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## Highland Schools in the Caucasus: Historical Background

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### Abstract

The article explores the history of the highland schools (Gorskaya shkola) in the Caucasus that covers the period from the 1850s to the 1860s. Established in 1859 and originally planned to function as a pilot project for four years, they proved to be effective, so the experiment continued. This paper also examines the legal status of highland schools.

The desk research was focused on facts derived from official archives of the Ministry of Education published in the 'Journal of Ministry of Education'. Such sources included legal documents, extracts from reports of the Minister of Education and the Trustee of the Caucasus Education District, as well as local findings on operation of the then established schools.

The research methodology is based on principles of historicism, objectivity and systematism that are commonly used in historiography. The study involved the problem-based chronological method to scrutinize certain facts in the history of highland schools' development in the Caucasus, and disclose the highlanders' interest in such institutions which prompted further establishment of other highland schools in the region.

In conclusion, it is important to state that the network of highland schools in the Caucasus allowed not only to satisfy educational needs of children residing in the highland communities, but also to co-educate them with children of the Russian Empire commissioners. Graduates of such schools maintained a wider range of social relationships (through religion, consecrated friendship, comradeship) that helped them to adapt easier to the rapidly changing world and to the rapidly changing situation in the Caucasus.

**Keywords:** highland school, the Caucasus, the 1850-1860s, the Russian Empire, 'Journal of Ministry of Education'

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### **1. Introduction**

In 1859, when the Caucasian War waging in the eastern part of the Caucasus was about to cease, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Adjutant General, Duke A.I. Baryatinsky submitted to Emperor Alexander II a concept of establishing special schools with the purpose to educate children of highland indigenous tribes of the Caucasus (Trekhratova, 2015: 60).

On October 20, 1859, the Russian Emperor approved the draft of the Statute of Highland Schools. An important fact was that Imam Shamil was captured in the Caucasus in the very same year. The Russian administration was proactive at that time and did its best to cool down and stabilize the society by creating a network of highland schools. In accordance with the Statute, these schools were launched as a pilot project that would last for four years. One of the main reasons for establishing these schools was the fact, that in some territories controlled by the Russian military troops for several decades there had not been a single public school for children (neither for civil commissioners, nor for indigenous population). Such territories were: Sukhum, Vladikavkaz, Nalchik, Temir-khan-Shur, Ust-Laba and the Groznaya fortress.

### **2. Materials and Methods**

Our desk research involved the study of documents, derived from official archives of the Ministry of Education, that had been published in the 'Journal of Ministry of Education'. Such materials include legal documents, extracts from individual reports of the Minister of Education and the Trustee of the Caucasus Education District, as well as local findings on operation of the established schools.

The research methodology is based on principles of historicism, objectivity and systematism that are commonly used in historiography. The study involved the problem-based chronological method to scrutinize certain facts in the history of highland schools' development in the Caucasus, and disclose the highlanders' interest in such institutions which prompted further establishment of other highland schools in the region.

### **3. Discussion**

The first written evidence of establishment of highland schools in the Caucasus refers to the period immediately following the formal approval of the draft Statute of Highland Schools, i.e. the pre-revolutionary time. For instance, a report on the establishment of a highland school in Zakataly was published in 1863 (Shkola dlya gortsev, 1863), the school in Sukhum was referred to quite often (Izvlachenie iz otcheta, 1866; Otkrytie zhenskoi shkoly, 1871), some other schools were also mentioned.

A remarkably big amount of publications on highland schools appeared in the modern period, as this topic attracted researchers from national territories in the North and West Caucasus. A number of recent articles discuss Russia's politics in the Caucasus, for example, papers by T.A. Bekoeva (Bekoeva, 2009), V.A. Sturba (Shturba, 2010) and S.A. Trekhratova (Trekhratova, 2015). The topic of education development for Muslims was the scientific interest of such researchers as M.F. Titorenko, O.G. Shkileva (Titorenko, Shkileva, 2008) and R.A. Khachidogov (Khachidogov, 2015). Articles devoted to the history of regional schools can be considered a specific type of papers. For example, the highlanders' schooling in Osetia was studied by E.I. Kobakhidze, N.A. Ladonina (Kobakhidze, Ladonina, 2015; Ladonina, 2015), in Dagestan – by D.Z. Ataeva and K.I. Khadzhaliev (Ataeva, 2009; Khadzhaliev, 2011), in Grozny and Nalchik – by T.A. Bekoeva, A.Z. Magamedova, A.G. Kudzaeva (Bekoeva, Magamedova, 2016; Kudzaeva, 2016).

### **4. Results**

The Statute consisted of five Chapters: 1. Number, Aim and Division of Schools; 2. Regional Schools; 3. Primary Schools; 4. Boarding Facilities at Highland Schools; 5. Guidelines on Administration of Highland Schools and Their Boarding Facilities.

The aim of establishment of highland schools was to promote the idea of civic consciousness and education among peaceful highlanders, as well as to provide families of officers and civil commissioners in the Caucasus with education opportunities for their children. The highland schools were founded as district-based first-level educational institutions.

The schools were established in the following locations: a) regional schools: in Vladikavkaz, Nalchik, Temir-khan-Shur; b) primary schools: in Ust-Lab, the Groznaya fortress, and Sukhum (Trekhratova, 2015: 61).

There were four forms in regional schools; including a pre-school program.

Regional schools, like other district and regional educational institutions that were subordinate to the Caucasus Education District, were administrated by full time inspectors appointed by the Commander in Chief of the Caucasus Army and the Viceroy of the Caucasus on request from the Trustee of the region. The inspectors were recruited from amongst the teachers who demonstrated high-level pedagogical skills.

The full-time inspectors were selected mainly from the list of candidates who had obtained a diploma from a university or who had completed a full course at a Pedagogy department of the Stavropol Gymnasium.

Apart from a full-time inspector, personnel of such schools consisted of: teachers of Orthodox religion and Islam, three teachers of sciences and one teacher of a pre-school course; the former two teachers came from the clergy, while teachers of sciences and the pre-school course were graduates of institutions of higher education.

Regional schools were originally founded for indigenous highlanders and for children of Russian officers and public civil commissioners; however, they could also enroll boys coming from other free social classes, irrespective of their religion.

The following subjects were taught at regional schools:

a) Orthodox Religion including praying scripts, a summary of the Manual for catechizing, a short history of religion, as well as the dogmas of Orthodox church service - for children adhering to the Orthodox church;

b) Dogmas of Islam – for Muslim children;

c) The Russian Language and Russian Grammar with practical exercises;

d) Introduction to the World and Russian Geography; the Russian geography covered some statistical information about the national and the Caucasus administrative order;

e) Introduction to the World and Russian History;

f) Arithmetic and Algebra;

g) Introduction to Geometry, including basic concepts of lines, planes and objects, together with their main characteristics, as well as the creation of geometric shapes;

h) Calligraphy and Drawing (Ob uchrezhdenii, 1859: 26; Trekhratova, 2015: 61).

All these subjects were divided among all teachers, to guarantee equal workload.

Each course at regional schools was to last for one year, as opposed to the pre-school course that could last for two years or longer.

The academic year began on August 15. The summer vacation was scheduled from July 1 to August 15.

Those people wishing to attend the school on a part time basis, had to submit a special application to the full time inspector. The tuition fee for this category of pupils was 5 rubles per year. The Teachers Council and the local Commander in Chief were the only authorities that could allow people in need to attend school free of charge. All the funds collected from pupils were spent as follows: one half was used to pay the teachers' salaries; the other half was divided into two smaller parts. One of them was used to supply under-privileged pupils with textbooks and outfit, the other one was used to improve the content of teaching materials as well as to cover other expenses of the institution.

Graduates of regional schools enjoyed the same rights as graduates of district schools within the Caucasus Education District.

The students who had demonstrated good academic achievements did not have to take any exams to get promoted to the fourth form, if they wanted to be on a state service afterwards.

The full time and part time students who were the first ones to have successfully passed the term exam in their respective classes, could be admitted as boarders at public expense.

The primary school consisted of three forms, including one pre-school course. They were administered by inspectors who were appointed by the Trustee of Caucasus Education District and had obtained a diploma from a university or completed a course offered by the Pedagogy department of the Stavropol Gymnasium.

Apart from an inspector, the personnel of such schools consisted of two teachers of sciences, one teacher of Orthodox religion and one teacher of Islam.

Not only children of indigenous highlanders, military men and public civil commissioners were allowed to study at such schools, but also boys coming from other social classes could study there, regardless of their religious views.

The program of primary schools featured the following subjects:

- a) Orthodox Religion, including praying scripts, a short history of religion, a short version of the Creed as well as praying scripts stated in the 'Basic Elements of Orthodox Faith' textbook;
- b) Dogmas of Islam;
- c) The Russian Language, including reading exercises, dictations, the structure of speech;
- d) Counting and Introduction to Arithmetic;
- e) Basic Characteristics of the Earth, and an Overview of Russian Geography;
- f) Calligraphy.

The tuition fee at primary schools was lower than that of regional schools and amounted to 3 rubles per year. Poor people could be exempted from paying such fees on the decision of the Teachers Council and the local Commander in Chief.

The pupils who had demonstrated outstanding academic performance were accepted to the second form of district schools and gymnasiums within the Caucasus Education District without any exams.

No uniform was introduced for part time students of highland regional and primary schools; however, the boarders of such schools who displayed academic achievements and good behavior were granted a privilege to wear a just-au-corps.

Boarding facilities were arranged next to highland schools to assist parents in upbringing their children, as well as to better inform the young highlanders about moral values. These moral rules would develop in children's minds a sense of dignity, duty, hard work and order, and get them prepared for the civic life that was the overall aim of the whole educational process.

The boarding schools located in various geographical areas had different numbers of pupils: in Vladikavkaz – 120 people; in Nalchik – 65 people; in Temir-khan-Shurinsk – 65 people; in Ust-Lab – 65 people; in Grozny – 65 people; in Sukhum-Kal – 40 people.

There were always some boarders that were educated at the expense of the state. In Valdikavkaz there were 80 such boarders: 50 children from the most outstanding and prominent families of the Osetia military district and 30 children of Russian military men and public civil commissioners. In Nalchik, there were 25 boarders: 10 children of dukes and noblemen of the Kabarda region and 15 children of Russian military men and public civil commissioners. In Temir-khan-Shirinsk, there were 40 boarders: 25 highlanders' children from honored families of Northern and Southern Dagestan and 15 children of Russian public civil commissioners. In Ust-Lab, there were 40 boarders: 25 children from tribes inhabiting the left bank of the Kuban River and 15 children of Russian public civil commissioners. In Grozny, there were 40 boarders: 25 children from the honored Chechen and Kumyk families and 15 children of Russian public civil commissioners. In Sukhum-Kal, there were 20 boarders: 15 children of the Abkhaz, Tsebelda and Jiget families and 5 children of Russian public civil commissioners (*Ob uchrezhdenii, 1859: 30*).

The remaining places at schools were shared among: a) boarders who studied at the expense of collective funds (like at the Nalchik school that saw a similar funding pattern for 25 children of dukes and noblemen of the Kabarda region); b) boarders who studied at the expense of funds controlled by the Viceroy of the Caucasus; and c) boarders who paid for studies on their own (termed as 'svoekoshtnye').

The annual fee for accommodation at a boarding facility was 80 rubles.

All students of boarding schools wore a regular dark-green forage cap with a red band as well as a regular dark-green just au corps with a dark-green collar made of woven felt and decorated with red straps and polished copper buttons. In winter, the boarders were dressed in a dark-green coat that had a similar style as a coat of any regular citizen.

The age of a child wishing to be accepted to school and financed by the state (termed as 'kazennokoshtnye') had to vary between 9 and 15. Specifically, the age limit for a pre-school course was 13 years old, for a first form of regional schools – 14 years old, and for a second form – 15 years old. All children who did not satisfy this age requirement could not be financed by the state.

Every boarder could study in the same form for no more than two years; however, the children who had a nationality other than Russian could remain on a pre-school course for up to three years. The children who at the end of their study programs did not have enough knowledge to move to a higher form, were expelled from school, however, they still had a right to attend classes as part time students.

After the end of the course, the boarders were returned to their parents; the children who performed well throughout the years could be recommended by the military commander to enter a gymnasium and be granted a public subsidy. For this reason, the inspector of every school reported to the regional commander on the excellent performance of students who managed to reach the highest level. They would then be considered as prospective candidates to fill some state positions offered to the students of the Stavropol Gymnasium.

In every boarding school there was a fixed number of non-commissioned officers and common soldiers. Two or three non-commissioned officers had a task to supervise students according to a rotating schedule. While on duty, the officers were at full discretion of the room inspector.

Neither non-commissioned officers nor room inspectors had a right to punish students themselves. The inspector could only make a reprimand or deprive a student of his free time; all other types of punishment could be executed only by the school inspector or in some cases only by the Teachers Councils.

According to the school Statute, the boarding conditions for the students needed to be satisfactory, but not luxurious. The main requirement for food was its good quality; the main requirement for clothes was a smart outlook.

To facilitate the administration of schools, schools were divided into multiple directorates within the Caucasus Education District. The regional schools in Vladikavkaz, Nalchik and Temir-khan-Shur as well as the primary school in Grozny were under the control of the Stavropol Governorate; the primary schools in Ust-Lab formed part of the Chernomorskaya Governorate; the primary schools in Sukhum-Kal were supervised by the Kutais Governorate.

While being directly managed by respective school principals, these institutions were also under the control of the local military administration and its military district commander, in particular. Significantly, the military district commander enjoyed all the rights of the school's trustees. When the commander checked the facilities of his supervised school and detected some defects or malfunctions, he had to immediately inform the school principal about his remarks.

The budget of primary schools differed across various institutions depending on the number of students. For example, the schools in Ust-Lab and Grozny had 7 teachers, including administrative personnel, and 40 students. The total budget of one school in that case was 5,406 rubles per year. However, while the number of teachers and administrative personnel was the same but the number of registered students was 20, the budget of the school in Sukhum was 3,702 rubles (Ob uchrezhdenii, 1859: 38-40).

As for the regional schools, their budget was much higher than that of the primary schools (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Highland schools (personnel and budget)

School	Number of teachers and administrative personnel	Number of students	Total budget (in rubles)
<b>Primary schools</b>			
Ust-Lab	7	40	5406.95
Grozny	7	40	5406.95
Sukhum-Kal	7	20	3702.70
<b>Regional schools</b>			
Temir-khan-Shur	8	40	6272.70
Nalchik	8	25	5306.95
Vladikavkaz	10	80	9793.90
Total			35890.15

Almost all new schools faced some challenges. The local population was skeptical about sending their children to such schools as they did not fully understand the benefits that education offered in general. To solve this problem, the Russian administration in the Caucasus did its utmost to make it their priority to promote people to a higher position if they had completed a program at one of educational institutions.

New schools were launched in accordance with the approved schedule. The regional school in Temir-khan-Shurin opened in 1861. A boarding house was constructed next to the school that could accommodate the total number of 65 students: 40 children were financed by the state, 25 children came from the honored families of Northern and Southern Dagestan as well as families of Russian public civil commissioners (Khadzhialiev, 2011: 162).

By 1864, the number of teachers at the school in Sukhum was 4, while the number of students was 53. In 1865, the number of teachers remained the same, but the number of students decreased to 47 (Iz vlechenie iz otcheta, 1866: 350). The establishment of the first school in Abkhazia led to the creation in 1871 of the first women's boarding school (Otkrytie zhenskoi shkoly, 1871: 773).

The creation of highland schools proved to be a successful project that was extended over a longer period. As a result, a boarding school in Zakataly was opened in 1862. At first, the population did not trust that institution, and only 5 students were admitted to the program, while there were 25 vacancies at the boarding school. However, four months later the situation changed, and all available places were occupied while the administration received hundreds of applications (Shkola dlya gortsev, 1863: 114).

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to state that the system of highland schools, that was formed in the Caucasus, allowed not only to satisfy the educational needs of the children who lived in the highland region but also to co-educate them together with children of Russian public civil commissioners. Graduates of such schools maintained a wider network of cultural relationships (through religion, consecrated friendship, comradeship) that helped them to adapt easier to the rapidly changing world and to the rapidly changing situation in the Caucasus.

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