Online exhibit for Corps of Pages

Overview:
The Bakhmeteff Archive plans an online version of its exhibit on the **Imperial Corps of Pages**.
The exhibition, which was on view at RBML's West Gallery from December 1, 2002 to April 28, 2003, featured 50 objects drawn exclusively from the Imperial Corps of Pages collection held by the Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European History and Culture. This exhibition of unique photographs, newsletters, and printed memorabilia, such as programs, menus, tickets and school forms portrays the Corps of Pages school life and the life of the Imperial family. The exhibition, created to mark the 200th anniversary of the Corps of Pages, also coincides with the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg to be celebrated in June 2003.

Background

The Corps of Pages was a privileged military school reserved for sons of noblemen and high-ranking officers. It was founded in October 1802 by Alexander I in St. Petersburg. Except by personal appointment of the Emperor or as a son of a Major General killed in action, admission was only by a difficult competitive examination. Only the sons or grandsons of those in the top three levels of the Table of Rank were eligible to apply. All graduates were assigned to the imperial regiment of their choice. A small percentage of graduates entered the diplomatic or civil services. From its inception until 1917, the Corps graduated 4,505 officers. An additional 200 were unable to complete their education because of the revolution. The school was disbanded on the order of Alexander Kerenskii, War Minister of the Provisional Government, in June 1917.

The Imperial Corps of Pages collection was acquired by Columbia University over a period of more than twenty years (1957-1982). The collection consists of unusual photographs, lists of graduates, paintings, etchings, newsletters, and printed mementos belonging to the Imperial family and the Corps of Pages. The bulk was purchased during 1957-1971 from the Union of Pages, the émigré alumni organization founded in 1920. Almost 400 photographs, chiefly of students and graduates of the Corps of Pages, and school life ephemera, as well as a few photographs of Nicholas II, were donated to the Archive in 1982 by Alexei Mozhaiskii.

The Bakhmeteff Archive has physical rights for all images used in the exhibit. They will be displayed at low resolution (72 dpi) to prevent any misuse. The higher quality versions may be made available upon request in accordance with RBML reproduction policies.

Online exhibit purpose and intended audience

The exhibit attracted a positive response and significant interest from the scholarly community and general public (as well as potential donors from all over the world). Unfortunately, a large part of the potential audience (such as many former pages/families,

etc.) was unable to travel to New York to view the exhibit. However, a lot of them contacted me asking about a catalog of the exhibit. Surely enough, the Bakhmeteff Archive had no funds to print a catalog. But my mentioning about a possibility of an online exhibit was accepted with a great enthusiasm and support.

Our estimated audience will include scholars, students and Russian Émigré community. The *viewing of* the exhibit will not require any technical skills above basic Internet navigation, and should function properly on reasonably up-to-date machines. However, the exhibit will be image-heavy, so the server space and loading time considerations may arise.

Technical considerations :

The exhibit is intended for general audience and does not presume high level of computer literacy and/or advanced hardware. Therefore we plan to use HTML (likely with some embedded JavaScript) but not to include any multimedia components (such as Flash or QuickTime applications). At present we see no need for search utilities or any other dynamic information exchange.

The number and size of images can be varied and highly depends on our server space constraints. We also may limit a number of images on any single page to ensure the reasonably fast loading time. However, for some objects, in addition to the general view, we would like to provide few close-ups of the selected details. Otherwise, many fine artistic qualities of the images might be lost due to low resolution. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the total number of images, used for the exhibit. We assume that from 50 to 100 images will be involved (either in .tiff or in .jpg format, at the resolution of 72 dpi). Some of the images will come from scanning the actual objects (predominantly black&white), others from digital photographs (oversize*d*/color). The online exhibit will use labels from the current exhibit for its textual content.

The physical exhibit consisted of 5 wall displays, each containing one or more specific topics relating to the Corps of pages, such as Corps's history, pages daily routines, participation in coronation activities, revolution and emigration. We envision the following components for the online exhibit:

1. Overall view of the physical displays (existing digital photographs), with hot spots over specific items. Clicking on the hot spot will take users to individual items (see no. 2)

2. Individual items - large images with accompanying text labels.

3. Introductory text page (history of the Corps of Pages) containing links to the major topics.

4. Major topics (Corps's history, pages daily routines, participation in coronation activities, revolution and emigration etc.) with thumbnail images of the relevant items. Clicking on the thumbnail will take users to individual items (no. 2)

This way the users have a choice of accessing the online exhibit via its content components or of recreating (to an extent) the actual physical experience.

Items for further discussion:
1. Location of the exhibit/space considerations (Slavic Bibliographer, Jared Ingersoll offered his server space as a possible solution.)
2. Backup and maintenance
3. Standards to follow