

THE ROMANOV FAMILY BEYOND THE ROYAL TRAGEDY: 10 FACTS YOU MAY NOT KNOW

The Romanovs' historical relevance goes far beyond a midnight execution.

The Romanovs conjure up a specific image for most—those doomed young girls, soon to face a late-night execution in the tumult of a changing Europe. But the Romanov family and dynasty extend much further into the past than Nicholas II and Anastasia.

The mystique may be primarily associated with the last of the Romanovs, but in many ways they were a typical European ruling family. After the extinction of the Rurik dynasty, the Romanov family, then boyars of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, rose through the Time of Troubles to see Michael Romanov crowned Tsar of Russia in 1613.

The original male line of the Romanov family came to an end in 1730 when Peter II died only three years into his reign from smallpox. He was succeeded by Anna Ioannovna, daughter of Ivan V, the half-brother of Peter the Great—Peter II's grandfather. This second branch of the Romanov family would continue to rule until Nicholas II was deposed in 1917. During those three hundred years, Russia became an empire, underwent multiple cultural revolutions, and eventually completely removed their ruling family. Discover the intricacies of the Romanov rule.

1. The Romanov dynasty first achieved prominence when Anastasia Romanovna married Ivan the Terrible.

Noblewoman Anastasia Romanovna married Ivan IV Vasilyevich, then the grand prince of Moscow, in 1547. Ivan was declared Tsar of all Russia later that same year, making him the first Tsar of a unified Russian state. The House of Romanov officially became the reigning imperial house of Russia in 1613, when Anastasia and Ivan's relative Michael Romanov became tsar. The Romanovs would rule over Russia for more than 300 years.

Anastasia Romanovna was believed to have a positive influence on her husband, tempering the fits of rage he was prone to. She died in 1560 and Ivan had a nervous breakdown, believing she was the victim of a poisoning plot. It wasn't until the early 2000s that forensic research showed elevated mercury in Anastasia's remains, indicating that she was indeed likely murdered. Ivan would later go on to murder his eldest son and heir during one of his outbursts, and may have caused the miscarriage of his unborn grandchild by beating his daughter-in-law. No wonder he would earn the lasting nickname Ivan the Terrible.

2. 18 Romanovs ruled over Russia.

From Michael I to Nicholas II, 18 Romanovs were crowned tsar or tsarina. Among the 18, four Romanov rulers were women who ruled in their own right. Some may choose not to count Catherine the Great amongst these women, as she married into the Romanov family—she was born into the Prussian house, Ascania. Her succession to the Russian throne after the contested death of her husband, Peter III, usually merits her inclusion among the Romanovs.

Catherine the Great (second of her name) and Peter I, also called the Great, are usually remembered as the most effective Romanov rulers, but Tsar Alexei, father of Peter, was also a stabilizing, if less bombastic, ruler.

3. Unlike many other royal families, Romanovs didn't strictly follow a pattern of primogeniture.

Although the throne was typically passed to a tsar's eldest son, the current ruler had the ability to choose his or her own heir, regardless of their relation. This may be part of the reason that female rulers were slightly more common in Russia than a country like England, with its strict emphasis on primogeniture.

4. Nicholas II was no longer the tsar when he and his family were murdered.

The assassination of the entire family seems even more senseless when one realizes that Nicholas II had renounced the throne some four months earlier. The February Revolution, a food-rationing protest-turned-revolution, marked the turn of the loyalty of the Russian Army. Without the military behind him, Nicholas abdicated the throne on March 15, 1917. Four months later, on July 17th, Nicholas, his wife, and his children were executed.

5. The British Royal Family were the carriers of hemophilia, not the Russians.

The coddling of young Alexei due to his hemophilia has become practically the stuff of fable. But despite its association with the Romanovs and Russia, it was Queen Victoria's bloodline that carried the potentially fatal flaw. Empress Alexandra, granddaughter of Victoria, passed on the gene to her son. Alexei's hemophilia caused Alix to worry over her son nearly constantly—and to seek out dubious medical solutions from the likes of Rasputin.

6. Not every Romanov was killed in 1918—but Anastasia was not one of the survivors.

Thanks to pretenders like Anna Anderson and the Fox film *Anastasia*, the idea that the youngest daughter of Alix and Nicholas may have lived on survived long into the 20th century. The bodies of the Romanovs were thrown into an unmarked grave, and when their skeletons were later rediscovered, two skeletons were missing. Alexei and one of the girls was nowhere to be found. At the time, it was believed that Anastasia's body was the unaccounted one, although it may have actually been her older sister, Maria.

In 2007, the remaining corpses were found nearby, showing signs of acid damage and an attempt to cut the bones into pieces.

7. After the execution of the royal family, many other Romanovs went into exile.

It's clear the Bolsheviks wanted to eliminate any potential claims to the Russian throne. After the execution of the royal family, 18 more people belonging to the Romanov dynasty were killed, and the location of the remains of all but one are unknown. The surviving 47 members of the dynasty fled and lived in exile abroad.

8. The Soviets led a deliberate campaign of misinformation about the Romanovs' fate.

It's no coincidence that there has been so much confusion surrounding the deaths of the royal family. Soviet leadership misled the public for many years. For instance, in the immediate aftermath the Bolsheviks claimed that Nicholas II alone had been murdered and his family was taken to another safe location; while in 1919 the government claimed that the Romanovs had been murdered by left-wing revolutionaries who were not associated with the Bolsheviks, and in 1922 denied outright that they were dead.

The Soviets finally acknowledged the murders in 1926, but said that Lenin's Cabinet was not responsible. The family's final resting place was discovered in 1979; it would be another decade before the Soviet Union publicly acknowledged the existence of these remains.

9. Prince Philip was a key to identifying the Romanovs' bodies.

Since the Romanovs were buried in an unmarked grave, it would have been difficult to identify the Romanovs simply based on location. Luckily, mitochondrial DNA was able to identify the decayed bodies. Prince Philip's great-grandmother, Alice, was Empress Alexandra's mother. Since mitochondria is passed exclusively by the mother, Prince Philip's, Empress Alix's and all of the Romanov children have the same mtDNA. With Prince Philip's contribution, scientists were able to confirm the Romanovs' identities.

10. Anastasia imposters were not alone.

The many, many people who pretended to be—or were convinced that they in fact were—Anastasia may be more well-known, but there was also a number of men who attempted to

convince the world that they were Tsarevich Alexei, rightful heir to the Russian throne. The most well-known of these men was Michael Goleniewski, a Polish soldier who turned spy for the CIA in the late 1950s.

Just a few years later, Goleniewski began claiming that he was Alexei Nikolaevich. His age (some 18 years younger than Alexei) was of no concern—after all, Alexei's hemophilia caused him to look much younger than he actually was. By this time living in New York City, Goleniewski was quickly disowned by the CIA. He remained in Queens for the rest of his life, passing away in 1993.