

The Russian Calendar

by Adam Giesinger. This article appeared in 1975 AHSGR Clues. Reprinted with permission.

Until 1918 Russia operated on the Julian Calendar, often called Old Style and denoted by O.S. after dates in Russian history. Early in 1918 the new regime decided to put Russia on the Gregorian Calendar or New Style (N.S.), used in western Europe and America.

The Julian Calendar originated with Julius Caesar, who introduced it into the Roman Empire in 46 B.C. It became the accepted calendar later wherever Roman civilization penetrated or Christianity spread. This included all of Europe, northern Africa and the Near East.

In Caesar's time it was thought that the year was exactly 365 days and 6 hours long and that an extra day every fourth year (a leap year) would keep the calendar in step with the sun. More accurate calculations later showed that the 6 hours was 11 minutes and 14 seconds too much. As a result of this error the calendar gradually fell behind the sun. With the passage of the centuries the accumulated error became substantial. At the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, the vernal equinox was on March 21; by the sixteenth century it was on March 11, indicating that the calendar had fallen days behind the sun.

There was much discussion of calendar reform over the centuries, but for a long time no practical solution was found. Finally, in 1563, the Council of Trent, in its last session, urged the Pope to undertake the reform. Nineteen years later, Pope Gregory XIII introduced the calendar as we now have it, usually called after him the Gregorian Calendar.

Gregory's reform involved dropping 10 days from the calendar as it then was, to bring it into step with the sun (restoring the vernal equinox to March 21), and omitting three leap years in every four centuries thereafter to keep the calendar in step. The former was accomplished by converting October 5, 1582 (O.S.) into October 15; the latter by retaining as leap years only those centurial years whose first two figures were divisible by 4, such as 1600, 2000, 2400, etc. and making ordinary years out of 1700, 1800, 1900, 2100, etc.

The New Style was quickly adopted by Catholic States, but most Protestant States retained the Old for more than a century. Not till 1700 was the Gregorian reform accepted by the Protestant States of Germany and not till 1752 by Great Britain. Russia and other states of Orthodox religion remained on the Julian calendar until the twentieth century.

The Julian Calendar (O.S.), used in Russia till 1918, was 10 days behind the Gregorian (N.S.) up to 1699, 11 days behind from 1700 to 1799, 12 days behind from 1800 to 1899, and 13 days behind after 1900.

This calendar difference affects many dates in Russian history of special interest to us, and, of course, the birthdays of our family members born in Russia under the old regime.

	<u>Julian Calendar (old style)</u>	<u>Gregorian Calendar (new style)</u>
Catherine's Manifesto of 1763	July 22, 1763	August 2, 1763
Abrogation of the Colonist Status	June 4, 1871	June 16, 1871
Outbreak of the First World War	July 19, 1914	August 1, 1914
Beginning of the February Revolution	February 23, 1917	March 8, 1917
Abdication of Nicholas II	March 2, 1917	March 15, 1917
October Revolution (Bolshevik Coup)	October 25, 1917	November 7, 1917

In January 1918, Lenin decreed that the Russian date, February 1, 1918 (O.S.) should become February 14 (the date in N.S.), thus putting Russia on the Gregorian Calendar.