

“Alexander Pushkin in Tsarskoye Selo”

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Alexander Pushkin in Tsarskoye Selo

In spring of 1831, soon after his marriage, Alexander Pushkin wrote from Moscow to his Petersburg friend Piotr Pletnirov, “I would like to stay in Tsarskoye Selo. A blessed idea! I could thus spend the summer and autumn enjoying inspiring seclusion, close to the capital, surrounded by dear memories.” True to the poet’s request, Pletnirov rented a suite of rooms in a small wooden house owned by Anna Kitayeva, the widow of a court valet de chambre. The cottage was constructed by Alexei Gornostaev under the supervision of Vassily Stasov.



*Alexander Pushkin .
Water-colour by an unknown artist. 1831*

Pushkin and his young wife came to Tsarskoye Selo, where he had once spent six happy Lyceum years, on May 25, 1831, just before his birthday. It was at the Lyceum that he found his first and best friends; it was there that he became a poet. He was walking back into the world of sweet memories.

The routine was soon established: he used to work in the morning in the study on the mezzanine floor and go out for a stroll in the park in the evening. “Many people would go on purpose to catch a glimpse of Pushkin in the summer time, as he circled the lake arm-in-arm with his wife . . .”



*Natalia Pushkin.
Watercolour by Alexander Briullov. 1831*

Pavel Miller, a boy student of the Lyceum, once met the poet in the park. He recalled later: “I took off my cap a few steps off and said in an emotional voice: “Sorry to stop you, Sir, Alexander Sergeevich, but I am your Lyceum grandson and I would like to meet you!” “I’m very glad”, he said smiling and taking my hand, “Very glad.” I could see he did not pretend by his eyes and smile.” Pushkin visited the Lyceum soon where the students welcomed him enthusiastically.



The dining room

The summer months in Tsarskoye Selo were filled with joy of friendly contacts and happiness of poetic work.



The drawing room

Vassily Zhukovsky and Nikolay Gogol, a new name in literature, came to visit Pushkin later in the evenings. The poet rejoiced at the arising literary circle: “I think if we are all knocked together in a handful, the literature cannot fail warming up and producing something.” Gogol read passages from his first big book *Evenings in a Farm Near Dikanka* and Pushkin wrote joyously: “Here is true hilarity, sincere, unpretentious and unrestrained . . . So lyrical in some parts! It is so extraordinary for the present – day literature that I’m staying agasp.” The mocking poetic contest brought about Pushkin’s *Tale of the Tzar Saltan* and Zhukovsky’s *Tale of the Tzar Berendey* and *The war of Mice and Frogs*.



Alexander Pushkin's study

That summer Pushkin was getting his Boldino-autumn *Belkin's Stories* ready for publishing. Pavel Miller his frequent guest, recollected, "Soon after *Belkin's Stories* were published I dropped in at Alexander Sergeevich's for a minute. The book was there on the desk. I never suspected he fathered the stories. "What are these stories? Who is that Belkin?" I asked peeping in. "Whoever he is, this is the way to write stories: curt, pithy and lucid."

Here Pushkin returned to his earlier novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* and amended it with Onegin's Letter to Tatiana.



The desk in the Pushkin's study

The summer of 1831 however did not go off unperturbed. The peasant riots in Russia and the European political developments – insurrection in Poland and uprisings in Europe – excited the poet reminding him of the war against Napoleon when he was still a Lyceum pupil. The fates of Russia and Europe were reflected in *The Anniversary of Borodino* and *To the Slanderers of Russia*.



Paper-weight with a dragon figurine (Pushkin's gift to Delvig)

On October 19 Pushkin celebrated here the twentieth anniversary of the Lyceum. Alas, his bosom friends were not with him. Ivan Pushchin was exiled to Siberia, Wilhelm Kuechelbecker was jailed – they participated in the December uprising of 1825. Anton Delvig, a fine poet and a close friend since the Lyceum years died suddenly in January of the same year. Pushkin mourned his friends in *The 19th of October, 1831*.



The pantry

And yet the poet looked ahead with hope that summer. He wrote Pletnirov in June, “Delvig is dead . . . just you wait, Zhukovsky will die, we’ll die too. But life is still rich, we’ll meet new people, and we’ll make new friends . . . If we stay alive we’ll be happy some time.”



The boudoir

The Pushkins left Tsarskoye Selo for Petersburg in the late autumn, and the modest wooden house forever retained the memories of the short illusion filled time span in the poet's life: "I am married and happy; I hope nothing will change in my life, I cannot wish myself any better."

All other owners of Kitayeva's house cherished the memory of Pushkin. The house has stayed there until today with some slight alterations dating to 1868 when the veranda and mezzanine were paned, two rooms were added on each side and the main entrance was shifted. The museum was inaugurated here in 1958, Pushkin's study on the mezzanine floor was rehabilitated and a new exposition was opened in 1981, 150 years since those memorable days.

The two added rooms house a display devoted to Pushkin's elders Vassily Zhukovsky and Nikolay Karamzin. They too had tight links with Tsarskoye Selo.



*Nikolay Karamzin.
Oil on canvas by Argunov
from G.-B. Damon-Ortolani's original.
1805*



*Vassily Zhukovsky.
Watercolour by Piotr Sokolov.
1820s*

Nikolay Karamzin came to live there in May of 1816. He had been a celebrated author by the time glorified by his *Letters of a Russian Traveller* and *Poor Liza*. He worked there at the deed of his life – *The History of the Russian State*. Pushkin devoted his *Boris Godunov* (completed at Mikhailovskoye in 1825) to the prominent historian.

Karamzin's friend Vassily Zhukovsky visited the gifted young man Pushkin at the Lyceum in 1815 and wrote: "I struck up a pleasant acquaintance

with our young miracleworker Pushkin. I talked to him for a minute at Tsarskoe Selo. What a nice and lively creature! He was glad to see me and pressed my hand tight to his heart. He is the hope of our literary lore.” They had remained friends since, the older poet loving and patronizing Pushkin till his last breath.

The town of Pushkin is often called the Abode of the Muses. It gave indeed lofty inspiration to many poets and writers and its parks, cottages and palaces retain memories of them.



All-Union Alexander Pushkin Museum