

***GRANHOLM  
GENEALOGY***

***RUSSIAN RECENT  
RELATIONSHIPS***

## INTRODUCTION

*This part of our Russian ancestry covers the history of and our relationship to two of Russia's most famous ladies, from Catherine the Great to Anastasia and between them several of the Russian Tsars. Their and our ancestry stem from one common ancestor, Nils Kettilsson Vasa, as showed below. The history of the highlighted persons are here described.*

### Descendants of: Nils Kettilsson Vasa As Related to: Lars Erik Granholm

- 1 **Nils Kettilsson Vasa** b. 1332 Björnö, Frötuna, Uppland d. BEF 1378 (18th great grand father)  
m. **Kristina Jonsdotter Rickery** m. 1357 b. 1336 Björnö, Frötuna, Uppland d. OCT 1378  
[daughter of Jon Nilsson Rickeby and NN Ketillsdotter Puke]
- 2 **Kristiern Nilsson Vasa** (18th great uncle)  
m. **Margareta Eriksdotter Krummedige**
- 3 **Johan Kristiernsson Vasa** b. 1426 d. 1477 (first cousin, 18 times removed)  
m. **Birgitta Gustavsdotter Sture** d. 1472  
[daughter of Gustav Anundsson Sture and Birgitta Steensdotter Bielke]
- 4 **Erik Johansson Vasa** b. 1470 d. 1520 (second cousin, 17 times removed)  
m. **Cecilia Månsdotter Ekaätten** b. 1476 d. 1522
- 5 **Gustav I Vasa King of Sweden** b. 1496 d. 1560 (third cousin, 16 times removed)  
m. **Margareta Leijonhufvud Queen of Sweden** b. 1516 d. 1551  
[daughter of Erik Abrahamsson Leijonhufvud and Ebba Eriksdotter Vasa]
- 6 **Charles IX King of Sweden** b. 4 October 1550 d. 30 October 1611 (4th cousin, 15 times removed)  
m. **Maria von Palatinate Princess of Germany** b. 1561 d. 1589
- 7 **Catherine Princess of Sweden** b. 1584 d. 1638 (5th cousin, 14 times removed)  
m. **John Casimir Count of Palatine** b. 1589 d. 1652
- 8 **Christina Magdalena** b. 1616 d. 1662 (6th cousin, 13 times removed)  
m. **Frederick VI, Margrave of Baden-Durlach**
- 9 **Frederick VII, Margrave of Baden-Durlach** (7th cousin, 12 times removed)  
m. **Augusta Marie of Holstein-Gottorp**
- 10 **Albertina Frederica von Baden-Durlach** (8th cousin, 11 times removed)  
m. **Christian August Prince of Holstein-Gottorp** b. 1673 d. 1726  
[son of Christian Albrecht Duke of Holstein-Gottorp and Frederika Amalia Princess of Denmark]
- 11 **Johanna Elisabeth von Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp** (9th cousin, 10 times removed)  
m. **Christian August Prince of Anhalt** b. 1690 d. 1747
- 12 **Catherine the Great Empress of Russia** b. 1729 d. 1796 (10th cousin, 9 times removed)  
m. **Peter III Tsar of Russia** b. 1728 d. 1762  
[son of Charles Frederick Duke of Holstein and Anna Petrovna Grand Duchess of Russia]
- 13 **Paul I Tsar of Russia** b. 1754 d. 1801 (11th cousin, 8 times removed)  
m. **Maria Feodorovna von Württemberg** b. 1759 d. 1828
- 14 **Alexander I Tsar of Russia** b. 1777 d. 1825 (12th cousin, 7 times removed)
- 14 **Nicholas I Tsar of Russia** b. 1796 d. 1855 (12th cousin, 7 times removed)  
m. **Alexandra Feodorovna (Charlotte) Princess of Prussia** b. 1798 d. 1860
- 15 **Alexander II Tsar of Russia Grand Duke of Finland** b. 1818 d. 1881 (13th cousin, 6 times removed)  
m. **Maria Alexandrovna von Hesse**
- 16 **Alexander III Romanov Tsar of Russia** b. 1845 d. 1894 (14th cousin, 5 times removed)  
m. **Maria Feodorovna (Dagmar) Empress of Russia** b. 26 Nov 1847 d. 13 Oct 1928 (20th cousin, 4 times removed)  
[daughter of Christian IX King of Denmark and Louise Fredericka Princess of Hesse-Kassel]
- 17 **Nicholas II Romanov Tsar of Russia** b. 1868 d. 16 Jul 1918 Executed by Bolsheviks (15th cousin, 4 times removed)  
m. **Alexandra Feodorovna von Hessen** b. 1872 d. 16 Jul 1918 Executed by Bolsheviks  
[daughter of Louis IV Grand Duke of Hesse and Alice Princess of the United Kingdom]
- 18 **Anastasia Romanov Grand Duchess of Russia** b. 1901 d. 16 Jul 1918 Executed (16th cousin, 3 times removed)

# Catherine II of Russia

**Catherine II**, called **Catherine the Great** (2 May 1729 – reigned as [Empress of Russia](#) from 9 July 1762 until 17 November 1796). Under her direct auspices the Russian Empire expanded, improved its administration, and continued to [modernize](#) along Western European lines. Catherine's rule re-vitalized Russia, which grew ever stronger and became recognized as one of the [great powers](#) of Europe. She frequently occasioned scandal — given her propensity for relationships which often resulted in [gossip](#) flourishing within more than one European court.

## *Empress and Autocrat of All the Russias*



Catherine took power after a conspiracy deposed her husband, [Peter III](#) (1728–1762), and her reign saw the high point in the influence of the [Russian nobility](#). Peter III, under pressure from the nobility, had already increased the authority of the great landed proprietors over their [muzhiks](#) and [serfs](#). In spite of the duties imposed on the nobles by the first prominent "modernizer" of Russia, Tsar [Peter I](#) (1672–1725), and despite Catherine's friendships with the [western European](#) thinkers of the [Enlightenment](#) (in particular [Denis Diderot](#), [Voltaire](#) and [Montesquieu](#)) Catherine found it impractical to improve the lot of her poorest subjects, who continued to suffer (for example) [military conscription](#).

## Early life

Catherine's father [Christian August, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst](#) belonged to the [ruling family](#) of Anhalt, but entered the service of Prussia and held the rank of a [Prussian](#) general in his capacity as Governor of the city of Stettin in the name of the king of [Prussia](#). Born as **Sophia Augusta Frederica** in Stettin, Catherine did have some Russian ancestry, and two of her first cousins became Kings of [Sweden](#): [Gustav III](#) and [Charles XIII](#).

Historical accounts portray Catherine's mother as emotionally cold and [physically abusive](#) who loved gossip and court intrigues. Johanna's hunger for fame centered on her daughter's prospects of becoming empress of Russia, but she infuriated Empress Elizabeth, who eventually banned her from the country for spying for King [Frederick of Prussia](#) (reigned 1740–1786). The empress knew the family well: she herself had intended to marry Princess Johanna's brother [Charles Augustus](#), who had died of [smallpox](#) in 1727 before the wedding could take place. Nonetheless, Elizabeth took a strong liking to the daughter, who on arrival in Russia spared no effort to ingratiate herself not only with the Empress Elizabeth, but with her husband and with the [Russian people](#). She applied herself to learning the [Russian language](#) with such zeal that she rose at night and walked about her bedroom barefoot repeating her lessons. This resulted in a severe attack of [pneumonia](#) in March 1744. When she wrote her [memoirs](#) she represented herself as

having made up her mind when she came to Russia to do whatever seemed necessary, and to profess to believe whatever required of her, in order to become qualified to wear the crown. The consistency of her character throughout life makes it highly probable that even at the age of fifteen she possessed sufficient maturity to adopt this worldly-wise line of conduct.

Tsar Peter III reigned only 6 months; he died on 17 July 1762

Count Andrei Shuvalov, chamberlain to Catherine, knew the diarist [James Boswell](#) well, and Boswell reports that Shuvalov shared private information regarding the monarch's intimate affairs. Some of these rumours included that Peter took a mistress ([Elizabeth Vorontsova](#)), while Catherine carried on liaisons with [Sergei Saltykov](#), [Grigory Grigoryevich Orlov](#), (1734-1783), [Stanisław August Poniatowski](#), [Alexander Vassilchikov](#), and others. She became friends with Princess [Ekaterina Vorontsova-Dashkova](#), the sister of her husband's mistress, who introduced her to several powerful [political groups](#) which opposed her husband.



## The reign of Peter III and the coup d'état of July 1762

After the death of the Empress Elizabeth on 5 January 1762, Peter, the Grand Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, succeeded to the throne as [Peter III of Russia](#), and his wife, Grand Duchess Catherine became [Empress Consort](#) of Russia. The imperial couple moved into the new [Winter Palace](#) in [Saint Petersburg](#).

In July 1762, barely six months after becoming the Tsar, Peter committed the political error of retiring with his Holstein-born courtiers and relatives to [Oranienbaum](#), leaving his wife in Saint Petersburg. On [July 13](#) and [July 14](#) the [Leib Guard](#) revolted, deposed Peter, and proclaimed Catherine the ruler of Russia. The bloodless [coup](#) succeeded; [Ekaterina Dashkova](#), a confidante of Catherine who became President of the [Russian Academy of Sciences](#) in 1783, the year of its foundation, seems to have stated that Peter seemed rather glad to have rid himself of the throne, and requested only a quiet estate and his mistress.

But three days after the coup, on [July 17, 1762](#) - just six months after his accession to the throne - Peter III died at [Ropsha](#), at the hands of [Alexei Orlov](#). Historians find no evidence for Catherine's complicity in the supposed assassination. Catherine, although not descended from any previous Russian emperor, succeeded her husband as [Empress Regnant](#). She followed the precedent established when [Catherine I](#) (born in the [lower classes](#) in the Swedish East Baltic territories) succeeded her husband [Peter I](#) in 1725.

# Foreign affairs

## Relations with Western Europe



Catherine II of Russia

*Portrait of Catherine in an advanced age, with the [Chesme Column](#) in the background.*

From 1788 to 1790, Russia fought in the [Russo-Swedish War](#) against Sweden, instigated by Catherine's cousin, King [Gustav III of Sweden](#). Expecting to simply overtake the Russian armies still engaged in war against [the Ottoman Turks](#) and hoping to strike Saint Petersburg directly, the Swedes ultimately faced mounting human and territorial losses when opposed by Russia's [Baltic Fleet](#). After [Denmark declared war](#) on Sweden in 1788 (the [Theater War](#)), things looked bleak for the Swedes. After the [Battle of Svensksund](#) in 1790, the parties signed the [Treaty of Värälä \(August 14, 1790\)](#) returning all conquered territories to their respective owners, and peace ensued for 20 years, aided by the assassination of Gustav III in 1792.



## Personal life

Catherine, throughout her long reign, took many lovers, often elevating them to high positions for as long as they held her interest, and then pensioning them off with large estates and gifts of serfs. After her affair with her lover and capable adviser [Grigori Alexandrovich Potemkin](#) ended in 1776, he would allegedly select a candidate-lover for her who had both the physical beauty as well as the mental faculties to hold Catherine's interest. Some of these men loved her in return, and she always showed generosity towards her lovers, even after the end of an affair. One of her lovers, Zavadovsky, received 50,000 rubles, a pension of 5,000 rubles, and 4,000 peasants in the Ukraine after she dismissed him. The last of her lovers, [Prince Zubov](#), 40 years her junior, proved the most capricious and extravagant of them all.

Catherine suffered a [stroke](#) on 16 November 1796 and died in her bed at 9:20 the following evening without having regained consciousness.

She lies buried at the [Peter and Paul Cathedral](#) in [Saint Petersburg](#).

# Paul I of Russia

**Paul** (October 11754 – March 23, 1801) was the [Emperor of Russia](#) between 1796 and 1801.

*Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*



## Childhood

Paul was born in the Palace of [Empress Elisabeth](#) in [St Petersburg](#). He was the son of Elizabeth's heir, her nephew, the Grand Duke [Peter](#), later Emperor Peter III, and his wife, the Grand Duchess Catherine, later Empress [Catherine II](#).

During his infancy, Paul was taken from the care of his mother by the Empress [Elizabeth](#), whose ill-judged fondness allegedly injured his health. As a boy, he was reported to be intelligent and good-looking. His pug nosed facial features in later life are attributed to an attack of [typhus](#), from which he suffered in 1771. It has been asserted that his mother hated him, and was only restrained from putting him to death while he was still a boy by the fear of what the consequences of another palace crime might be to herself. [Lord Buckinghamshire](#), the British [Ambassador](#) at her court, expressed this opinion as early as 1764. However, others suggest that the Empress, who was usually very fond of children, treated Paul with kindness. He was put in the charge of a trustworthy governor, [Nikita Ivanovich Panin](#), and of competent tutors.

oy destined to become the sovereign, but Catherine took great trouble to arrange his first marriage with Wilhelmina Louisa (who acquired the Russian name "[Natalia Alexeievna](#)"), one of the daughters of [Ludwig IX, Landgrave of Hesse-Darmstadt](#), in 1773, and allowed him to attend the Council in order that he might be trained for his work as Emperor. His tutor, Poroshin, complained of him that he was "always in a hurry," acting and speaking without reflection.



## Early life

*Maria Feodorovna, portrait by [Alexander Roslin](#)*

After his first wife died in childbirth, his mother arranged another marriage on [October 7, 1776](#), with the beautiful [Sophia Dorothea of Württemberg](#), given the new name **Maria Feodorovna**. At this time he began to be involved in intrigues. He believed he was the target of assassination. He also suspected his mother of intending

to kill him, and once openly accused her of causing broken glass to be mingled with his food.

Yet, though his mother removed him from the council and began to keep him at a distance, her actions were not unkind. The use made of his name by the rebel [Pugachev](#), who had impersonated his father Peter, tended no doubt to render Paul's position more difficult. On the birth of his first child in 1777 the Empress gave him an estate, [Pavlovsk](#). Paul and his wife gained leave to travel through western Europe in 1781–1782.

## Ascension to the throne

Paul became emperor after Catherine suffered a [stroke](#) on [November 5, 1796](#), and died in bed without having regained consciousness. His first action was to inquire about and, if possible, to destroy her testament, as it was rumoured that she had expressed wishes to exclude Paul from succession and to leave the throne to Alexander, her eldest grandson. These fears probably contributed to Paul's promulgation of the famous [Pauline Laws](#), which established the strict principle of [primogeniture](#) in the House of [Romanov](#) and were not to be modified by his successors.

During the first year of his reign, Paul emphatically reversed many of the policies of his mother. The army, then [poised to attack Persia](#) in accordance with Catherine's last design, was recalled to the capital within one month of Paul's ascension. His father Peter was reburied with great pomp at the royal sepulchre in the [Peter and Paul Cathedral](#). To the rumour of his illegitimacy Paul responded by parading his descent from [Peter the Great](#). The inscription on the [monument to the first Emperor of Russia](#) erected in Paul's time near the [St. Michael's Castle](#) reads in [Russian](#) "*To the Great-Grandfather from the Great-Grandson*", a subtle but obvious mockery of [Latin](#) "PETRO PRIMO CATHERINA SECUNDA", the pompous dedication by Catherine on the [Bronze Horseman](#)', the most famous statue of Peter in St Petersburg.

## Purported eccentricities

Emperor Paul was idealistic and capable of great generosity, but he was also mercurial and capable of vindictiveness. Those who did not share his chivalric views were dismissed or lost their places at court: seven field marshals and 333 generals fell into this category.

Morbidly suspicious of democracy and anything Western-European, Paul banned the import of books and censored correspondence with foreigners. He closed down private printing presses and deleted from the Russian dictionary the words meaning: "citizen", "club", "society" and "revolution". In 1797 he dictated a law banning modern dress including round hats, top boots, long pants, and shoes with laces, then sent a couple hundred armed troops onto the streets of St. Petersburg with orders to attack anyone who did not adhere to the new dress code.

Emperor Paul also ordered the bones of [Grigory Potyomkin](#), his mother's lover, dug out of their grave and scattered.

# Assassination

[St. Michael's palace](#), where Emperor Paul was murdered within weeks after the housewarming.



Paul's premonitions of assassination were well-founded. His attempts to force the nobility to adopt a code of chivalry alienated many of his trusted advisors. The Emperor also discovered outrageous machinations and corruption in the Russian treasury. Although he repealed Catherine's law which allowed the corporal punishment of the free classes and directed reforms which resulted in greater rights for the peasantry, and better treatment for serfs on agricultural estates, most of his policies were

viewed as a great annoyance to the noble class and induced his enemies to work out a plan of action.

*Military Parade of Emperor Paul in front of Mikhailovsky Castle painting by [Alexandre Benois](#)*



On the night of the March 23, 1801, Paul was murdered in his bedroom in the newly built [St Michael's Castle](#) by a band of dismissed officers. They charged into his bedroom, flushed with drink after supping together, and found Paul hiding behind some drapes in the corner. The conspirators pulled him out, forced him to the table, and tried to compel him to sign his abdication. Paul offered some resistance, and one of the

assassins struck him with a sword, after which he was strangled and trampled to death. He was succeeded by his son, the 23-year-old [Alexander I](#)—who was actually in the palace—and to whom General [Nicholas Zubov](#), one of the assassins, announced his accession, accompanied by the admonition, "Time to grow up! Go and rule!".

*Military Parade of Emperor Paul in front of Mikhailovsky Castle painting by [Alexandre Benois](#)*

# Alexander I of Russia

**Alexander I of Russia** (**Russian:** Aleksandr I Pavlovich) (23 December 1777 – 19 November 1825), also known as **Alexander the Blessed** served as **Emperor** of Russia from 23 March 1801 to 1 December 1825 and **Ruler of Poland** from 1815 to 1825, as well as the first Russian **Grand Duke of Finland** and **Lithuania**.

*Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*  
*King of Poland; Grand Duke of Finland; Grand Duke of Lithuania*



He was born in **Saint Petersburg** to **Grand Duke Paul Petrovich**, later Emperor **Paul I**, and **Maria Feodorovna**, daughter of the **Duke of Württemberg**. Alexander was the eldest of four brothers. He succeeded to the throne after his father was murdered, and ruled Russia during the chaotic period of the **Napoleonic Wars**. In the first half of his reign Alexander tried to introduce liberal reforms, while in the second half he turned to a much more arbitrary manner of conduct, which led to the revoking of many early reforms. In foreign policy Alexander gained certain successes, mainly by winning several military campaigns. In particular under his rule Russia acquired Finland and part of Poland. The strange contradictions of his character make Alexander one of the most interesting Tsars. Adding to this, his death was shrouded in mystery, and the location of his body remains unknown.

## Early life

Alexander and his younger brother **Constantine** were raised by their grandmother, **Catherine the Great**. Some sources allege that she created the plan to remove her son (Alexander's father) Paul I from succession altogether. Both she and his father tried to use Alexander for their own purposes, and he was torn emotionally between them. This taught Alexander very early on how to manipulate those who loved him, and he became like a **chameleon**, changing his views and personality depending on whom he was with at the time. From the free-thinking atmosphere of the court of Catherine and his **Swiss** tutor, **Frédéric-César de La Harpe**, he imbibed the principles of **Rousseau's** gospel of humanity. But from his military governor, **Nikolay Saltykov**, he imbibed the traditions of Russian autocracy. **Andrey Afanasyevich Samborsky**, whom his grandmother chose for his religious upbringing, was an atypical, unbearded **Orthodox** priest, who had long lived in England and taught Alexander (and Constantine) excellent English. Young Alexander sympathised with **French** and **Polish revolutionaries**, but his father seems to have taught him to combine a theoretical love of **humankind** with a practical contempt for humankind. These contradictory tendencies remained with him through life and are observed in his dualism in **domestic** and **military** policy.

On 9 October, 1793 when Alexander was still 15 years old, he married 14 year old [Louise of Baden](#), who took the name Elizabeth Alexeievna. Meanwhile, the death of Catherine in November 1796, before she could appoint Alexander as her successor, brought his father, Paul I, to the throne. Paul's attempts at reform were met with hostility and many of his closest advisers as well as Alexander were against his proposed changes. Paul I was murdered in March, 1801.

## Succession to the throne

Alexander I succeeded to the throne on 24 March 1801, and was crowned in the [Kremlin](#) on 15 September of that year. Historians still debate about Alexander's role in his father's murder. The most common opinion is that he was let into the conspirators' secret and was willing to take the throne but insisted that his father should not be killed. Alexander's having become Tsar through a crime that cost his father's life would give him a strong sense of remorse and shame, which explains his increasing religiosity after the Napoleonic Wars.

## Legal reform

Alexander, who, without being consciously tyrannical, possessed in full measure the [tyrant's](#) characteristic distrust of men of ability and independent judgement, in fact lacked the first requisite for a reforming sovereign: confidence in his people; and it was this want that vitiated such reforms as were actually realised. He experimented in the outlying provinces of his [Empire](#); and the Russians noted with open murmurs that, not content with governing through foreign instruments, he was conferring on Poland, Finland and the [Baltic provinces](#) benefits denied to themselves.



## Influence on European Politics

### 1807 loss to French forces

*Equestrian portrait of Alexander I (1812)*

Meanwhile Napoleon, a little deterred by the Russian autocrat's youthful ideology, never gave up hope of detaching him from the coalition. He had no sooner entered [Vienna](#) in triumph than he opened negotiations with him; he resumed them after the [Battle of Austerlitz](#) (2 December, 1805). [Imperial Russia](#) and France, he urged, were "geographical allies"; there was, and could be, between them no true conflict of interests; together they might rule the world. But Alexander was still determined "to persist in the system of disinterestedness in respect of all the states of Europe which he had thus far

followed", and he again allied himself with the Kingdom of Prussia. The campaign of [Jena](#) and the [battle of Eylau](#) followed; and Napoleon, though still intent on the Russian alliance, stirred up [Poles](#), [Turks](#) and [Persians](#) to break the obstinacy of the Tsar. A party too in Russia itself, headed by the Tsar's brother Constantine Pavlovich, was clamorous for peace; but Alexander, after a vain attempt to form a new coalition, summoned the Russian nation to a holy war against Napoleon as the enemy of the Orthodox faith. The outcome was the rout of [Friedland](#) (June 13/14, 1807). Napoleon saw his chance and seized it. Instead of making heavy terms, he offered to the chastened autocrat his alliance, and a partnership in his glory.

The two Emperors met at [Tilsit](#) on 25 June 1807. Alexander, dazzled by Napoleon's [genius](#) and overwhelmed by his apparent generosity, was completely won over. Napoleon knew well how to appeal to the exuberant imagination of his new-found friend. He would divide with Alexander the Empire of the world; as a first step he would leave him in possession of the [Danubian](#) principalities and give him a free hand to deal with Finland; and, afterwards, the Emperors of the [East](#) and [West](#), when the time should be ripe, would drive the [Turks](#) from Europe and march across Asia to the conquest of [India](#). A programme so stupendous awoke in Alexander's impressionable mind an ambition to which he had hitherto been a stranger. The interests of Europe were forgotten. "What is Europe?" he exclaimed to the French ambassador. "Where is it, if it is not you and we?"

## Prussia

The brilliance of these new visions did not, however, blind Alexander to the obligations of friendship; and he refused to retain the Danubian principalities as the price for suffering a further dismemberment of Prussia. "We have made loyal war", he said, "we must make a loyal peace." It was not long before the first enthusiasm of Tilsit began to wane. The French remained in Prussia, the Russians on the Danube; and each accused the other of breach of faith. Meanwhile, however, the personal relations of Alexander and Napoleon were of the most cordial character; and it was hoped that a fresh meeting might adjust all differences between them. The meeting took place at [Erfurt](#) in October 1808 and resulted in a treaty which defined the common policy of the two Emperors. But Alexander's relations with Napoleon nonetheless suffered a change. He realised that in Napoleon sentiment never got the better of reason, that as a matter of fact he had never intended his proposed "grand enterprise" seriously, and had only used it to preoccupy the mind of the Tsar while he consolidated his own power in [Central Europe](#). From this moment the French alliance was for Alexander also not a fraternal agreement to rule the world, but an affair of pure policy. He used it, in the first instance, to remove "the geographical enemy" from the gates of Saint Petersburg by [wresting Finland from the Sweden](#) (1809); and he hoped by means of it to make the Danube the southern frontier of Russia.

## Private life

On 9 October, 1793, Alexander married [Louise of Baden](#), known as Elisabeth Alexeyevna after her conversion to the [Orthodox Church](#). He later told his friend Frederick William III that the marriage, a political match devised by his grandmother, [Catherine the Great](#), regrettably proved to be a misfortune for him and his wife. Their two children of the marriage died young.

# Mysterious death

*The Palace of Alexander I in Taganrog, where the Russian Emperor died in 1825.*



Tsar Alexander I became increasingly involved in and increasingly more suspicious of those around him. On the way to the conference in [Aachen](#), Germany an attempt had been made to kidnap him which made him even more suspicious of the people around him.

In the autumn of 1825 the Emperor undertook a voyage to the south of Russia due to the increasing illness of Alexander's wife. During his trip he himself caught a cold which developed into typhus from which he died in the southern city of [Taganrog](#) on 1 December, 1825. His wife died a few months later as the emperor's body was transported to [Saint Petersburg](#) for the funeral. He was interred at the Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral of the [Peter and Paul Fortress](#) in Saint Petersburg on 13 March, 1826.

The unexpected death of the [Emperor of Russia](#) far from the capital caused persistent rumors that his death and funeral were staged while the emperor allegedly renounced the crown and retired to spend the rest of his life in solitude. It is rumored that a "soldier" was buried as Alexander or that the grave was empty or that a British ambassador at the Russian court said he had seen Alexander boarding a ship. Some say the former emperor became a [monk](#) in either [Pochaev Lavra](#) or [Kievo-Pecherskaya Lavra](#) or elsewhere. Many people, including some historians, supposed that a mysterious hermit [Feodor Kuzmich](#) (or *Kozmich*) who emerged in [Siberia](#) in 1836 and died in the vicinity of [Tomsk](#) in 1864 was in fact Alexander I under an assumed identity. While there are testimonies that "Feodor Kozmich" in his earlier life might have belonged to a higher level of society, his identity as Alexander I was never established beyond reasonable doubt. In 1925 the Soviets opened Alexander's tomb and did not find a body.<sup>1</sup>

The immediate aftermath of Alexander's death was also marked by confusion regarding the order of succession and by the attempt of military coup-d'etat by liberal-minded officers. The [heir presumptive](#), [Tsesarevich](#) and [Grand Duke Constantine Pavlovich of Russia](#) had in 1822 renounced his rights of succession, but this act was not publicly announced, nor known to anybody outside of few people within the tsar's family. For this reason, on 27 November (O.S.), 1825 the population, including Constantine's younger brother [Nicholas](#), swore allegiance to Constantine. After the true order of succession was disclosed to the imperial family and general public, [Nicholas I](#) ordered that the allegiance to him to be sworn on 14 December (O.S.), 1825. Seizing the opportunity, the [Decembrists](#) revolted, allegedly to defend Constantine's rights to the throne, but in fact in order to initiate the change of regime in Russia. [Nicholas I](#) brutally suppressed the rebellion and sent the ringleaders to the gallows and Siberia.

# Nicholas I of Russia

**Nicholas I** (6 July [O.S. 25 June] 1796 – 2 March 1855), was the [Emperor of Russia](#) from 1825 until 1855, known as one of the most [reactionary](#) of the [Russian monarchs](#). On the eve of his death, the Russian Empire reached its historical zenith spanning over 20 million square kilometres.

*Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*  
*King of Poland; Grand Duke of Finland*



Nicholas I was born in [Gatchina](#) to [Emperor Paul I](#) and [Empress Maria Feodorovna](#). He was a younger brother to [Alexander I of Russia](#) and [Grand Duke Constantine Pavlovich of Russia](#).

## Early life and road to power

Nicholas was not brought up to be the Emperor of Russia, as he had two elder brothers before him. As such, in 1825, when Alexander I suddenly died of typhus, Nicholas was caught between swearing allegiance to his second-eldest brother [Constantine Pavlovich](#) and accepting the throne for himself. The interregnum lasted until [Constantine Pavlovich](#) who was in [Warsaw](#) at that time confirmed his refusal. Additionally, in 25 December Nicholas issued the manifesto claiming his accession to the throne. That manifesto named 1 December as official date of his reign start.

## Foreign policy

In foreign policy, Nicholas I acted as the protector of ruling legitimism and guardian against revolution. His offers to suppress revolution on the European continent, trying to follow the trends of his eldest brother, Tsar Alexander I, earned him the label of *gendarme of Europe*. In 1825 Nicholas I was crowned and began to limit the liberties of [constitutional monarchy](#) in [Congress Poland](#). In return, after the [November Uprising](#) broke out, in 1831 the [Polish parliament](#) deposed Nicholas as king of Poland in response to his repeated curtailment of its constitutional rights. The Tsar reacted by sending Russian troops into Poland. Nicholas crushed the rebellion, abrogated the Polish constitution, and reduced Poland to the status of a [Russian province](#) and embarked on a policy of repression towards Catholics.

In 1848, when a [series of revolutions](#) convulsed Europe, Nicholas was in the forefront of reaction. In 1849 he intervened on behalf of the [Habsburgs uprising in Hungary](#), and he also urged [Prussia](#) not to accept a liberal constitution.

While Nicholas was attempting to maintain the status quo in Europe, he adopted an aggressive policy toward the [Ottoman Empire](#). Nicholas I was following the traditional Russian policy of resolving the so-called [Eastern Question](#) by seeking to partition the Ottoman Empire and establish a protectorate over the Orthodox population of the [Balkans](#), still largely under Ottoman control in the 1820s.

*Monument to Nicholas I on St. Isaac's Square*



Russia fought a successful war with the Ottomans in 1828 and 1829. In 1833 Russia negotiated the [Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi](#) with the Ottoman Empire. The major European parties mistakenly believed that the treaty contained a secret clause granting Russia the right to send warships through the [Bosporus](#) and [Dardanelles](#) straits. By the [London Straits Convention](#) of 1841, they affirmed Ottoman control over the straits and forbade any power, including Russia, to send warships through the straits. Based on his role in suppressing the revolutions of 1848 and his mistaken belief that he had British diplomatic support, Nicholas moved against the Ottomans, who declared war on Russia in 1853.

Fearing the results of an Ottoman defeat by Russia, in 1854 [Britain](#), France, the Kingdom of [Sardinia](#) and also then Duchy of [Savoy](#) , (which would be absorbed into Italy in 1861), and the [Ottoman Empire](#) on the other joined forces in the conflict known what became known as the [Crimean War](#)

on the Ottoman side and in Western Europe, but known in Russia as the *Eastern War* (March 1854–February 1856).

## Death

Nicholas died on 2 March 1855. The cause of his death is unclear though many believe he poisoned himself after learning of Russia's defeat at [Evpatoria](#) during the [Crimean War](#).

## Issue

Nicholas married [Charlotte of Prussia](#) (1798–1860) who thereafter went by the name Alexandra Feodorovna. Charlotte was daughter of [Frederick William III of Prussia](#) and [Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz](#). Nicholas and Charlotte were third cousins, as they were both great-great-grandchildren of [Frederick William I of Prussia](#).

# Alexander II of Russia

**Alexander (Aleksandr) II Nikolaevich** (Moscow, 29 April 1818 – 13 March 1881 in [St. Petersburg](#)), also known as **Alexander the Liberator** was the [Emperor](#) of the [Russian Empire](#) from 3 March 1855 until his [assassination](#) in 1881. He was also the [Grand Duke of Finland](#) and the [King of Poland](#).

*Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*



## Early life

Born in 1818, he was the eldest son of [Nicholas I of Russia](#) and [Charlotte of Prussia](#), daughter of [Frederick William III of Prussia](#) and [Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz](#). His early life gave little indication of his ultimate potential; until the time of his accession in 1855, aged 37, few imagined that he would be known to posterity as a leader able to implement the most challenging reforms undertaken in Russia since the reign of [Peter the Great](#).

## His reign

Alexander II succeeded to the throne upon the death of his father in 1855. The first year of his reign was devoted to the prosecution of the [Crimean War](#), and after the fall of [Sevastopol](#) to negotiations for peace. It was widely thought that the country had been exhausted and humiliated by the war. Encouraged by public opinion he began a period of radical reforms, including an attempt to not to depend on a landed aristocracy controlling the poor, to develop Russia's natural resources and to thoroughly to reform all branches of the administration.

Painting by Mihály Zichy of the coronation of Tsar Alexander II and the [Empress Maria Alexandrovna](#), which took place on 26 August/7 September 1856 at the [Dormition Cathedral](#) of the [Moscow Kremlin](#). The painting depicts the moment of the coronation in which the Tsar crowns his Empress



Autocratic power was now in the hands of someone with some sort of flexible thought, sufficient prudence and practicality.

However, the growth of a [revolutionary movement](#) to the "left" of the educated classes led to an abrupt end to Alexander's changes when he was assassinated in 1881. It is notable that after Alexander became tsar in 1855, he maintained a generally liberal course at the helm while being a target for numerous assassination attempts (1866, 1873, 1880).

*Tsar Alexander II and his wife, Empress Maria, with their son, the future [Tsar Alexander III](#)*



## Marriages and children

During his bachelor days, Alexander made a state visit to England in 1838. Just a year older than the young [Queen Victoria](#), Alexander's approaches to her were indeed short-lived. Victoria married her German cousin, Prince [Albert of Saxe-Coburg](#) in February 1840. On 16 April 1841, aged 23, Tsarevitch Alexander married [Princess Marie of Hesse](#) in St Petersburg, thereafter known in Russia as [Maria Alexandrovna](#).

## Suppression of national movements

*Jan Matejko's [Polonia](#) depicts the aftermath of the failed Polish [January 1863 Uprising](#), crushed by Alexander II. Captives await exile to [Siberia](#); Russian officers and soldiers supervise a blacksmith placing [shackles](#) on "Polonia", a woman representing Poland.*



At the beginning of his reign, Alexander expressed the famous statement "No dreams" addressed for Poles, populating [Congress Poland](#), Western [Ukraine](#), [Lithuania](#), [Livonia](#) and [Belarus](#). The result was the [January Uprising](#) of 1863–1864 that was suppressed after eighteen months of fighting.

Thousands of Poles were executed, and tens of thousands were deported to [Siberia](#). The price for suppression was Russian support for Prussian-  
united Germany. Twenty years later, Germany became the major enemy of Russia on the continent.

All territories of the former [Poland-Lithuania](#) were excluded from liberal policies introduced by Alexander. The [martial law](#) in Lithuania, introduced in 1863, lasted for the next 40 years. Native languages, [Lithuanian](#), [Ukrainian](#) and [Belarusian](#) were completely banned from printed texts, see a , e.g., [Ems Ukase](#). The [Polish language](#) was banned in both oral and written form from all provinces except [Congress Kingdom](#), where it was allowed in private conversations only.



## Rewarding loyalty and encouraging Finnish nationalism within Russia

*The monument to Alexander II "The Liberator" at the [Senate Square](#) in Helsinki was erected in 1894, 13 years after the assassination of Alexander II. At that time, Finland was still a Russian province. The date "1863" refers to the reopening of the [Diet of Finland](#). This monument, expressing the Finns' gratitude to this Tsar, survived unharmed through many later periods of tension and war with Russia under various of its later regimes.*

In 1863 Alexander II re-established the [Diet of Finland](#) and initiated several reforms increasing Finland's autonomy from Russia including establishment of its own [currency](#), the [Markka](#). Liberation of enterprise led to increased [foreign investment](#) and industrial development.

Finally, the elevation of Finnish from a language of the common people to a [national language](#) equal to [Swedish](#) opened opportunities for a larger proportion of the society. Alexander II is still regarded as "The Good Tsar" in Finland.

These reforms could be seen as results of a genuine belief that reforms were easier to test in an underpopulated, homogeneous country, than the in whole of Russia. They may also be seen as a reward for the loyalty of its relatively western-oriented population during the [Crimean war](#) and during the [Polish uprising](#). Encouraging Finnish [nationalism](#) and language can also be seen as an attempt to dilute ties with Sweden.

## Assassination

The new [monument to Alexander II](#) in front of the [Cathedral of Christ the Saviour](#) in Moscow



On 13 March, 1881, Alexander fell victim to an [assassination](#) plot.

As he was known to do every Sunday for many years, the tsar went to the Manezh to review the Life Guards. He traveled both to and from the Manezh in a closed carriage accompanied by six [Cossacks](#) with a seventh sitting on the coachman's left. The tsar's carriage was followed by two sleighs carrying, among others, the chief of police and the chief of the tsar's guards. The route, as always, was via the [Catherine Canal](#) and over the [Pevchesky Bridge](#).

The street was flanked by narrow sidewalks for the public. A youth [Nikolai Rysakov](#), was carrying a small white package wrapped in a handkerchief.

"After a moment's hesitation I threw the bomb. I sent it under the horses' hooves in the supposition that it would blow up under the carriage...The explosion knocked me into the fence."

The explosion, while killing one of the [Cossacks](#) and seriously wounding the driver and people on the sidewalk, had only damaged the bulletproof carriage, a gift from Napoleon III of France. The tsar emerged shaken but unhurt. Rysakov was captured almost immediately. Police Chief [Dvorzhitsky](#) heard Rysakov shout out to someone else in the gathering crowd. The surrounding guards and the Cossacks, urged the tsar to leave the area at once rather than being shown the site of the explosion. A young man, [Ignacy Hryniewiecki](#), standing by the canal fence, rose up both arms and threw something at the tsar's feet. Dvorzhitsky was later to write:

*The Church of the Savior on Blood commemorates the spot where Tsar Alexander II was assassinated.*



"I was deafened by the new explosion, burned, wounded and thrown to the ground. Suddenly, amid the smoke and snowy fog, I heard His Majesty's weak voice cry, 'Help!' Gathering what strength I had, I jumped up and rushed to the tsar. His Majesty was half-lying, half-sitting, leaning on his right arm. Thinking he was merely wounded heavily, I tried to lift him but the tsar's legs were shattered, and the blood poured out of them. Twenty people, with wounds of varying degree, lay on the sidewalk and on the street. Some managed to stand, others to crawl, still others tried to get out from beneath bodies that had fallen on them. Through the snow, debris, and blood you could see fragments of clothing, epaulets, sabers, and bloody chunks of human flesh."<sup>[3]</sup>

Later it was learned there was a third bomber in the crowd. [Ivan Emelyanov](#) stood ready, clutching a briefcase containing a bomb that would be used if the other two bombers failed.

Alexander was carried by sleigh to the [Winter Palace](#) to his study where, twenty years before almost to the date, he had signed the [Emancipation Edict](#) freeing the serfs. Alexander was bleeding to death. Members of the [Romanov family](#) came rushing to the scene.

The dying tsar was given [Communion](#) and [Extreme Unction](#). When the attending physician, [Dr. S. P. Botkin](#), asked how long it would be, replied, "Up to fifteen minutes"<sup>l</sup> At 3:30 that day the standard of Alexander II was lowered for the last time.

The assassination caused a great setback for the reform movement. One of Alexander II's last ideas was to draft up plans for an elected parliament, or [Duma](#), which were completed the day before he died but not yet released to the Russian people. The first action Alexander III took after his coronation was to tear up those plans. A [Duma](#) would not come into fruition until 1905, by Alexander II's grandson, [Nicholas II](#), who commissioned the Duma following heavy pressure on the monarchy by the [Russian Revolution of 1905](#).

A second consequence of the assassination was anti-Jewish [pogroms](#) and [legislation](#). Despite the fact only one Jew was involved in the assassination conspiracy, over 200 Jews who had nothing to do with the murder of Alexander II were beaten to death in these pogroms.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

A third consequence of the assassination was that suppression of civil liberties in Russia and [police brutality](#) burst back with a full force after experiencing some restraint under the reign of Alexander II. Alexander II's murder and subsequent death was witnessed firsthand by his son, [Alexander III](#), and his grandson, [Nicholas II](#), both future Tsars, who vowed not to have the same fate befall them. Both used the Okhrana to arrest protestors and uproot suspected rebel groups, creating further suppression of personal freedom for the Russian people.

# Alexander III of Russia

**Alexander III Alexandrovich** (10 March 1845 – 2 November 1894) reigned as [Emperor of Russia](#) from 13 March 1881 until his death in 1894.

*Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*



## Early life

Alexander III was born in [Saint Petersburg](#), the second son of Tsar [Alexander II](#) by his wife [Princess Marie of Hesse and by Rhine](#). In disposition, he bore little resemblance to his soft-hearted, liberal father, and still less to his refined, philosophic, sentimental, chivalrous, yet cunning grand-uncle [Alexander I](#), who coveted the title of "the first gentleman of [Europe](#)". Although an enthusiastic amateur musician and patron of the ballet, he was seen as lacking refinement and elegance. Indeed, he rather relished the idea of being of the same rough texture as the great majority of his subjects. His straightforward, abrupt manner savoured sometimes of gruffness, while his direct, unadorned method of expressing himself harmonized well with his rough-hewn, immobile features and somewhat sluggish movements. He was also noted for his immense physical strength, though the large boil on the left side of his nose caused him to be severely mocked by his contemporaries, hence why he always sat for photographs and portraits with the right side of his face most prominent.

Perhaps an account from the memoirs of the artist [Alexander Benois](#) best describes an impression of Alexander III:

“ After a performance of the ballet '[Tsar Kandavl](#)' at the [Mariinsky Theatre](#), I first caught sight of the Emperor. I was struck by the size of the man, and although cumbersome and heavy, he was still a mighty figure. There was indeed something of the [muzhik](#) [*Russian peasant*] about him. The look of his bright eyes made quite an impression on me. As he passed where I was standing, he raised his head for a second, and to this day I can remember what I felt as our eyes met. It was a look as cold as steel, in which there was something threatening, even frightening, and it struck me like a blow. The Tsar's gaze! The look of a man who stood above all others, but who carried a monstrous burden and who every minute had to fear for his life and the lives of those closest to him. In later years I came into contact with the Emperor on several occasions, and I felt not the slightest bit timid. In more ordinary cases Tsar Alexander III could be at once kind, simple, and even almost... homely. ”

## Rise to power

During the first twenty years of his life, Alexander had little prospect of succeeding to the throne, because he had an elder brother, [Nicholas](#), who seemed of robust constitution. Even when this elder brother first showed symptoms of delicate health, the notion that he might die young was never seriously taken; Nicholas was betrothed to the charming Princess [Dagmar of Denmark](#). Under these circumstances, the greatest solicitude was devoted to the education of Nicholas as Tsarevich, whereas Alexander received only the perfunctory and inadequate training of an ordinary Grand Duke of that period, which did not go much beyond secondary instruction, with practical acquaintance in [French](#), [English](#) and [German](#), and a certain amount of [military drill](#).

## Education

Alexander became [heir apparent](#) by the sudden death of his elder brother in 1865. It was then that he began to study the principles of law and administration under [Konstantin Pobedonostsev](#), who was then a professor of [civil law](#) at [Moscow State University](#) and who later (in 1880) became [chief procurator](#) of the [Holy Synod](#). Pobedonostsev awakened in his pupil very little love for abstract studies or prolonged intellectual exertion, but he influenced the character of Alexander's reign by instilling into the young man's mind the belief that zeal for [Russian Orthodox](#) thought was an essential factor of Russian [patriotism](#) and that this was to be specially cultivated by every right-minded Tsar.



*Portrait by the artist Georges Becker of the coronation of Tsar Alexander III and [Empress Maria Fyodorovna](#), which took place on 28 May [O.S. 15 May] 1883 at the [Uspensky Sobor Cathedral](#) of the [Moscow Kremlin](#). On the left of the dais can be seen his young son and heir, [the Tsarevich Nicholas](#), and behind Nicholas can be seen a young [Grand Duke George](#).*

On his deathbed, Alexander's elder brother Nicholas is said to have expressed the wish that his affianced bride, Princess Dagmar

of Denmark, should marry his successor. This wish was swiftly realized, when on 9 November 1866 in the Imperial Chapel of the [Winter Palace](#) in [St.Petersburg](#), Alexander wed the Princess of [Denmark](#). The union proved a most happy one and remained unclouded to the end. Unlike that of his parents, there was no adultery in the marriage. During those years when he was heir-apparent—1865 to 1881—Alexander did not play a prominent part in public affairs, but he allowed it to become known that he had certain ideas of his own which did not coincide with the principles of the existing government.

## Foreign relations

Alexander deprecated what he considered undue foreign influence in general, and German influence in particular, so the adoption of genuine national principles was off in all spheres of official activity, with a view to realizing his ideal of a homogeneous Russia—homogeneous in language, administration and religion. With such ideas and aspirations he could hardly remain permanently in cordial agreement with his father, who, though a good patriot according to his lights, had strong German sympathies, often used the German language in his private relations, occasionally ridiculed the exaggerations and eccentricities of the [Slavophiles](#) and based his foreign policy on the Prussian alliance.

## Anti-semitism

Alexander III engaged in [anti-Semitic](#) policies such as tightening restrictions on where [Jews](#) could live in the [Pale of Settlement](#) and restricting the occupations that Jews could attain. The [pogroms](#) of 1881 occurred at the beginning of Alexander III's reign. Antisemitic policies under both Alexander III and his successor, Nicholas II, encouraged the Jewish [immigration to the United States](#) from 1880 on. The administration of Alexander III enacted the [May Laws](#) in 1882 that imposed harsh conditions on the Jews as a people for the alleged role of some Jews in the assassination of [Alexander II](#).

## Anti-reforms

During the campaign in Bulgaria he had found by painful experience that grave disorders and gross corruption existed in the military administration, and after his return to Saint Petersburg he had discovered that similar abuses existed in the naval department. For these abuses, several high-placed personages—among others two of the grand-dukes—were believed to be responsible, and he called his father's attention to the subject. His representations were not favourably received. Alexander II had lost much of the reforming zeal which distinguished the first decade of his reign, and had no longer the energy required to undertake the task suggested to him. The consequence was that the relations between father and son became more strained. The latter must have felt that there would be no important reforms until he himself succeeded to the direction of affairs. That change was much nearer at hand than was commonly supposed. On 13 March 1881 Alexander II was assassinated by a band of [Nihilists](#), [Narodnaya Volya](#) (People's Will), and the autocratic power passed to the hands of his son.

In the last years of his reign, Alexander II had been much exercised by the spread of Nihilist doctrines and the increasing number of anarchist conspiracies, and for some time he had hesitated between strengthening the hands of the executive and making concessions to the widespread political aspirations of the educated classes. Finally he decided in favour of the latter course, and on the very day of his death he signed an ukaz, creating a number of consultative commissions which might have been easily transformed into an assembly of notables.

Alexander and his wife [Empress Maria Fyodorovna](#) on holiday in Copenhagen in 1893.



In his opinion Russia was to be saved from anarchical disorders and revolutionary agitation, not by the parliamentary institutions and so-called [liberalism](#) of [western Europe](#), but by the three principles which the elder generation of the Slavophiles systematically recommended—nationality, [Eastern Orthodoxy](#) and autocracy. His political ideal was a nation containing only one nationality, one language, one religion and one form of administration; and he did his utmost to prepare for the realization of this ideal by imposing the Russian language and Russian schools on his German, Polish and other non-Russian subjects (with the exception of the Finns), by fostering Eastern Orthodoxy at the expense of other confessions, by persecuting the [Jews](#) and by destroying the remnants of German, Polish and Swedish institutions in the outlying provinces. These policies were implemented by "[May Laws](#)" that banned [Jews](#) from rural

areas and [shtetls](#) even within the [Pale of Settlement](#).

With encouragement from the successful assassination of his father, [Alexander II](#), in 1881, the [Peoples Will](#) planned the murder of Tsar Alexander III. Though unsuccessful, among the conspirators captured were one [Aleksandr Ulyanov](#), who was sentenced to death and hanged on 5 May 1887. Alexander Ulyanov was the brother of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, who would later take the pseudonym [V.I. Lenin](#). The Emperor also survived the [Borki train disaster](#) of 1888. At the moment of the crash the royal family was in the dining car. Its roof collapsed in the crash, and Alexander held the remains of the roof on his shoulders as the children fled outdoors. He died of [nephritis](#) at the [Livadia Palace](#) on 1 November 1894 and was buried at the [Peter and Paul Fortress](#) in [Saint Petersburg](#). Alexander III was succeeded by his eldest son [Nicholas II of Russia](#).



Emperor Alexander and his Danish-born wife regularly spent their summers in their [Langinkoski](#) manor near [Kotka](#) on the [Finnish](#) coast, where their children were immersed in a Scandinavian lifestyle of relative modesty.

The [Borki Cathedral](#) was one of many churches built all over the empire to commemorate the Tsar's "miraculous" survival in the train crash.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria\\_Feodorovna\\_\(Dagmar\\_of\\_Denmark\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Feodorovna_(Dagmar_of_Denmark))

## Maria Feodorovna (Dagmar of Denmark)

**Maria Feodorovna**, born **Princess Dagmar of Denmark** (26 November 1847 - 13 October 1928) was [Empress consort of Russia](#). She was the second daughter of [Christian IX of Denmark](#) and [Louise of Hesse-Kassel](#). After her marriage to [Alexander III of Russia](#), she became the Empress Consort of Russia as **Maria Feodorovna**. Among her children was the last Russian monarch, the [Emperor Nicholas II](#), whom she outlived by ten years.



Portrait of Empress Maria Feodorovna. [Gatchina Palace](#), 1885

# Nicholas II of Russia

**Nicholas II** (18 May 1868 – 17 July 1918) was the last [Emperor](#) of [Russia](#), [Grand Duke of Finland](#), and claimed the title of [King of Poland](#). His official title was **Nicholas II, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias** and he is currently regarded as **Saint Nicholas the Passion Bearer** by the Moscow Patriarchate of the [Russian Orthodox Church](#).

*[Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias](#)*



Nicholas II ruled from 1894 until his [abdication](#) on 15 March 1917. His reign saw Imperial Russia go from being one of the foremost [great powers](#) of the world to an economic and military disaster. [Critics](#) nicknamed him **Bloody Nicholas** because of the [Khodynka Tragedy](#), [Bloody Sunday](#), and the [anti-Semitic pogroms](#) that occurred during his reign. As head of state, he approved the Russian mobilization of August 1914 which marked the first fatal step into World War I and thus into the demise of the [Romanov](#) dynasty.

Nicholas II abdicated following the February Revolution of 1917 during which he and his family were imprisoned first in the [Alexander Palace](#) at [Tsarskoe Selo](#), then later in the [Governor's Mansion](#) in [Tobolsk](#), and finally at the [Ipatiev House](#) in [Yekaterinburg](#). Nicholas II, his wife, his son, his four daughters, the family's medical doctor, the Tsar's Valet, the Empress' Lady in Waiting and the family's cook were all killed in the same room by the [Bolsheviks](#) on the night of 17 July 1918. This led to the canonization of Nicholas II, his wife the Empress and their children as martyrs by various groups tied to the [Russian Orthodox Church](#) within Russia and, prominently, by the [Russian Orthodox Church](#) outside Russia.

## Family background

Nicholas was the son of [Emperor Alexander III](#) and [Empress Maria Feodorovna of Russia](#), the latter was born "Princess Dagmar of [Denmark](#)". His paternal grandparents were [Emperor Alexander II](#) and [Empress Maria Alexandrovna of Russia](#), the latter was born "Princess Marie of Hesse". His maternal grandparents were [King Christian IX of Denmark](#) and [Princess Louise of Hesse-Kassel](#).

Nicholas often referred to his father nostalgically in letters after Alexander's death in 1894, although as a child, he was jealous of his physical strength. He was also very close to his mother, revealed in their published letters to and from one another. Nicholas had three younger brothers: [Alexander](#) (1869-1870), [George](#) (1871-1899) and [Michael](#) (1878-1918) and two younger sisters: [Xenia](#) (1875-1960) and [Olga](#) (1882-1960).

Since his father's cousin, [Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich](#), shared the same first name, the Grand Duke was often known within the Imperial Family as "Nicholasha" to distinguish him from the future Tsar. Maternally, Nicholas was the nephew of several monarchs, including [King George I of Greece](#), [King Frederick VIII of Denmark](#), [Alexandra, Queen consort of the United Kingdom](#), and [The Crown Princess of Hanover](#).

Nicholas, Nicholas's wife, and Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany were all first cousins of George V, king of Great Britain. Nicholas and Wilhelm were not each other's first cousins, but they were third cousin once removed since they were both descended from Frederick William III, King of Prussia.

## Tsarevich

*Nicholas II with his mother (1870).*



Nicholas became [Tsarevich](#) following the assassination of his grandfather, [Alexander II](#) on 13 March 1881 and the subsequent accession of his father, [Alexander III](#). Nicholas and other family members witnessed this event while staying at the [Winter Palace](#) in [Saint Petersburg](#), but for security reasons, the new Tsar and his family relocated their primary residence to the [Gatchina Palace](#) outside the city.

## Marriage, Family Life, and accession

*Nicholas and Alexandra.*

Nicholas became engaged to [Alix of Hesse](#) in April 1894. Alix was hesitant to accept the engagement due to the requirement that she convert from Lutheranism to Russian Orthodoxy and renounce her former faith. An exception was made for Alix where she could convert without renouncing her Lutheran faith and convert with a clear conscience. Nicholas and Alix became formally engaged on 8 April 1894. Alix converted to Orthodoxy in November 1894, and took the name Alexandra Fedorovna.

Nicholas took the throne in 1894 at the age of 26 following Alexander III's unexpected death.



*Portrait by L. Tuxen of the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, which took place on 26 May 1896 at the Uspensky Sobor Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin amongst extraordinary opulence and splendor. Seated upon the dais, from left to right, the Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna, and Tsar Nicholas II*



Nicholas and Alix's wedding was originally scheduled for the following spring, however it was moved forward at Nicholas' insistence. Staggering under the weight of his new office, he had no intention of allowing the one person who gave him confidence to leave his side. The wedding took place on November 26, 1894. Alexandra wore the traditional dress of Romanov brides, and Nicholas a Hussar's uniform. Each holding a lighted candle, Nicholas and Alexandra faced the Metropolitan. A few minutes before one in the afternoon, they were married.

Nicholas and Alexandra had 5 children; Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, and Alexei. Nicholas was a loving father and husband until his death in 1918.

## Reign

On May 14, 1896, Nicholas' formal coronation as Tsar was held in Uspensky Cathedral located within the Kremlin. In celebration on May 18, 1896, a large festival with food, free beer, and souvenirs was held in [Khodynka Field](#) outside Moscow. Khodynka was chosen as the location as it was believed to be the sacred center of the Russian Empire and would therefore demonstrate Nicholas' legitimacy as tsar and ties to the old autocracy. Khodynka was also used as a military training ground and the field was uneven with trenches. When food and drink were handed out, the crowd rushed to get their share and individuals were tripped and trampled. Of the approximate half million in attendance, it is estimated that 1,429 individuals died and another 9,000 to 20,000 were injured. The [Khodynka Tragedy](#) was seen as a bad omen and in addition to his conservative policies, Nicholas found gaining popular trust difficult from the beginning of his reign.

## Anti-Semitic pogroms of 1903-1906

The administration of Nicholas II published [anti-Semitic propaganda](#) that encouraged people to riot in various parts of the [Pale of Settlement](#), resulting in the pogroms of 1903-1906. [Viacheslav Plehve](#), the Minister of the Interior, paid the Kishinev newspaper "[Bessarabets](#)" for [anti-Semitic material](#), and the press during the [Russo-Japanese War](#) accused the Jews of being a [fifth column](#). This accusation encouraged the eruption of numerous pogroms, especially after Russia lost the war. Pogroms also resulted from the government's reaction to the 1905 revolution.

## 1905 Revolution

With the defeat of Russia by a non-Western power, the prestige of the government and the authority of the autocratic empire was brought down significantly. Defeat was a severe blow and the Imperial government collapsed, with the ensuing revolutionary outbreaks of 1905-1906. In hope to frighten any further contradiction many demonstrators were shot in front of the Winter Palace in St.Petersburg; the Emperor's Uncle, Grand Duke Sergei, was killed by a revolutionary's bomb in Moscow as he left the Kremlin.

The [Black Sea Fleet mutinied](#), and a railway strike developed into a general strike which paralyzed the country. Tsar Nicholas II, who was taken by surprise by the events, mixed his anger with bewilderment. He wrote to his mother after months of disorder,

"It makes me sick to read the news! Nothing but strikes in schools and factories, murdered policemen, [Cossacks](#) and soldiers, riots, disorder, mutinies. But the ministers, instead of acting with quick decision, only assemble in council like a lot of frightened hens and cackle about providing united ministerial action... ominous quiet days began, quiet indeed because there was complete order in the streets, but at the same time everybody knew that something was going to happen — the troops were waiting for the signal, but the other side would not begin. One had the same feeling, as before a thunderstorm in summer! Everybody was on edge and extremely nervous and of course, that sort of strain could not go on for long.... We are in the midst of a revolution with an administrative apparatus entirely disorganized, and in this lies the main danger."

## Bloody Sunday

On Saturday, 9 January 1905, a priest named [George Gapon](#) informed the government that a march would take place the following day and asked that the Tsar be present to receive a petition. The ministers met hurriedly to consider the problem. There was never any thought that the Tsar, who was at Tsarskoe Selo and had been told of neither the march nor the petition, would actually be asked to meet Gapon. The suggestion that some other member of the Imperial family receive the petition was rejected. Finally informed by the Prefect of Police that he lacked the men to pluck Gapon from among his followers and place him under arrest, the newly appointed Minister of the Interior, Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, and his colleagues could think of nothing to do except bring additional troops into the city and hope that matters would not get out of hand. That evening Nicholas learned for the first time from Mirsky what the next day might bring. He wrote in his diary, "Troops have been brought from the outskirts to reinforce the garrison. Up to now the workers have been calm. Their number is estimated at 120,000. At the head of their union is a kind of socialist priest named Gapon. Mirsky came this evening to present his report on the measures taken." At Tsarskoe Selo, Nicholas was stunned when he heard what had happened. He wrote in his diary, "A painful day. Serious disorders took place in Petersburg when the workers tried to come to the Winter Palace. The troops have been forced to fire in several parts of the city and there are many killed and wounded. Lord, how painful and sad this is." On Sunday, 22 January 1905, Father Gapon began his march. Locking arms, the workers marched peacefully through the streets. Some carried crosses, icons and religious banners, others carried national flags and portraits of the Tsar. As they walked they sang

religious hymns and the Imperial anthem, 'God Save The Tsar'. At 2PM all of the converging processions were scheduled to arrive at the Winter Palace. There was no single confrontation with the troops. Throughout the city, at bridges on strategic boulevards, the marchers found their way blocked by lines of infantry, backed by Cossacks and Hussars; and the soldiers opened fire on the crowd. The official number of victims was ninety-two dead and several hundred wounded. Gapon vanished and the other leaders of the march were seized. Expelled from the capital, they circulated through the empire, exaggerating the casualties into thousands. That day, which became known as "Bloody Sunday", was a turning point in Russian history. It shattered the ancient, legendary belief that the Tsar and the people were one. As bullets riddled their icons, their banners and their portraits of Nicholas, the people shrieked, "The Tsar will not help us!" Outside Russia, the future British Labour Prime Minister [Ramsay MacDonald](#) attacked the Tsar calling him a "blood-stained creature and a common murderer".

Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna wrote, "Nicky had the police report a few days before. That Saturday he telephoned my mother at the Anitchkov and said that she and I were to leave for Gatchina at once. He and Alicky went to Tsarskoe Selo. Insofar as I remember, my Uncles Vladimir and Nicholas were the only members of the family left in St.Petersburg, but there may have been others. I felt at the time that all those arrangements were hideously wrong. Nicky's ministers and the Chief of Police had it all their way. My mother and I wanted him to stay in St.Petersburg and to face the crowd. I am positive that, for all the ugly mood of some of the workmen, Nicky's appearance would have calmed them. They would have presented their petition and gone back to their homes. But that wretched Epiphany incident had left all the senior officials in a state of panic. They kept on telling Nicky that he had no right to run such a risk, that he owed it to the country to leave the capital, that even with the utmost precautions taken there might always be some loophole left. My mother and I did all we could to persuade him that the ministers' advice was wrong, but Nicky preferred to follow it and he was the first to repent when he heard of the tragic outcome."

From his hiding place, Father Gapon issued a letter. He stated, "Nicholas Romanov, formerly Tsar and at present soul-murderer of the Russian empire. The innocent blood of workers, their wives and children lies forever between you and the Russian people ... May all the blood which must be spilled fall upon you, you Hangman. I call upon all the socialist parties of Russia to come to an immediate agreement among themselves and bring an armed uprising against Tsarism." Gapon's body was found hanging in an abandoned cottage in Finland in April 1906.

On the night of 16/17 July 1918, the royal family was awakened around 2:00 am, told to dress, and led down into a half-basement room at the back of the Ipatiev house; the pretext for this move was the family's safety - that anti-Bolshevik forces were approaching Ekaterinberg, and the house might be fired upon. Present with Nicholas, Alexandra and their children were their doctor, and three of their servants, who had voluntarily chosen to remain with family - the Tsar's personal physician [Eugene Botkin](#), his wife's maid [Anna Demidova](#), and the family's chef, [Ivan Kharitonov](#), and footman, [Alexei Trupp](#). A firing squad had been assembled and was waiting in an adjoining room, composed of seven Communist soldiers from Central Europe, and three local Bolsheviks, all under the command of Bolshevik officer [Yakov Yurovsky](#). Nicholas was carrying his son; when the family arrived in the basement, the former empress complained that there were no chairs for them to sit in. Yurovsky ordered chairs brought in, and when the empress and the

heir were seated, the executioners filed into the room. Yurovsky announced to them that they had been condemned to death by the Ural Soviet of Workers' Deputies. A stunned Nicholas asked, "What? What?" and turned toward his family. Yurovsky repeated the order. One witness among the several who later wrote accounts of Nicholas's last moments reported that the Tsar said, "You know not what you do," paraphrasing [Jesus's](#) words on the cross.

The executioners drew revolvers and the shooting began. Nicholas was the first to die; Yurovsky shot him multiple times in the head and chest. Anastasia, Tatiana, Olga, and Maria survived the first hail of bullets; the sisters were wearing over 1.3 kilograms of diamonds and precious gems sewn into their clothing, which provided some initial protection from the bullets and bayonets. They were stabbed with bayonets and then shot at close range in the head.



*Wedding of Nicholas II and Alexandra Feodorovna*



*King George V (right, Queen Elizabeth's grandfather) with his first cousin Tsar Nicholas II, their mothers - Queen Alexandra of the United Kingdom and Empress Maria Feodorovna of Russia (Princess Dagmar of Denmark) - were sisters. Berlin, 1913*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand\\_Duchess\\_Anastasia\\_Nikolaevna\\_of\\_Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duchess_Anastasia_Nikolaevna_of_Russia)



*Grand Duchess Anastasia knitting in her mother's boudoir*

*Anastasia Nikolaevna*

*Grand Duchess Anastasia of Russia*



*Anastasia*



*Original theatrical poster for Anastasia*