

## Benckendorff Family Papers6568033

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## Summary Information

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| <b>Repository:</b>               | Rare Book and Manuscript Library  |
| <b>Creator:</b>                  | Benckendorff family   |
| <b>Title:</b>                    | Benckendorff Family Papers  |
| <b>ID:</b>                       | 6568033   |
| <b>ID:</b>                       | BA#0036   |
| <b>Date [inclusive]:</b>         | 1772-1968   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b>     | 16.32 linear feet 34 document boxes   |
| <b>Language of the Material:</b> | EnglishFrenchRussian  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>                 | The bulk of the collection consists of Benckendorff family correspondence with prominent Russian noble families, documents, and photographs. There are also manuscripts, financial statements and drawings. |

### Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Benckendorff Family Papers; Box and Folder; Bakhmeteff Archive, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

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Benckendorff (Benkendorff) family was a prominent Russian noble family which served Russian Imperial Court for more than two centuries.

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## Biographical / Historical

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Count Alexander Khristoforovich Benckendorff (1782-1844), a general of cavalry, senator and head of the Third Department of the Imperial Chancery. Before attaining the post for which he was best known — chief of gendarmes under Nicholas I — Alexander Benckendorff had built a brilliant career in the military serving with distinction in all the major campaigns of the Napoleonic wars and rising to the rank of General Adjutant. In 1798 he joined the Life-Guards of the Semenovskii Regiment and served in the Georgian campaign. After the Treaty of Tilsit he went with the Russian Embassy to Paris under Count Tolstoy until 1809, when he rejoined the army and fought against the Turks under Count Vorontsov, and later against Napoleon's invasion; he received many decorations. In 1821 A. KH. Benckendorff submitted to Emperor Alexander I a memorandum describing in great detail the organization and activities of the "Soiuz blagodenstviia" ("Union of Welfare"), a secret society organized by the future Decembrists. Despite Benckendorff's plea that the union be disbanded and its leaders exiled, Alexander chose not to take any action. In the light of the Decembrist uprising which took place four years later, however, A. KH. Benckendorff's warning appeared downright prophetic. As a result, A. KH. Benckendorff was quickly catapulted to a position of great prominence under Russia's new emperor, Nicholas I. In 1826 he submitted a report on the need for a Higher Police to the Nicholas I, who created the Third Department of the Chancery and A. KH. Benckendorff was appointed chief of the gendarmes, head of the Third Department (the secret police) and senator. From that time on he accompanied the Emperor on most of his travels and enjoyed a high degree of power and influence. Among the tasks entrusted to Benckendorff was the oversight of Alexander Pushkin. His zealous fulfillment of this and other missions earned him the enmity of Russia's cultural elite and made the name Benckendorff synonymous with bureaucratic narrow-mindedness and persecution of the intelligentsia. Despite his unsavory reputation, Benckendorff was not a cruel or ignorant man. He was known, in fact, more for his remarkable absent mindedness, which bordered on dementia in his later years, than for any perverse pleasure he may have taken from the persecution of others. As his letters to his nephew Konstantin Konstantinovich Benckendorff show, he was a kind and doting parent. In 1817, Benckendorff married Elizaveta Andreevna Bibikova (nee Zakharzhevskaiia), the widow of Paul Gavrilovich Bibikov (d. 1812). Elizaveta Andreevna's daughter from her first marriage, Elena, was brought up as a member of the Benckendorff household and married first Prince Esper Beloselskii-Belozerskii and after his death Prince Vasili Kochubei. The Benckendorffs had three children, Anna (married Count Rudolph Apponyi), Maria (married Prince Grigorii Petrovich Volkonskii), and Sophie (married Paul Demidov). From 1828 until 1837 he was Nicholas's closest adviser and accompanied him on his tours of Russia and abroad. In 1832 Benckendorff was granted the title of Count, which because of the absence of any direct male descendants, passed to his nephew Konstantin Konstantinovich Benckendorff. Benckendorff, who is said to have converted to Catholicism in his later years, died on board the steamship "Hercules" en route from Reval to St. Petersburg in September 1844. A detailed description of his last days can be found in the letter from his nephew Konstantin Konstantinovich Benckendorff to his sister Princess Dorothea Lieven dated September 14/26, 1844.

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Princess Dorothea Lieven (Daria Khristoforovna Benckendorff), 1784-1857. Princess Lieven became lady-in-waiting to Maria Feodorovna, wife of Emperor Paul I, in her early teens. At the age of 16 she was married to Prince Christoph Heinrich Lieven (1774-1839) at the behest of the Empress. In 1809 Lieven was sent to Berlin as ambassador. Thanks, in large measure, to the intelligence, charm, and resourcefulness of his wife, Lieven was a great success as a diplomat. In 1812, Lieven was awarded the post of Ambassador to Great Britain which he retained until 1834. During these years, Princess Lieven became quite influential in British diplomatic and court circles while providing the Russian government with valuable inside information. She was particularly close with the Duke of Wellington and Prince Metternich. In 1834, Prince Lieven was summoned back to Russia to serve as the personal tutor of the heir to the throne, the Grand Duke Alexander. After a year in St. Petersburg during which two of her sons died, Princess Lieven was allowed to return to London alone, ostensibly for reasons of health. Once in the West she refused to return to Russia in defiance of the wishes of the Emperor and her husband. She eventually settled in Paris where she established an important salon and became a close friend of M. Guizot, the French politician and historian. In 1848 Princess Lieven and Guizot were forced to flee Paris and take refuge in England. They were able to return to Paris in 1850 where Princess Lieven continued to live until her death in January 1857.

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Count Konstantin Khristoforovich Benckendorff (1785-1828). Konstantin Khristoforovich Benckendorff, younger brother of Alexander was educated for a career in the foreign service. At the age of 18, thanks to the patronage of Maxim Maximovich Alopeus, whose niece he later married, he was sent to serve in Berlin and other German cities. After the Russian defeat at Austerlitz and the capitulation of the German states to the armies of Napoleon, K. KH. Benckendorff was sent on a diplomatic mission to China. On his return he was sent to Naples where he served as secretary of the embassy. In 1812 K. KH. Benckendorff returned to Russia and joined the army, serving with distinction in the major campaigns of the Napoleonic wars. In 1814 he married Natalia Davidova Alopeus with whom he had two children, Konstantin Konstantinovich (b. 1816) and Maria Konstantinovna (b. 1818, married Paul Tolstoy). In 1816 he was granted leave from service for reasons of health and spent the next four years travelling in Europe. In 1820 K. KH. Benckendorff reentered foreign service as special envoy to the Württemberg and Baden courts. In 1823 his wife Natalia Davidovna died in Stuttgart. In 1826 he returned to Russia and rejoined the army where served again with distinction rising to

the rank of Lieutenant General. In the campaign against Persia he was in the vanguard during the siege of Erevan, crossed the Akzubiuk hills and Besobdal, and captured Echmiadzin; he advanced towards Zangul in sight of the cavalry of Hassan-Khan, which was pushed back to Dzhevan-Bulaksii via Araks and Abiran. On the conclusion of peace Count Paskevich-Erivanskii commissioned him to hold Abbas-Mirza but his health had suffered. Despite the severe impact which service in the army had on his health, K. KH. Benckendorff insisted on taking part in the campaign of 1828. He died of typhus in August 1828 while fighting the Turks in Bulgaria. He was buried beside his wife in Stuttgart. He published his "Letters from Persia" in "Severnaia pchela", and wrote an account of the Cossaks dedicated to the Tsar.

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Count Konstantin Konstantinovich Benckendorff (1816-1856), the nephew of Count Alexander Khristofovich Benckendorff. Born in Berlin, Konstantin Konstantinovich's early life was marred by a series of tragic losses. In 1823 his mother Natalia Davidovna died in Stuttgart. His father, Konstantin Khristoforovich, died in 1828 while fighting the Turks in Bulgaria. After the death of his father, Konstantin Konstantinovich was raised by his uncle, Alexander Khristoforovich, from whom he inherited the title of Count. In 1830 he was enrolled in the Corps of Pages. He graduated in 1834 and became an officer of the guards. In 1836 he took part in the first of three campaigns in the Caucasus. On his return he was named aide de camp to the Minister of War General Chernyshev. A year later he became aide de camp to the Emperor Nicholas I. In 1842 he went on a second campaign in the Caucasus followed by an extended stay in Europe. When he returned to Russia in 1844 he was faced with the deaths of his uncle Alexander Khristoforovich and his sister Maria Konstantinovna within a period of two months. The following year he embarked on his third campaign in the Caucasus in which he served under Prince Vorontsov and was severely wounded. After two years spent recuperating abroad, K. K. Benckendorff was named military attache to the Russian embassy in Berlin. He was an eye witness to the events of 1848 in Prussia and provided valuable information to the Russian government about the upheaval. In June 1848, K. K. Benckendorff married Princess Louise von Croy-Diilman. The couple had five children, Alexander (b. 1849), Konstantin (b. 1851 — died in infancy), Paul (b. 1853), Nathalie (b. 1854) and Olga (b. 1857). As part of his service in Berlin, K. K. Benckendorff traveled widely and had extensive contacts with government figures and aristocrats throughout Europe. In 1849 he was promoted General and in 1855 he was named aide-de-camp of the Emperor Alexander II whom he accompanied in a trip to Crimea that same year. The following year he was appointed ambassador to the court of Wiirtemberg in Stuttgart. Konstantin Konstantinovich Benckendorff died in January 1858 from a nervous disorder apparently connected with the wounds he received in 1845.

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Count Alexander Konstantinovich Benckendorff (1849-1917), the eldest son of Konstantin Konstantinovich and Louise von Croy, educated in Germany and Russia. He married Sofiiia Petrovna Shuvalova and lived at the family estate of Sosnovka in Tambov province before being persuaded to enter the diplomatic service, on account of his upbringing and linguistic capabilities. He spent many years in Vienna before being transferred to Copenhagen, and then to London in 1902 as ambassador. His tact and diplomacy made him greatly respected by the last three imperial Russian Foreign Ministers, Lamsdorf, Izvolskii and Sazonov, as well as by his colleagues in London and others in diplomatic and political circles, during a very busy and difficult period. He had three children, Konstantin born in 1880, who later served in the Black Sea Fleet during the Russo-Japanese war, Peter in 1882 and Natalia in 1886.

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Sofiiia Petrovna Benckendorff, nee Shuvalova (1857-1928), daughter of Count Peter Shuvalov. Shuvalov was described by his grandson as a liberal or even radical aristocrat who kept well away from St. Petersburg and the imperial court, preferring to spend the summer on his estate near Kiev and the winter at Villa Monticello, Nice. Sofiiia Petrovna married in 1879 Alexander Konstantinovich Benckendorff and they elected to live on the Benckendorff estate at Sosnovka in the Province of Tambov which had been granted to the family about 1775. Sofiiia Petrovna's affection for this estate and the rural life is described by her son Konstantin in his autobiography as are the growing demands of Alexander's diplomatic career which increasingly curtailed his visits' to Sosnovka. Thus her letters kept him in touch with all manner of detail about the estate and its management. Sofiiia Petrovna was a woman of restless energy and enterprise. The constant improvements she made to the house, inside and out, the gardens and the farms are chronicled with gusto. She was also a talented amateur photographer. Her son relates how the letters of his parents preserved in the house when he returned in 1918 (presumably including those of his father written in reply to these letters of his mother) were later sent by the local soviet to the Central Archives of Historical Research in Moscow (the Lenin Library). Sofiiia Petrovna was President of the Russian Prisoners of War Help Committee during the First World War. After the death of her husband and her departure from the Embassy, she settled in Suffolk.

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Konstantin Alexandrovich Benckendorff (1880-1959), known as "Cony", joined the Imperial Russian Navy as a volunteer in October 1899 and was commissioned as a sub-lieutenant in 1902. He joined the battle squadron at Port Arthur and was on board the "Retvisan" in January 1904 at the time of the Japanese attack. He was a prisoner of war at Matsouyama until the end of 1905. K. A. Benckendorff joined the battleship "Poltava" in 1914 and was later sent on a confidential mission to London to deliver a captured German signal book and to study London's air defences. He was Senior Staff Officer, Special Duties, to the C-in-C Archangel, 1915-1917. After demobilisation he returned to Sosnovka, which he found in good order in the hands of the local soviet, and later took refuge at Kulevatovo with the Juri Davidoff family. In the spring of 1919 as a former naval commander he was ordered to report for posting and thus saw service in the soviet navy. He served as naval adviser to the peace delegation to Estonia headed by Dr. Joffe, and as a member of the Frontier Delineation Commission in Estonia and Georgia. He accompanied the first British Labour Delegation to Leningrad as an interpreter. Twice imprisoned in the Butirsky Jail, he was put on the Reserve List in July 1922. He married the eminent harpist Marie Korchinksa, and in 1924 left Russia and settled in England. A copy of his autobiography (to 1923), "Half a Life: The Reminiscences of a Russian Gentleman", London, 1954, is included in the collection.

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Pierre Aleksandrovich Benckendorff (1882-1915), was granted a commission in the Garde a Cheval and was seconded to the 1st East Siberian Cossacks for the duration of the Japanese War; he served with distinction in Manchuria. In 1914 he commanded the 5th Troop of the Garde a Cheval. He was killed in 1915 at Rudopolianka, Lithuania, where his troop was covering the evacuation of a station on the main line to Petrograd. He married Helena Dmitrievna Narishkina (Ella).

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Nathalie Aleksandrovna Benckendorff (1886-1968), married in 1911 the Honourable Sir Jasper Nicholas Ridley, KCVO, OBE. She served on the Russian Prisoners of War Help Committee in the World War I.

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Paul Konstantinovich Benckendorff (1853-1921), Grand Marshal of the Court of Nicholas II and Alexandra Fedorovna. He was commissioned in the Garde a Cheval and took part in the war against the Turks in 1877. He was an aide-de-camp to Alexander II and Alexander III. His account of the last months spent by Nicholas I and Alexandra Fedorovna at Tsarskoe Selo was published after his death. The Emperor ordered Paul and his wife to remain at St. Petersburg and not to accompany the Imperial Family to Siberia; they later fled to Estonia where Paul died in 1921.

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## Summary

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Until the discovery of this archive in the attic of an English country house by a member of the Benckendorff family, its survival had never been suspected. Count Alexander Benckendorff, the last Tsarist Ambassador in London, died in office in January 1917. He had brought with him from Russia a substantial collection of family letters such as the correspondence of his parents, his grandfather, his great-aunt (Princess Lieven) and his great-uncle, all of whom had played distinguished roles in the political and diplomatic or military life of their time. These are included in the collection.

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The papers of Count Konstantin Konstantinovich Benckendorff (1817-1858) and his wife Countess Louise Benckendorff, nee Princess von Croy-Dulmen (1825-1890). The collection consists primarily of correspondence. Benckendorff was well connected in Russian and European political and diplomatic circles and was a prolific letter writer. Correspondents include A. F. Budberg, A. I. Chernyshev, V. A. Dolgorukov, M. D. Gorchakov, M. Guizot, P. K. Meyendorff, M. S. Vorontsov and many others. There is also a large collection of family correspondence which includes sets of letters from Alexander Khristoforovich Benckendorff, Princess Dorothea Lieven (Benckendorff's aunt), Elena Kochubei (a cousin), and numerous other relatives. The largest set of letters in the collection is the correspondence between

Benckendorff and his wife in which they share their views on such events as the revolutions of 1848, the Crimean War, and the coronation of Alexander II. In addition to the correspondence, the collection also includes several manuscripts on European political affairs and the Russian army, a set of letters from French noble refugees in Switzerland regarding an offer of land in Russia extended by Emperor Paul I, documents concerning the management of the Benckendorff estates in Tambov, and the notebooks and journals of Benckendorff's parents.

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## Summary

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In addition there are the Ambassador's own papers which are of considerable importance. The letters written to him by his brother Paul Benckendorff cover the period 1892-1916. Paul Benckendorff was Marshal of the Imperial Court, and he wrote regularly from Russia to his brother to keep him informed on every significant development - domestic or foreign - which came to his notice. He was at the heart of Russian affairs. The Russo-Japanese War the First Revolution of 1905, the First Duma, the events leading up to the First World War and the conduct of the war itself are discussed with complete freedom in the knowledge that the letters would not be subject to the usual official censorship. He reports on court intrigues, criticises Emperor and Empress, and gives his candid opinion on the merits and shortcomings of ministers and other figures in public life. This correspondence runs to nearly 700 pages. There are also the Ambassador's diplomatic papers. These include the letters and texts of the strictly confidential telegrams sent to him by successive Russian Foreign Ministers between 1904 and 1917 (Lamsdorf, Izvolskii and Sazonov). The letters written to the Ambassador by his wife - some 600 in number, dating between 1903 and 1914 - give a fascinating glimpse of the Russian provincial life which they both loved, but which became less and less possible for him to enjoy the further he moved up the diplomatic ladder. And those of his son Konstantin chart the life of a Russian naval officer from 1903 to 1922 and greatly amplify the account in his autobiography of his service in the Imperial Navy - in the Russo-Japanese War and First World War - and in the Soviet Navy. And there is excellent illustrative material. The Ambassador and his wife were keen amateur photographers and a substantial quantity of their photographs from the period 1890-1905 were discovered with the papers. These are included in the collection. A significant number were taken in Russia.

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## Arrangement

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Arranged in two series. Series I: Cataloged correspondence, documents, photographs; Series II: Arranged correspondence, manuscripts, photographs.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

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### Restrictions on Access

This collection is located on-site.

### Restrictions on Access

This collection has no restrictions.

### Accrual

No accruals are expected

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Method of acquisition--Purchase; Date of acquisition--1987.

### Processing Information

Papers processed Ellen Scaruffi 1990.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Ambassadors -- Russia -- Biography
- World War, 1914-1918 -- Russia
- World War, 1914-1918 -- Diplomatic history
- Russians -- United States
- Great Britain -- Foreign relations -- Russia
- Emigration and immigration -- Soviet Union -- 20th century
- Russia -- Foreign relations -- 1918-1945
- Russia -- History
- Russia -- History -- 1918-1945
- Alexander, Emperor of Russia, I, 1777-1825
- Alexander II, Emperor of Russia, 1818-1881
- Benckendorf, Aleksandr Khristoforovich, 1783-1844
- Benckendorff Constantin Constantinovich, Count, 1816-1858
- Lieven, Dorothea, Princess, 1785-1857
- Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia, 1868-1918
- Demidov, Pavel Grigorievich, 1809-1858
- Frederick William IV, King of Prussia, 1795-1861
- Humboldt, Alexander von, 1769-1859
- Voronʹsov, Mikhail Semenovich, knīaz' , 1782-1856
- Alexandra, Queen, consort of Edward VII, King of Great Britain, 1844-1925
- George, King of Great Britain, V, 1865-1936
- Mariīa Feodorovna, Empress, consort of Alexander III, Emperor of Russia, 1847-1928

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## Other Finding Aids

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Collection inventory is available as [a PDF file](#). Collection can be requested through [CLIO](#).

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