner governorates, could alleviate this difficulty by taking upon themselves the fulfillment of paternal duties, then the extreme remoteness and the necessary expenses associated with sending children to their homeland do not allow the grieving fathers to even think about this, and to whom, in this case, could their parental hearts entrust their children?

To alleviate these inconveniences, the gymnasiums and public schools established in Siberia do not provide sufficient resources. Siberia, as noted



above, lacks its own moral foundation and resources for this purpose; gymnasiums and schools are limited, and they can only provide knowledge.

The European governorates are not subject to this inconvenience; they have a long-established nobility and citizens of varying ranks, who, according to their abilities, have many means and methods for educating their children on firm moral principles; to this must be added Cadet Corps, Institutes, and similar educational institutions.

Siberia is deprived of all these precious conveniences; and the delivery of children even from remote governorates to places determined for their education, according to distance and climate, has less inconvenience than many Siberian uyezd towns, compared to bringing these children to provincial capitals.

Such remoteness, and the fact that everyone here is engaged in service, create an obstacle for fathers to personally supervise their children, as often as paternal care would require it; to whom then can they entrust such a task here?

All officials in the Governorate, due to a shortage of staff and even scribes, are overbooked at all times, and therefore distracted by their domestic lifestyle. They rely on settlers and even the exiled, or, better yet, those stripped of their ranks and noble titles, to perform essential services.

And it is to such people that fathers, during their long absences and even when they are present, necessarily entrust the teaching, as well as the education and supervision of their children's behavior. What moral consequences should we expect from this?

Gymnasium teachers, running through lessons with their students, spend only a few hours a day with them; the rest of the time, students are given over to their own whims, to the persistence of passions, kindled with the ardor of age by bad example, to habits and discussions on subjects whose very name should be foreign to their understanding at their age. And from this arise the pernicious qualities of secrecy, hypocrisy, perfidy, and the need to just appear to be what they should be, for their own good and the benefit of society.

If this does lead to some success in learning, unfortunately, many examples prove that early depravity often renders it insignificant and even harmful. How many who received the most worthy enlightenment in this way, revealing the most flattering gifts and abilities, were sadly left useless! This is sad proof that enlightenment of the mind, while losing and

even weakening morality, which shapes the soul and heart, is more harmful than beneficial. Morality shapes national character, and this character shapes the power of kingdoms and love for the Fatherland.

Such were the local hardships of Siberia that many fathers, in fulfillment of their parental duty, were compelled, when the appointed time came, to leave service in that region. Others did so out of a natural attachment to their native land or because of family circumstances. Yet, instead of receiving every assistance for the return journey of many thousands of versts, the greater number found only one source of support—in their own fortitude and in the compassion of others.

Such were the consequences of the local hardships attendant upon entering service in Siberia after receiving one's official rank, together with the difficulties of returning, that useful, and indeed indispensable, men could not be retained for the benefit of the region.

If, in compensation for what has been irretrievably lost in the past, one seeks a remedy for the future and the present, experience itself demonstrates how ineffective, and even harmful, all coercive measures directed toward this end have proved.

Plain evidence shows that even the least grateful part of the fatherland, where a man's labors are doubled, cannot be replaced by the most fertile and abundant (foreign) land; nor can wealth prevent a man from returning beneath the roof of a humble abode in order to regain his native home. Might it not be possible to build upon the strength of this natural attachment a nursery of men useful both to Siberia and to the state as a whole? Would it not be more fitting, and at the same time more beneficial, to attain this goal by measures adopted for that very purpose, while simultaneously securing the future and education of the children of those fathers who devote themselves to the service of this region? Would not such provision constitute the most precious reward for the sacrifice they have made of themselves in the service of the state?

If this proposal were carried into effect, would not these pupils remain free from the vices that have arisen here among others of their condition, and would they not themselves eradicate those vices? Would not Siberia, having reared and educated them, become forever the homeland to which they are devoted? In time, would she not raise up sons of her own—upright fathers of families, virtuous mothers, useful members of civilized society, and men of native genius? And would the Government not recognize, in



the establishment of this educational institution for the benefit of the Siberian region, an enduring advantage for future generations?

By the establishment of this institution there would be erected in the hearts of the loyal and grateful people of Siberia an imperishable monument to Our Most August Monarch, to endure throughout the ages to come.

### Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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