

KHERSON PHOTOGRAPHY. THE BEGINNING

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The word "photo" is derived from the Greek roots "phytos" (light) and "graphe" (representation by means of lines or drawing), together meaning "drawing with light". The year of the invention of photography is 1839, when the so-called "daguerreotype" appeared in Paris. The French inventor Louis Daguerre managed to photograph a person and get a steady photo image. The fundamental difference between the daguerreotype and the modern photograph is the production of a "positive", not a "negative", which did not make it possible to obtain copies. In Ukraine, photography began to develop at a rapid pace almost immediately after the promulgation of the principles of photography.

In the pre-revolutionary magazine "Photography", it was written that, from 1889 to 1914, half a million cameras were imported into the Russian Empire, mainly cameras by the German company, "Kodak". Fewer than 10 cameras were delivered to Kherson. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were several photo studios in this city, which offered their services to the public by printing their advertisement in the newspaper "The Yug" ("The South").

It's amazing, but photography was available for ordinary people and existed even during the revolution, the civil war and general destruction of the city. Box cameras on a tripod had been with photographers since the time of "tsarism", but how they found imported materials for photography it is hard to imagine! There was supply and demand: people needed a souvenir photo! In the 1920s, in Kherson oblast there were 21 photographer-artisans who provided photographic services for the population, by today's terminology – self-employed (people keeping small private businesses). Notably, there was one woman among them. Ten

photographers worked in Kherson, the rest practised in Kakhovka, Oleshky (Tsyurupinsk), Beryslav, Skadovsk, and Vysokopillya. The photographers competed with each other. Since the final price of a photograph could not be lower than its cost, everyone tried to reach the rank of a master. Photography studios were usually named after their owners, however, there was also the “Red Light Painting”, for example.

In 1926, the attention was drawn to the photographers of this region by the Council of Deputies because photographers would probably be unreliable for the new Soviet government. In addition, they could make a picture of some objects and transfer photos to the enemies of the country. All the police stations were sent an order in which it was said that the photographers had to remove the old army officers' images from their shop-windows. They were allowed to store only negatives, not copies of photographs.

And not only that. All the photographer-artisans, were required to provide two of their own photos to the authorities. In the documents which certified the identity there was a verbal portrait of the owner. And they were to complete a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions: birthplace, nationality, education, marital status, occupation since 1917, whether they had relatives abroad, etc. Moreover, the government was interested in everyone, even those who were fond of photography at the amateur level.

According to the questionnaires mentioned above, photographers in 1926 got 27-50 rubles a month. To compare: a worker of a flour mill earned 360 rubles, and an employee of the Starostin Mechanical Plant – 500. Luckily, average market prices for basic food products (according to data for 1924) were quite low. A pound of beef cost 18 kopecks (a kopeck was one hundredth of a ruble), white bread – 6, sugar – 25, ten chicken eggs – 24. Unfortunately, photographic materials and their processing were not available for all.

Mass popularity for photography began with the appearance of the Soviet-made serial photocaleras 'Fotokor' and 'FED' in the early 1930s. A well-known photographer of those years Rodchenko said a catchphrase in the spirit of his time: *"The lens of the camera is the apple of the eye of a civilized person in the socialist society."*

Oh, if only Kherson photographers of the twenties of the 20th century had lived to the present day! They would be amazed at the abundance of photographic equipment, photographic materials, and a computer's ability to do whatever you want with an image. That would make them jealous! However, they would be flattered by the fact that their surviving images are carefully stored in archives and private collections, and that black and white art photography continues to be appreciated all over the world.

Based on:

- 1) "Khersonskiye fotografy na zare sovetskoy vlasti" by Vitaliy Moskalenko
<http://www.kordi.info/moskalenko/hersonskie-fotografyi.html>
- 2) "Istoriya fotografii: Nachalo #1" by Ivan Tolmachev.
<https://photo-monster.ru/books/read/istoriya-fotografii-chast-1-nachalo.html>
- 3) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photography>

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