

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 166

“An Unanswered Riddle”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The Russian situation is to me an unanswered and unanswerable riddle...I cannot see how this element which is hostile to the very idea of nationality can claim that they are the government of a nation or expect to be recognized as such. They are avowedly opposed to every government on earth; they openly propose to excite revolutions in all countries against existing governments; they are as hostile to democracy as they are to autocracy. If we should recognize them in Russia, we would encourage them and their followers in other lands. That would be a serious error...To recognize them would give them an exalted idea of their own power, make them more insolent and impossible, and win their contempt, not their friendship.

US Secretary of State Robert Lansing, memorandum of December 2, 1917.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 166. An Unanswered Riddle.

It took the American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, very little time to sour on Russia's new Bolshevik government, as you will have noticed from the quote I just read. Mere weeks after the October Revolution, Lansing was opposed to recognizing the new Russian government and regarded it as an implacable enemy.

Lansing was an outlier in this respect. Most of the leadership in Paris and London and Washington looked at Lenin and his government with cautious optimism, or at least with a wait-and-see attitude. Western leaders were unhappy that the new Russian government had so quickly ditched Russia's pre-existing commitments to her allies to seek an armistice with the Central Powers. Of course they were. But they also recognized Russia's disintegration and understood that, Bolshevik ideology notwithstanding, it was doubtful whether any Russian government would have had the means to continue the war, given Russia's internal collapse.

On the other hand, while the plight of the Russian government might be lamentable, that doesn't excuse the Bolsheviks' endless tirades against Russia's erstwhile allies, Britain, France, and the United States. The Bolsheviks seemed perversely eager to alienate and antagonize every one of the Great Powers, friend or foe. Secretary of State Lansing was willing to take the Bolsheviks at their word that they were enemies of all existing foreign governments, but the more common view in Allied capitals was that the Bolsheviks were merely experiencing an excess of revolutionary enthusiasm and would settle down once they faced up to the hard work of managing the world's largest nation. Woodrow Wilson would cite his experience with the Mexican Revolution and advise anyone who would listen that if the Russians wanted to raise hell, let them raise hell until they tired of it.

Then in February 1918, the new Russian government repudiated Russia's foreign debt. This went down not at all well in the Allied nations, which held most of that debt. The decision was particularly painful in France. The French had been issuing large loans to Russia for years, long before the war started, to build up the Russian military and railroads, and they ramped up this policy once the fighting began. The French government encouraged private French investors to buy Russian bonds in the name of patriotism and Allied solidarity. Now those patriotic French investors were looking at substantial, even crippling, losses.

Soon after, though, the peace talks at Brest-Litovsk broke down and the Germans began advancing eastward. In the West, this raised hopes of a new Eastern Front, or at least of Russia tying down enough Germans to weaken or even prevent the expected 1918 German offensive in the West. Also, this German bullying might be just what was needed to convince the Bolsheviks that, whatever their ideological differences, the Western Allies had no designs on Russian territory and the Germans clearly did, and thus national self-interest dictated cooperation with the Allies.

Then came the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Again, you could argue that was a necessity, but you couldn't overlook how the Bolsheviks sent their best units against the White Army, rather than the Germans. I think that's what they call a "tell." Ukraine was in chaos. Germans and Austrians were intervening in support of the Rada and against Ukrainian Bolsheviks, while the Bolshevik government now in Moscow blithely began planning to retake Ukraine just as soon as the White movement was dealt with.

By this time, the Bolsheviks had given up on their revolutionary notions that armies were a bourgeois affectation and that a modern socialist state could get by merely by distributing arms to the proletariat and relying on them as the socialist militia, the Red Guards model. Only weeks into their rule, Lenin and his followers had had enough of being bullied by the Germans, threatened by the Whites, and standing idly by while huge swaths of the Russian population declared themselves independent states. Russia needed a real army.

And so, even before the treaty was signed, the new Russian government set to work creating a new Russian army to replace the now defunct Imperial army. It would be designated the “Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army,” but since that’s too much of a mouthful, most folks came to call it simply the “Red Army.” This would be the official name until 1946, when it would be redesignated the “Soviet Army.”

Hey, everyone was predicting that the Bolsheviks were eventually going to have to settle down and get serious about managing a great nation. Part of that process would be to break the habit of exalting ideological purity over technical expertise. In the case of the Army this means admitting that Russia needs a real army, commanded by real, trained military commanders. So, however reluctantly, the Bolsheviks turned to the senior officers of the old Imperial Army and asked them to prepare, train, and command the Red Army. Some agreed out of patriotism. Others were reluctant, some were forced back into service by threats against them and their families.

And the Bolsheviks didn’t trust any one of them, naturally. Their solution to this problem was to appoint loyal Bolsheviks as political commissars to shadow senior military commanders, just to make sure they didn’t succumb to any temptations to backslide into counterrevolutionary thinking. This practice of placing ideological overseers into the officer corps would continue throughout the history of the Red Army and then the Soviet Army.

These reforms were Trotsky’s idea. The military commander-in-chief, Nikolai Krylenko, objected to this un-Bolshevik approach to building an army and resigned. Trotsky himself took control. He had no military experience, but would prove an able organizer and leader. The foreign ministry would be handed to Georgi Chicherin, a former Menshevik who had been born into an aristocratic family. His father had been a diplomat under the old Emperors. He was educated, cosmopolitan, and now a loyal Bolshevik, making him ideal for the position. Chicherin would hold the post of foreign minister under Lenin and later Stalin until his retirement in 1930.

Meanwhile, the Western governments took in these developments, especially the organization of a new army and the budding Russian Civil War and their thoughts turned to those huge stockpiles of arms and ammunition languishing in the warehouses of Archangel and Vladivostok. Remember those? The Germans and the Turks had most of Russia’s seaports blockaded, so the Allies shipped military aid to Russia through those two ports, the only ports in Russia still open to the outside world. But the failing Russian rail network could not ship those supplies to the front as quickly as they were arriving, and so these massive stocks of weapons accumulated in the warehouses of these two remote cities.

The Germans were actually toying with the idea of sending a military force to Archangel to seize the Allied weapons. And in any case, the Allies had sent those weapons to Russia with the intent that they be used against the Germans. It now seemed more likely that the Bolsheviks would use them to secure their control of Russia and defeat the pro-Western White movement. Also, bear in mind that the previous government had purchased these arms with funds loaned to it by foreign

investors. By repudiating Russia's foreign debt, the Bolsheviks had essentially stiffed the Allies on payment for these weapons. Logically, then, the Allies had the right to repossess them. This helps explain the Royal Navy ships prowling the waters off Archangel and the Imperial Japanese ships keeping watch over Vladivostok. In March 1918, Trotsky floated the idea to British and American representatives that their governments help train the new Red Army. The UK and the US were interested in this proposal, but it fell apart when the Allies insisted that the Russians allow Japanese troops into Vladivostok as part of the deal.

Red Guards managed to seize control in Vladivostok in late March, but a couple of weeks later, a Japanese-owned business in the city was attacked by an armed gang that might or might not have been Red Guards, but either way, it was just the sort of provocation the Japanese had been waiting for. Within days, Japanese marines were landing in the city. Most everyone in Russia and in Britain and America were suspicious of Japanese motives. It was widely believed what the Japanese really wanted was to carve off a chunk of eastern Siberia into a Japanese-controlled territory, much as they had done with Manchuria in China. And the French were very keen on allowing the Czechoslovak Legion rail passage into Vladivostok, and then sea passage to France, as you'll recall from episode 163.

Allied pressure persuaded the Japanese to withdraw from Vladivostok, for now, but it was only a couple of weeks later that the Legion, strung out over the Trans-Siberian Railway, rose up against the Bolsheviks and seized control of the rail line.

You already heard about the incident at the train station at Chelyabinsk that led to the conflict between the Czechoslovak Legion and the Russian government. The Legion took over stations up and down the line all the way to Vladivostok. To the outside world, the Legion were romantic figures, fighters for a Czecho-Slovak homeland who continued to resist the Germans after the Russian government had given up. Their dramatic seizure of the Trans-Siberian Railway raised hopes that the Bolshevik takeover was just a temporary setback, that patriotic Russians, aided by the Czechs and Slovaks, would unite to oust Lenin and restart the war in the East.

Spoiler alert: none of this is going to happen and most of it is unrealistic, but in the summer of 1918, it all seemed possible. But let's turn next to what the actual consequences of the Legion's uprising were. First of all, in the West, the uprising raised the profile of the Legion and of Czech and Slovak nationalism. It garnered sympathy and led the Western allies to recognize the national aspirations of Czechs and Slovaks.

Within Russia, the uprising gave anti-Bolshevik forces in eastern Russia and Siberia space to organize. A committee in the city of Omsk declared itself the government of Western Siberia. Siberian Cossacks in eastern Siberia similarly defied the government in Moscow. In Samara, renegade members of the dissolved Constituent Assembly set up shop and wooed Allied and White Army support by pledging to honor Russia's foreign debt and declaring their opposition to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Political factions from what was left of the Kadets and the Mensheviks and the Right Socialist Revolutionaries were coalescing against the regime. You'll recall that the Left Socialist Revolutionaries were the only political faction besides the Bolsheviks that supported Lenin's government. But even they had become disillusioned. On July 6, Left Socialist Revolutionaries assassinated the German ambassador in Moscow, denounced the Bolsheviks as German agents, and attempted to seize control of the government. The Bolsheviks put down the rebellion ruthlessly. Hundreds of Left Socialist Revolutionaries were arrested, and 13 executed.

The German government was quite fed up with the Bolsheviks after the murder of their ambassador and suspended diplomatic relations. As far as the Germans were concerned, the Bolsheviks governed Russia only at German sufferance, and they were proving to be spectacularly ungrateful. Bolshevik agitators continued to work their propaganda magic on German soldiers, they were not respecting the treaty terms, and now this. Ludendorff still wanted to advance the German Army deeper into Russia, overthrow the Bolsheviks, and install a White government, but the Kaiser would not support this. Foreign minister Kühlmann argued that all Germany required was for Russia to remain weak and divided, which it most definitely was.

Meanwhile, back in Siberia, the Czechoslovak Legion's seizure of the rail line also had two consequences that they themselves could not possibly have foreseen: the capture of an amazing quantity of gold and the death of an Emperor.

[music: Ravel, *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (*Pavane for a Dead Princess*)]

By mid-June, as the Czechoslovak Legion was seizing cities up and down the Trans-Siberian Railway, units of the Legion were approaching two very sensitive cities: Kazan and Ekaterinburg. The former was sensitive because Kazan was the location of a Red Army headquarters and even more important, the storage site for a portion of Russia's gold reserves, about 500 tons' worth, along with platinum and other valuable commodities. When the Great War began, Russia held the third largest gold reserves in the world, after the United States and France. In the early months of the war, the decision was made to transfer those reserves deeper into Russia, away from the front lines and any risk they might be captured by the Germans. Part of the reserve was stored in Kazan, which seemed safely distant from any of the front lines. Then came the October Revolution, the White Movement, and suddenly this valuable asset was in the hands of the Czechoslovak Legion. It was shipped off to Omsk, where the rump Constituent Assembly had now met and formed what was called the "Provisional All-Russian Government." The gold reserves gained them some instant credibility.

Ekaterinburg was even more important, because it was now the home of the former Russian Emperor. Remember the Emperor? We haven't talked about the deposed Emperor since episode 146. Back then, I told you that Alexander Kerensky had had Nikolai and his family sent off to the city of Tobolsk, ostensibly to protect them from the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. By accident or

design, this also placed them thousands of miles away from any port or frontier from which they might have escaped the country.

The October Revolution must have seemed very distant to the Romanovs and their household in faraway Tobolsk. As Russia became increasingly chaotic, the family heard rumors of various plots to break them out of the house arrest they were living under and spirit them away to safety, perhaps even out of the country. The family took these rumors to heart and remained optimistic.

Over the months that followed, treatment of the Romanovs grew harsher and stricter. In March the family was put on soldier's rations and forced to give up the last of their servants, apart from the few who refused to leave. The Bolsheviks by this time were contemplating bringing the former Emperor back to Moscow to stand trial for crimes against the Russian people, but as the situation in Russia grew more chaotic and with anti-Bolshevik forces springing up everywhere, there was a great fear that some faction hostile to the Moscow government would seize Nikolai and use him as a figurehead of their movement, perhaps even by transporting him out of the country and into exile.

In April, Tobolsk was deemed too insecure, and the Romanovs were moved to Ekaterinburg and held at the house formerly owned by an engineer named Ipatiev, which the Bolsheviks ominously christened "The House of Special Purpose." There they were held in strict isolation.

Exactly how the decision to kill the Romanovs was reached remains unclear. The official story was that the decision was made by the local soviet, although it seems unlikely the local soviet would do a thing like that without first checking with Moscow. But by July, with more and more of Russia rising up against the Bolsheviks, and with the Czechoslovak Legion closing on the town, the danger that the Legion might capture the Romanovs and transport them out of Russia became too great.

In the early morning hours of July 17, 1918, the family were awakened and ordered to get dressed. They were told that they were about to be transported out of Ekaterinburg to evade the approaching Czechoslovak soldiers. They were sent to a room in the basement, and told to wait. Soon a squad of Cheka men entered the room. Their commander read a brief statement announcing that Nikolai was to be executed for "continuing aggression against Soviet Russia." The squad opened fire.

What followed was a badly botched execution, reminiscent of the similarly botched attempt to kill Rasputin 18 months ago. (Was it really only 18 months ago?) The first fusillade killed only Nikolai himself. It took over seventy shots fired in total, plus multiple bayonetings, to kill Alexandra, the five children, and their servants. The small room filled with smoke and dust to the point where the doors had to be opened and the room aired out. Even then, the children were apparently all still alive. They were finally killed with bullets to their heads, eleven victims altogether.

After their deaths, the killers discovered that several of the victims had had diamonds and other gemstones sewn into their clothing, almost twenty pounds of gems in all. Their gem-encrusted underwear functioned like bulletproof vests, protecting them from the gunfire and the bayonets, until their frantic killers finally shot them in the heads.

After the bodies were stripped of valuables, they were carried away by truck and dumped in a mine. The mine turned out to be shallower than expected and the bodies too visible, so they were retrieved from the mine and put back in the truck. As the truck drove along a lonely dirt road in pouring rain, it got stuck in the mud. With dawn approaching and the men in the truck too tired to continue, it was decided to bury the bodies right there, by the side of the road, in a shallow grave. The bodies were mutilated and acid poured on them to disguise their identities, and two of them—the corpses of the two youngest children, Anastasia and Alexei, were buried at a different site fifteen meters away, to further confuse anyone who might seek the remains.

White Army forces captured Ekaterinburg a few days later, and discovered evidence the Romanovs had been there and had been killed, but did not find the graves. The details of the killings and the location of the remains would be a closely guarded secret for decades, and many believed the full story would never be known.

Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov was fifty years old, and he had ruled over the Russian Empire for twenty-two inglorious years.

[music: Ravel, *Pavane pour une infante défunte (Pavane for a Dead Princess)*]

What are we to make of Emperor Nikolai and his legacy? By all accounts, he was a good man personally. Kind, charming, well liked, religiously devout, and a loving husband and father. For many of us, that would be as much as we could hope for from our own epitaphs. But Nikolai was not one of us. Nikolai was the absolute ruler of one of the most powerful nations in the world at a pivotal moment in its history, and his rule was an unmitigated disaster. A disaster for his people, a disaster for his nation, a disaster for the entire world. In some respects, we are still suffering the repercussions of Nikolai's failures in our own time.

He was said to be intelligent and well educated, but not particularly well versed in the art of governance, nor did he display much interest in improving his skills as a ruler. He was indecisive and conflict averse, with a tendency to agree with whichever of his advisors he had spoken with most recently. This is not necessarily a bad trait, provided you choose your advisors well. Nikolai more often chose his advisors poorly. Like the worst autocrats in history, Nikolai ruled as if he believed Russia was there to serve him, rather than the other way around.

Nikolai fully deserves history's opprobrium, and yet I can't escape the feeling that he and his family deserved a better end than they got. Nikolai could be a cruel ruler, even heartless, yet neither Lenin nor Stalin nor Trotsky nor any of their families suffered so badly when they were his prisoners as he and his loved ones did when he was theirs. Similarly, as cruel and neglectful a

regime as Imperial Russia was, as easy as it is to understand what would move its subjects to revolt against it, none of that justifies the suffering that will be inflicted by the regime that replaces it.

[music: Ravel, *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (*Pavane for a Dead Princess*)]

The ruthless secret killings of the Imperial family shocked the world. Even the Germans were sufficiently repulsed by the bad behavior of what was supposed to be their clients in Moscow that Ludendorff and the military raised once again the prospect of military intervention to topple the government. All it would take, Ludendorff reasoned, was the capture of Petrograd, the true capital of Russia. That would leave the Bolsheviks isolated in the region of Moscow, deep inside Russia, with most of the country under the control of their opponents. But with the German military position deteriorating on the Western Front and the Kaiser's government's political position deteriorating at home, that final German intervention to topple Lenin never happened.

The Allies were at least as put off as the Germans were, and the dream of somehow turning Russia around and bringing her back into the war seemed increasingly farfetched. Allied leaders were coming around to Robert Lansing's view that the Bolsheviks were impossible to work with. Instead of the fantasy of wooing the Bolsheviks back into the fold, Paris and London and Washington also began toying with the idea of overthrowing the Bolsheviks and restoring a friendly government. On August 3, the White government in Omsk formally requested Allied assistance.

The French had few units to spare, but soon there were tens of thousands of British troops deployed to the far north, around Archangel and Murmansk, intended to take control of those arms stockpiles and—who knows?—possibly turn them over to White armed forces and assist them in a drive on Moscow. British money found its way into the hands of General Alexeyev and his Volunteer Army in the Don Cossack region.

In the Far East, the Japanese have been champing at the bit to land forces in Vladivostok. The other Allies were wary of this idea, but now that the situation in Russia had deteriorated badly, and with Vladivostok still the Czechoslovak Legion's only hope of escaping the country as well as the Allies' best route for sending aid to the Siberian Whites, a deal was quickly struck for a joint Japanese and American occupation, in the hope that an American presence would deter the Japanese from taking advantage of their position in Siberia. The US government was reluctant to take this action at a time when funneling as many American soldiers as possible to France as quickly as possible was their top priority, but the Wilson Administration grudgingly agreed. In retaliation for these moves, the Cheka arrested hundreds of British and French nationals in Moscow.

On August 17, the head of the Petrograd branch of the Cheka, a Bolshevik named Moisei Uritsky, was assassinated by Leonid Kannegisser, a 22-year old former Imperial Russian military cadet. Leonid had been among the cadets who had formed the final line of defense for the

Provisional Government on the night of the October Revolution. He was part of an underground opposition group and he was also gay, and apart from the political dimension, the killing of Uritsky was also an act of revenge after the Cheka executed Leonid's lover, another former army officer. Leonid was captured, interrogated under torture, and executed.

Now, if you are Lenin, you are thinking by August 1918 that things have been going steadily downhill for you and for the Bolshevik movement ever since those glorious days following the October Revolution. You're probably also thinking circumstances seem likely to get worse before they get better, and you're wondering how bad they can get and whether Bolshevik rule can survive. Even so, imagine how disturbed Lenin is going to become following the evening of August 30. As he was leaving a meeting that evening at the Moscow Metallurgical Plant, recently renamed the "Hammer and Sickle" plant, he encountered Fanya Kaplan, or Fanny Kaplan, if you like, a 27-year old Socialist Revolutionary, who drew a revolver and fired three shots at him.

Two of the shots struck Lenin, one penetrating his lung. Lenin was rushed back to the Kremlin for security and refused to leave the safety of its walls to visit a hospital. Doctors were brought to him instead, and they treated him but were unwilling to attempt to remove the bullets from his body in those surroundings. Lenin's injuries were serious, but he did survive. Those of you who have read ahead in the history of the twentieth century know that Lenin has only five and a half years left to him; he never will recover his full health and will pass away in January 1924. It is widely believed that this assassination attempt and the bullets that will remain lodged in his body for the rest of his life contributed to his early death at the age of 53.

Kaplan, like Kannegisser, insisted that she acted on her own, and would be summarily executed a few days later. Nevertheless, it was clear that Bolshevik Russia, encircled by hostile White armies, nationalist armies, and Allied interventionist armies also faced organized and violent Socialist Revolutionary opposition from within. Within days after the assassination attempt, while Lenin himself was still recuperating, Sovnarkom issued multiple decrees authorizing concentration camps and summary executions for political opponents. Leon Trotsky ordered the executions of Red Army soldiers who deserted or abandoned their posts, pointedly ordering that those executions should begin with officers and commissars.

Thus began a period known as the Red Terror. By the end of 1918, some 15,000 Russians would be killed, including many more Romanovs, their relatives and friends, and as many Socialist Revolutionary leaders as could be found. This number of killings rivals the French Revolution's Reign of Terror and far exceeds the number of political killings during Nikolai II's entire 22-year reign.

This was the last straw for the Germans. In September, the German government joined its British adversaries in funneling money to the White armies. The German military drew up a plan for Operation *Schlufstein*, to overthrow Lenin's government. But Lenin's luck held once again. By

September, Germany was collapsing in the West. In the Balkans, Bulgaria quit the war, ironically, a consequence of Bulgarian disappointment with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Germany no longer had the means to carry out Operation *Schlufstein*.

By October, in the words of a dispatch from the German embassy in Moscow, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was “a dead letter.” Now that Germany was no longer a threat, the Bolsheviks raided the German embassy, seizing diplomatic correspondence and hundreds of millions of rubles. German property and assets in Russia, which had previously been protected by the treaty, were confiscated and turned over to pro-Bolshevik German prisoners of war to fund revolution in Germany.

Vladimir Lenin, who had literally been a paid German agent, who had been denounced by his own supporters as a traitor for making peace with Germany, had been dramatically vindicated. All along he had insisted that his tactical alliance with Imperial Germany and then the tactical retreat of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, were temporary expedients, necessary to promote the proletarian revolution. Now, Germany and Austria were defeated, the treaty was an historical footnote, while the proletarian revolution is just getting started.

We’ll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and I’d like to thank Rafael for his donation, and thank you Joe for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help keep the words flowing and the bits going, and there’s always room for one more, so if you’d like to help out, visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you’ll join me in two weeks’ time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we turn our attention to Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire as first the one and then the other quits the war. Wait, what? Yes, two of the four Central Powers pack it in. By the autumn of 1918, most observers would have predicted an Allied victory, but it will come sooner than expected, owing to a series of events almost as unlikely as the ones that started the conflict, and they will begin in the same region: the Balkans. The end of the war is upon us, and no, I don’t believe it either. The fall of the Ottoman Empire, in two weeks time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In the chaotic Russia of 1918, the deaths of the Romanovs remained shrouded in mystery. Everyone knew it had been done, but many of the details remained unclear, and no one wanted to discuss it. To the outside world, it was a barbaric act; inside Russia, dangerous to take an interest in. Locally, in Ekaterinburg, there was inevitably curiosity and rumors, including rumors of hidden Romanov jewelry and treasures waiting to be found. These were also dangerous subjects to talk about.

One of the most peculiar aspects of this tale are the numbers of impostors who have come forward over the course of the twentieth century, claiming to be one or more of the Romanov children who somehow escaped the murders. There were about two dozen claimants in all. Many

claimed to be the Crown Prince Alexei, but the most famous of these imposters, for some reason, were women claiming to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia, Nikolai and Alexandra's youngest daughter.

The most famous of the Anastasia imitators was a young mentally ill woman who appeared in Berlin in 1920 and came to call herself Anna Tchaikovsky, with Anna short for Anastasia. During the 1920s through the 1960s, she lived first in the United States and then in Germany, where she attracted the attention of a few people willing to take her claim seriously. In 1968, she moved back to the United States for good, and passed away in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1984, at the age of 87. Modern DNA testing has confirmed she was not related to the Romanovs.

For me the most bizarre twist in this story is the 1997 animated feature film *Anastasia*, directed by Don Bluth and distributed by Twentieth Century Fox, with Meg Ryan voicing the title role and Christopher Lloyd as Rasputin. The film was modeled on the classic Disney animated fairy tale musical form, and was a commercial and critical success, earning two Academy Award nominations. I've never been able to bring myself to watch it, because I can't wrap my head around taking one of the uglier moments of twentieth century history, sugar-coating it, and serving it up as a children's entertainment, complete with song-and-dance numbers. Call me old fashioned if you must.

Do not get me started on the stage production or the *Anastasia on Ice* version. And no, I am not making this up.

Meanwhile, in 1979, when it was still dangerous to show interest in this subject, local amateur investigators discovered the burial site. This information was kept secret until after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The remains were then exhumed and reinterred at the Peter and Paul Cathedral in St. Petersburg, the traditional resting place of Russian Emperors. The remains of Anastasia and Alexei were not located; remember that they had been buried in a different location. That site was discovered in 2007.

In 1981, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad had canonized the Imperial family and the servants murdered with them as martyrs. In the year 2000, the Moscow Patriarchate canonized the family as passion bearers, which is not quite the same thing. These canonizations remain controversial in some quarters, given Nikolai's, shall we say, shortcomings as a national leader. June 16, 2003, saw the consecration of the Church of All Saints, a Russian Orthodox Church constructed on the site of the former House of Special Purpose.

[music: Closing War Theme]