

Archivists reveal facts and legends about ancestors

National Historical Archives of Belarus publishes fascinating *Foreign Nationals in Belarus (Late 18th — Early 20th Century)*

By Lyudmila Minaeva

Cakes with Eastern flavour

“The edition has taken over a decade to compile,” emphasises the Deputy Director of the National Historical Archives of Belarus, Denis Liseichikov. “Our archive contains hundreds of thousands of documents regarding foreign citizens who have resided in Belarus. We used to think that only the Germans had passed through, but hundreds of French and Belgians, Turks and Persians left their own legacy. Belarus’ location at a crossroads of trade and transport has brought connections with various states since the times of the Principality of Polotsk. In the days of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, it was common to see foreigners here. The most prominent time was that of the Russian Empire; from the late 18th century, foreign artisans and farmers arrived on Belarusian lands.”

According to Mr. Liseichikov, many people are currently researching their family trees with help from the archives. Some stories are quite romantic, as various Napoleonic soldiers fell in love with local beauties and decided to stay. He continues, “Many are quite keen to discover that they are descended from Napoleonic



Denis Liseichikov and Vladimir Dinisov of the National Historical Archive

soldiers but most of their ancestors arrived in peace as traders, artisans or farmers. The most famous baker in Minsk at the beginning of the last century was a Turkish citizen called Ahmed Hussein Ofli. He was a very wealthy man, owning a network of bakeries and confectioneries. He lived in a luxurious three-story mansion.”

French hair pins and Austrian matches

How many modern Belarusian enterprises have links with foreign nationals?

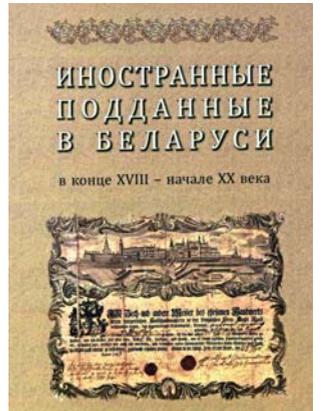
“Pinsk Match Factory was founded by Austrian Louis Herschman and was originally called Vulkan. Alivaria beer was launched by the Bavarian Lekkert brothers, who bought a Minsk brewery from Rohlia Frumkina — located at the

corner of Aleksandrovsкая and Zagorodnaya streets. It still stands,” says Mr. Liseichikov. “I was surprised to learn that Belarusian Milavitsa (lingerie) also has foreign origins, having grown from a factory set up by French citizen Francois Tourne. It began by making ladies’ hair pins, men’s combs, buttons, and other small grooming accessories.”

Many foreigners were invited to Belarus, since their expertise was in demand, Mr. Liseichikov admits. “Often, entire colonies were invited, being given a separate plot of unused land by the local nobility, with the aim of rent being charged. German principalities were most commonly invited but other states were also approached. For example, in the Brest Region, there were two settlements of Dutch colonists, who came seeking an easier working environment than that of over-populated Europe. They farmed and bred animals. One of the largest colonies of foreigners existed on the Gomel estate of Duke Paskevich-Erivansky.”

Foreign doctors and pharmacists

With the arrival of the railways came machinists and engineers, whose knowledge and skills were much needed. “Private initiative played its part,” notes Mr. Vasilevich. “For example, a tender was announced to build tramways in Vitebsk and was won by Frenchman Fernand Guillaum. A Belgian company ran Vitebsk’s tramways, using its own money to build electric railway rolling stock and run a power plant. It even issued shares in the Vitebsk Tramway in Brussels; they fetched a good price on the European market. In fact, Vitebsk opened its tramlines



a year earlier than Moscow, and nine years before St. Petersburg.”

In Belarus, many foreign nationals also worked in medicine. “If you look at the last name of any doctor, surgeon or pharmacist in the 19th century, they were certainly German: Prussian, Bavarian or Austrian,” asserts Mr. Liseichikov. “It’s rare to see a Slavic name. After five years here, foreign experts usually received Russian citizenship and remained forever, bringing their wives and children or marrying locally; accordingly, it’s hardly surprising that Belarus is home to so many family names of foreign origin.”

Mr. Liseichikov explains that research is ongoing, with an edition planned solely on the passports which were issued to immigrants. “There was a strict procedure for obtaining a residence permit. Provincial government offices registered new arrivals, with passport IDs given. Photos were expensive but height, eye and hair colour, occupation, family status and place of origin were listed. About 20,000 such passports existed in the Minsk Region, revealing much about our great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers. This is our history, so we should show respectful interest, honouring their memories by learning about them.”

Sending heart-rate data online

Doctors to learn of heart problems through text messages

By Kristina Yelskaya

Ten years ago, mobile phones were a rarity; now, some can’t live without them. We make appointments and meetings, exchange information and share experiences with their help. Soon, we could even use them to ensure our good health, sending SMS texts of electrocardiograms, blood pressure and pulse rates. One mobile operator is offering the service to allow the monitoring of patients from a distance.

The Mobile Health system is being tested by the Republican Scientific Practical Centre for Cardiology. Each kit includes a tonometer, a pulse oximeter, a device for receiving an electrocardiogram and

a transmitting device with a SIM-card. Blood pressure and heart rate can be measured in real time, sending data via Bluetooth to a mobile communication device. This automatically sends the data through the mobile network to a control room monitoring patients or to a specialist with access to a web interface.

The technology is being tested for two months before being assessed by the Ministry of Health; it’s too early to speak of results but great hopes are being pinned on the innovation, explains Larisa Plashchinskaya, of the Cardiac Rhythm Disturbance Laboratory at RSPC Cardiology. She tells us, “First of all, patients can monitor their vital signs themselves and see the ef-



SMS messaging delivers health data

fect of their treatment. Secondly, if their health deteriorates and hospitalisation is necessary, the system can send readings automatically or at the will of the patient, ensuring timely medical care. The number of strokes and heart attacks should fall.”

The new technology will allow medical staff to monitor patients’ state of health remotely, reducing their duration of stay in hospital and the load on consulting physicians and nursing staff. These short-term benefits are supplemented by long term advantages regarding patient

care, with resulting savings to the health service. Naturally, the system is also convenient for patients, who can return to normal life — even travelling abroad. Internet roaming can be used to send back data, with the kit packed in a small bag.

Ms. Plashchinskaya emphasises, “Telemedicine is in its infancy in Belarus but our initiative highlights again the necessity of modern ICT not only for the provision of communication services but for health care development. Technology is being used to improve quality of life.”

To ride with comfort

Minsk donates five trolley buses and five buses to Tiraspol

The Head of Trade, Transport and External Economic Relations in Tiraspol, Eduard Gutsul, is greatly appreciative of the second hand Belarusian buses and trolleys which have been donated. Still in good condition, they are modern and efficient. Local experts will examine them to determine their overall technical condition and what repairs may be needed. They’ll then be painted, ready for suburban routes and those in the centre of Tiraspol, in late November.

According to the Director of the Tiraspol Trolleybus Depot, Martik Nersisyan, the donated trolleybuses will be a great support, giving people jobs, improving services for passengers and raising the comfort of trips. The low rise, spacious buses, with fuel-efficient engines, are a wonderful addition to Tiraspol’s public transport system.