



International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence >

Volume 33, 2020 - [Issue 2](#)

310 | 0 | 2  
Views | CrossRef citations to date | Altmetric

Articles

# Tsarina's Necklace: Russian Jewels, Secret Agents, and the *Hellig Olav* Affair, 1918

Richard B. Spence

Pages 309-327 | Published online: 21 Jan 2020

“ Cite this article   <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2019.1692291>



Sample our  
Politics & International  
Relations Journals



>> **Sign in here** to start your access  
to the latest two volumes for 14 days

Full Article

Figures & data

“ Citations

Metrics

Reprints & Permissions

Read this article

Share



RICHARD B. SPENCE

## Tsarina's Necklace: Russian Jewels, Secret Agents, and the *Hellig Olav* Affair, 1918

Testifying before the Congressional Un-American Activities Committee in 1939, ex-Soviet functionary Dr. David Dubrowsky stated that, starting in early 1918, the Russian Bolshevik regime had relied on “confiscated diamonds and precious stones” to finance legal and illegal operations in the United States and other countries. The actual smuggling was done by “special couriers,” often equipped with “different names and different passports.”<sup>1</sup> When asked if any Russian “Crown jewels” had so entered the United States, Dubrowsky replied that “there are a great many Crown jewels” and “you [can] find on Fifth Avenue, New York, all sorts of trinkets which belonged to the Czar and his family.”<sup>2</sup>

This article will examine what may be the very first Soviet attempt to smuggle such valuables into America. It will detail who was involved, what happened, and what *did not* happen, as best the surviving records allow. It is,

*Dr. Richard Spence is a Professor of History at the University of Idaho. He received his doctorate in history from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1981. He specializes in Russian intelligence and military history, and his course offerings include Modern Espionage, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, History of Secret Societies, and the Occult in History. He has served as a commentator/consultant for the History Channel and the International Spy Museum and was a key consultant-interviewee for the Russian Cultural Foundation's 2007 documentary film, Leon Trotsky: The Secret of World Revolution, and its subsequent Trap for the Tsar. The author can be contacted at [rspence@uidaho.edu](mailto:rspence@uidaho.edu)*

## REFERENCES

## Notes

- 1 U.S. House of Representatives, Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Vol. 8, 18–27 September 1939, p. 5156.
- 2 Ibid., p. 5158.
- 3 “U.S. Agents Seek Foe Propaganda on Big Liner,” New York Tribune, 27 May 1918, p. 4.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 U.S. National Archives, Records of the Military Intelligence Division (MID), File 230-2, Whytock to Biddle, “Montifore [sic] Kahn and Valdimir [sic] Jogelsen,” 28 May 1918.
- 8 “U.S. Agents Seek Foe Propaganda on Big Liner,” p. 4.
- 9 “Reds Loot Cities and Seize Priceless Jewels,” Denver Post, 23 February 1919, p. 71.
- 10 “Baron Involves Attaché in Smuggling Case,” New York Tribune, 14 June 1918, p. 9.
- 11 MID, File 230-2/19, Statement dictated by Baron Maydell, 8 June 1918.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 “Baron Involves Attaché in Smuggling Case,” p. 9.
- 17 “Nip Plot to Smuggle Romanoff Jewels,” Philadelphia Inquirer, 6 June 1918, p. 1.
- 18 Register of the Department of State, 23 December 1918, p. 69. Sayer was appointed on 14 April 1918.
- 19 Margaret McFadden, “Hella Wuolijoki’s ‘Pipe Dreams,’ Finland to Russia, 1917.” NWSA Journal, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Fall 2003), pp. 160–164. Ancestry.com, World War I Draft Registration Cards, Murray D. Sayer, Draft Registration, 12 September 1918.

20 MID, File 230-2/44.

21 Ancestry.com, New York Passenger and Crew Lists, Olga Miklashevsky, Passenger Manifest, Hellig Olav, 26 May 1918.

22 “Crown Jewels in U.S.,” Washington Post (6 June 1918), p. 1.

23 “Romanoff Jewels Here; Two Held in Smuggling Case,” New York Tribune (6 June 1918), p. 9.

24 Ibid.

25 “Smuggled Gems Worth \$350,000 Taken by Police,” Bridgeport Telegram (8 June 1918), p. 4. This would be about \$6,000,000 in 2019 value.

26 The Jewelers’ Circular, Vol. 76, No. 2 (12 June 1918), pp. 85, 87. The where, when, and who of this appraisal is not mentioned.

27 “Jewels of Romanoff’s Valued at \$2,000,000,” Cincinnati Enquirer (6 June 1918), p. 1, and “Reds Loot Cities and Seize Priceless Jewels,” p. 71.

28 “New Story about Russian Jewels,” Asbury Park News, 14 June 1918, p. 1.

29 MID, File 230-2/40, “Lieutenant Vladimir Jogelsen, Russian Army.”

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 MID, File 230-2/23, Jogelsen to Easterly, 13 April 1918.

33 Ibid., Easterly to State Dept, 15 April 1918.

34 Ibid., Jogelsen to Easterly, 18 April 1918.

35 Ibid., Lansing to Easterly, 25 April 1918.

36 Ibid., Jogelsen to Easterly, 25 April 1918.

37 Ibid., Lansing to Easterly, 8 May 1918.

38 “Gems, Possibly Ex-Czar’s Were Smuggled Here,” Evening News [Wilkes-Barre, PA] (8 June 1918), p. 2.

- 39 "2,500 is Penalty as Gem Smuggler," Asbury Park Press (1 July 1919), pp. 1, 13.
- 40 "Smuggled Goods Sold High," Billings Gazette (2 May 1920), p. 4.
- 41 Benjamin E. Benson, Draft Registration, 12 September 1918.
- 42 U.S. National Archives, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation (BI), File 8000-182254, DeWoody to Bielaski, 24 August 1918.
- 43 Ibid., "In re: Leon Rains, et al," 9 August 1918.
- 44 Ibid., "B.E. Benenson [sic]," DeWoody to Bielaski, 12 August 1918.
- 45 Ancestry.com, U.S. Passport Applications, 1795–1925, Benjamin Benson Passport Application, 20 June 1919, attached letter of 11 June 1919 from Capt. R D. Whytock, U. S. Army, to Passport Bureau, NYC.
- 46 "Dallas Man Held While U.S. Seeks Russian Jewels," Oklahoma City Times, 12 June 1918, p. 1.
- 47 Silliman Evans, Draft Registration, 12 September 1918.
- 48 "Russian Crown Jewels Smuggled into U.S. Causes an Arrest," Rockford Republican (12 June 1918), p. 8.
- 49 "Hunt for Russian Jewels Continues," New York Tribune, 13 June 1918, p. 14.
- 50 "Baron Involves Attaché in Smuggling Case," p. 9.
- 51 "Smuggling Case at Dallas Ends," Waco News-Tribune (23 June 1918), p. 1.
- 52 "Russian Naval Officers Guests," Boston Globe, 19 July 1917, p. 3, and "Russian U-Boat Chief in San Francisco," San Francisco Examiner, 26 July 1918, p. 2.
- 53 In the late 1920s, Mikhail Miklashevsky changed his name to Michael Kissell. He worked for the U.S. Navy Department during World War II and later for the Army as an intelligence specialist.
- 54 "Smuggled Goods Sold High," p. 4.
- 55 "U.S. to Sell Alleged Jewels of Late Czar's," Naugatuck Daily News (26 February 1920), p. 2.

- 56 "Empress Brooch for Sale," Washington Post (8 August 1907), p. 1.
- 57 "Dog Show Prize Winner," Oakland Tribune (4 June 1911), p. 6.
- 58 "Gives Land Away," Topeka State Journal (24 May 1912), p. 7.
- 59 "Arrested for Larceny," The Red Bank Register (16 March 1910), p. 1.
- 60 "Gives Land Away," p. 7.
- 61 "Gift of 13,000 Acres a Mistake, It Is Feared," New York Times (25 May 1912), p. 6.
- 62 "U.S. Agents Seek Foe Propaganda on Big Liner," p. 4.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 MID, File 230-2/44, Passengers' Papers Report #97: "Montefiore [sic] G. Kahn," 5 June 1918.
- 65 BI 8000-16454, "In Re: Montifiore Kahn of Herman & Herman," 15 August 1918.
- 66 "Art Smuggling Explained," Art News, Vol. 17, No. 6 (16 November 1918), p. 1.
- 67 BI 20857, "German Suspect," 4 June 1917, p. 9.
- 68 BI 17943, "In re: Macbeth," 24 September 1917.
- 69 "Art Smuggling Explained," p. 1.
- 70 MID, File 230-2/29, Capt. Huntington to Capt. Ruth, 10 September 1918, and BI, 260427, Purington to Huntington, 14 October 1918.
- 71 BI, File 260427, Churchill to Bielaski, 10 October 1918.
- 72 "Millions in Soviet Gold on Ship Bound for U.S.," New York Tribune (5 May 1921), p. 2.
- 73 MID, File 230-2/37, Navy Department, Office of Chief Cable Censor to MID, 12 December 1918.
- 74 "Some Economic Thoughts on America's Industrial Conditions," Dry Goods Guide, Vol. 45-56, 1920, p. 7.

- 75 "Bolshevism in Russia Discredited," Daily Times [Davenport, IA] (7 September 1921), p. 3.
- 76 "American Granted Cellulose Monopoly," Des Moines Tribune (27 April 1928), p. 28.
- 77 "Oil Shares Offers Stock in Europe," National Petroleum News, Vol. 21 (1 May 1929), p. 130.
- 78 Kahn Faces Huge Judgment," Asbury Park Press (28 June 1933), p. 3.
- 79 "Montifiore G. Kahn," New York Times (11 February 1958), p. 31. Kahn died in Long Branch, NJ in February 1958.
- 80 V. V. Poznyakov, *Sovetskaya razvedke v Amerike, 1919-1941*. Moscow (2005), pp. 285-286, 325.
- 81 "Declares Russia Will Never Make Separate Peace," The Ottawa Citizen, 25 September 1943, p. 3.
- 82 "Montifiore G. Kahn," p. 31.
- 83 Poznyakov, *Sovetskaya razvedke v Amerike, 1919-1941*, p. 325.
- 84 "Reds Loot Cities and Seize Priceless Jewels," p. 71.
- 85 "Nip Plot to Smuggle in Romanoff Jewels," p. 1.
- 86 BI, File 185189, "Supplementary Report to APL Report of 7 May 1918," 25 May 1918.
- 87 MID, File 2242-44, Churchill to Colvin, 12 November 1918.
- 88 "The Passing of William Block," Business Equipment Topics (June 1919), p. 132.
- 89 Vladimir Jogelsen, Draft Registration, 12 September 1918.
- 90 "Captain Vladimir Jogelsen," New York Tribune, 15 December 1919, p. 5.
- 91 MID, File 230-2/39, Brasol to Pilenas, 7 December 1918.
- 92 "The Passing of William Block." It may possibly be relevant that Block's son, Wolfgang Block, remained in Moscow where he was arrested and imprisoned by the Bolsheviks. He reportedly died in captivity in December 1918.

93 BI, File 39368, Copy of cards from the Reilly-Weinstein investigation, October 1918, pp. 3-4.

94 MID, File 2338-644, Churchill to Jogelsen, 24 October 1918.

95 Treugolnik was a Russian firm manufacturing automobile tires. The book, presumably, was a road atlas of some kind.

96 MID, File 2338-292, Cotton to Jogelsen, 7 December 1918.

97 "Vladimir A. Jogelsen Dies," Business Equipment Topics (January 1920), p. 56.

98 MID, File 10080-342/38, War Trade Board report, August 1918.

## Additional information

### Notes on contributors

Richard B. Spence

Dr . Richard Spence is a Professor of History at the University of Idaho. He received his doctorate in history from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1981. He specializes in Russian intelligence and military history, and his course offerings include Modern Espionage, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, History of Secret Societies, and the Occult in History. He has served as a commentator/consultant for the History Channel and the International Spy Museum and was a key consultant-interviewee for the Russian Cultural Foundation’s 2007 documentary film, Leon Trotsky: The Secret of World Revolution, and its subsequent Trap for the Tsar. The author can be contacted at [rspence@uidaho.edu](mailto:rspence@uidaho.edu)

### Related research

People also read

Recommended articles

Cited by



## Information for

Authors

R&D professionals

Editors

Librarians

Societies

## Opportunities

Reprints and e-prints

Advertising solutions

Accelerated publication

Corporate access solutions

## Open access

Overview

Open journals

Open Select

Dove Medical Press

F1000Research

## Help and information

Help and contact

Newsroom

All journals

Books

## Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email



Sign me up



Copyright © 2025 Informa UK Limited [Privacy policy](#) [Cookies](#) [Terms & conditions](#)

[Accessibility](#)

 Taylor and Francis Group

Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954  
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG