



ALEXANDER VASILIEV

# CHILDREN'S FASHION OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE



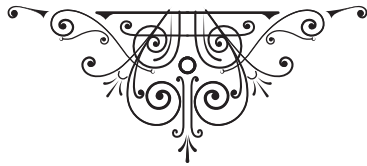


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OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE**

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Glagoslav Publications

# CHILDREN'S FASHION OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

by Alexander Vasiliev

Translated by James Womack

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# Author's note

You hold in your hands a book that is unique in Russia. It is dedicated to children's fashion and clothing from the cities of the Russian empire between the 1860s and the 1910s. Why this timeframe in particular? Well may you ask. The truth is that photographic *cartes de visite* — photographs glued onto small pieces of card — only appeared in Russia at the end of the 1850s during the reign of the Emperor Alexander II. This gives us the starting point for our story. Gathering together a large collection of photographs of children, we deliberately end our book in 1917, a time of governmental upheaval and revolution, the conclusion to the era of Old Russia.

I have been collecting old photographs for more than thirty-five years, and in my collection, which makes up a large part of the Alexander Vasiliev Fund, there are more than 10,000 photographs to some degree connected with fashion. This book is simply the next step in the publication of this valuable archival material, but at the same time it is also change to: my first large-scale illustrated edition in English with Glagoslav Publications, and also the first book exclusively devoted to children's fashion.

It is usual to speak a lot about children nowadays. All parents, and especially mothers, worry about how to bring up their children, how to develop their tastes, their sense of national identity, their behaviour, their education and their culture. If this is the case with you, then take a look at this book. Perhaps when you have read it through and looked closely at all the photographs, you will have fewer questions.

Throughout the history of Imperial Russia, children's clothing, as you shall see, had great importance as one of the chief elements in an individual's upbringing. Of course, fashions changed, but there existed in those days — alas, a tradition that has now practically fallen away — a form of dress specifically for children, very different from that of adults in its cut, its length, its fabric and its accessories. The crinolines that were fashionable in the 1850s and 1860s gave way in the 1870s to bustles, which were in their turn followed by flounced dresses with gigot sleeves; Fauntleroy and sailor suits were current for boys in the 1890s, but by the 1900s and 1910s *style moderne* had taken complete control of the child's wardrobe.

Judging from the many surviving photographs, the standard of living among the gentry, the urban bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie was high in Russia. All of the children seem happy, well fed and well cared for; their hair is cut, curled and pinned up, their clothes and stockings are clean, and their shoes are in good condition. I am sure that fashions of the past taught children how to be neat, how to look after their elegant clothing, to respect the handiwork of the seamstresses and furriers, tailors and cobblers who had made their clothing. To begin with, all

children's clothing in the past was made by hand, whether it was made at home or bought elsewhere. In Russia's larger cities there were a number of ateliers and workshops that specialised exclusively in children's clothing. The largest collection of such vintage clothing in Russia is housed in the State Historical Museum. According to their recently published catalogue for the exhibition *Children's Clothing from the Eighteenth Century to the First Quarter of the Twentieth*, the most famous workshops which specialised in this form of production were A. Vakhovskaya's Children's World, Madame Zina's *Studio and Showroom for Children's Suits and Dresses*, M.P. Mezentsev's *Children's Dresses*, M. Koletis's *Showroom for Children's Clothing*, T.A. Yezhikova's *Children's Outfitters* and the *Children's Education* showroom, amongst others. Most of the main workshops in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Riga, Warsaw and Kiev created clothing not just for adults, but for children as well.

Aside from fashionable ready-made clothes, 'folk' clothing was very popular in pre-Revolutionary Russia. In general, children took on their understanding of national character from their nurse, who would always be dressed in her sleeveless *sarafan* dress and her *kokoshnik* — her head-dress — and they would gladly wear homemade *kosovorotki*, *sarafanchiki*, *armyachki* and *cherkeski* (peasant shirts, *sarafans*, thick woollen overcoats, and Georgian-style long coats). They were not laughed at for this, nor did they feel uncomfortable, as children would nowadays, when they more often than not only think about American clothes and shoes and games. As can be seen from the photographs, these children were surrounded by extremely attractive, aesthetically pleasing toys — dolls, toy horses, hoops and drums. These children also loved their pets. The children in our album are often accompanied by dogs, both large and small, and by cats. There is also a certain amount of information to be gleaned from these photographs about pre-Revolutionary demographics. The type of family which is described in these photographs is always 'complete', with a father and a mother, brothers and sisters: united, monolithic, kind.

It is a matter of sincere regret that not all of these photographs have the names of their subjects inscribed upon them. When the child's name is known, we have indicated it in the caption. I am sure that this will help many of our readers discover the roots of their family and uncover previously lost family ties, as has already been the case thanks to the photographs reproduced in my previous books. If it is the case that you recognise any of the faces in this book, I ask you to get in touch with the publisher, or else with me via my personal website, [www.vassiliev.com](http://www.vassiliev.com), and we will carry out the necessary changes to future editions of this book.

To conclude, I would like to thank my Russian publisher Pavel Podkosov, Irina Seriogin from Alpina Non-Fiction, my sister Natalia Tolkunova, who edited the Russian text, and my literary secretary, Vasili Snegovsky, who helped me caption the photographs; and my British publishing house Glagoslav Publications for bringing this book to the English reader. I hope that you will find this book necessary and useful, and I wish you the very best of times, reading it and looking at the images.

# The 1860s



In the 1860s, children's clothing in Russia largely followed the general trends which came from Paris. Up until the age of five, boys' and girls' clothing had certain insignificant differences. Both sexes wore smocks over short skirts and culottes. The custom was to dress brother and sister in the same fashion.

For the whole of the decade, many children's costumes were made out of Scottish tartan fabric, with its chequered pattern. Taffeta, organdie, tarlatan and barège were also popular. The preference was largely for white clothes. 'For girls aged between five and six, nothing can be better than a white dress, even in winter, both for paying visits and for staying at home. Add to it a wide sash, which can be light blue, pink, violet or cherry-red, and tie it behind them with a large trailing bow. The bodice can be left open with a muslin chemise underneath, and boots of the same colour as the sash should be worn. Trousers and skirts should be in the English style and pleated. A white dress is not a wasted investment, as many mothers think. Quite the contrary, it has a great advantage: as it needs to be regularly changed, it can always be clean and new, and never goes out of fashion. With two white dresses, a child will always be well-dressed', the magazine *Fashion House* wrote. Other popular colours were pink, beige, black, grey and 'gooseberry'.

Girls, in imitation of adult fashions, still wore little crinolines and it was for this reason that they preferred to wear velvet cloaks, or shawls with fur collars, over their clothes. They also wore cashmere or velvet overcoats with details picked out in venice lace, a very popular fashion in those years. The Ivanova sisters from Saint Petersburg specialised in making children's overcoats.

Russian national imagery was very clearly displayed in boys' clothes. 'Most boys are dressed in the Russian style — this style in shirts and underclothing is very well known,' *Fashion House* wrote. Shirts were often trimmed with black braid to suggest Russian stitching. The unheard-of wave of interest in national costume even made it as far as Paris, where aspects of Russian national costume appeared in children's fashions, especially in the kind of braiding known as 'Russian stitch', usually created with black thread. In these years the French fashion press often mentioned 'Russian' shoes for children, or 'Russian fur collars' and 'Russian shirts'.

Towards the end of the decade, the fashion in decoration for boy's clothing gradually moved away from sewn ornament or appliqué; shirts began to be decorated with ribbons or else had their borders embroidered with rep. But the fashion for Russian-style *kosovorotki* or Algerian zouave-style jackets, as well as the wide 'coachman-style' trousers, still retained its importance.

The other fashionable daily garment for boys was the Breton jacket — a short jacket made from velvet, or else a shawl worn with knee-length trousers and a waistcoat. 'A little boy's clothes: grey or brown cashmere trousers, a shirt of the same colour with black embroidery, a sailor's straw hat with a black velvet band and a red ostrich feather,' was a description given by one observer of fashion at the time.





❖❖ Girl in formal dress. Photograph by M. Konarsky. *Novaya fotografiya Rossiskogo obschestva liubitelej sadovodstva*. Moscow. 1865.

❖❖ Girl in formal dress with ruche detail and long trousers. Photograph by V. Ilmar. Novgorod. 1866.

❖❖ Girl from the Knyazev family in formal dress with an apron. Saint Petersburg. 1860s.

❖ Girl in formal weekend dress. Photograph by G. Sachowicza. Warsaw. 1869.



G. SACHOWICZ

W WARSZAWIE



Girl in inexpensive dress and 'Garibaldi' outdoor jacket. Russia. 1867.

Girl in weekend dress with ribbon detail. Photograph by V. Kukushkin. Ivano-Voznesensk. 1868.

Girl in 'Balmoral-style' house dress with an apron. Russia. 1865.

Manya Girs in formal dress. Photograph by G. Shteinberg. Saint Petersburg. 1867.





❖❖ Girl in house dress. Photograph by S. Novodereshkin. Zadonsk. 1869.

❖❖ Girl in house dress. Photograph by the artist Letunov. Moscow. 1864.

❖❖ Two sisters in crinoline dresses, outdoor jackets with fur trim, hats with feathers and long trousers. Saint Petersburg. 1866.

❖ Girl in outdoor dress with a pelerine, decorated with a taffeta ribbon. Photograph by Mebius on the Bolshaya Lubianka at Mosolov's. Moscow. 1865.





Yulia Vysotskaya in 'Russian' dress: embroidered blouse, velvet waistcoat, taffeta skirt, rope of artificial pearls. Russia. 1865.

Girl in striped house dress. Photograph by A. Luarsabov. 1869.

Girl in school uniform. Photograph by A. Schmidt. Kostroma. 1869.

Girl in taffeta outdoor dress with a belted crinoline and a cape. Russia. 1865.





Over a 35-year period, a renowned fashion historian Alexander Vasiliev collected antique photographs featuring portraits of Russians in the olden days.

*Children's Fashion of the Russian Empire* came to be as a unique edition dedicated exclusively to children's clothing that had been worn in the cities of imperial Russia, and is based on the selection from Vasiliev's antiques.

The very first photographs in this volume date back to the late 1850s when such images only just appeared in the country as pictures pasted on cardboard. The timeline of this collection ends with 1917, the year the Old Russia ceased to exist.

Featuring over 400 photographs from the author's collection, *Children's Fashion of the Russian Empire* is a spectacular visual medium. This album of pretty tailored children's dresses for all occasions takes the viewer back in time and into the fascinating, unforgettable epoch in Russian history.



A world-famous fashion historian, collector and playwright, Alexander Vasiliev is also a fine lecturer and has more than thirty books to his name, including albums such as *Russian Fashion. 150 Years in Pictures* and *Three Centuries of European Fashion*.

He has staged over 100 productions at leading theatres in 25 countries around the world. Alexander Vasiliev is an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Arts, and has been awarded the gold medal of the Russian Academy of Arts and the Diaghilev and Nizhinsky medals.

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