

PETER THE GREAT OF RUSSIA



Born in Moscow, Russia on June 9, 1672, Peter the Great was a Russian czar in the late 17th century who is best known for his extensive reforms in an attempt to establish Russia as a great nation. He created a strong navy, reorganized his army according to Western standards, secularized schools, administered greater control over the reactionary Orthodox Church, and introduced new administrative and territorial divisions of the country.

Peter the Great was the 14th child of Czar Alexis, and he ruled jointly with his brother Ivan V beginning in 1682. When Ivan died in 1696, Peter was officially declared Sovereign of all Russia as "Peter I". Peter inherited a nation that was severely

underdeveloped compared to the culturally prosperous European countries. While the Renaissance and the Reformation swept through Europe, Russia rejected westernization and remained isolated from modernization.

During his reign, Peter undertook extensive reforms in an attempt to reestablish Russia as a great nation. Peter overcame opposition from the country's medieval aristocracy, the Boyars, and initiated a series of changes that affected all areas of Russian life. Peter focused on the development of science and recruited several experts to educate his people about technological advancements. He concentrated on developing commerce and industry and created a gentrified bourgeoisie population. Mirroring Western culture, he modernized the Russian alphabet, introduced the Julian calendar, and established the first Russian newspaper.

Peter was a skillful diplomat who abolished Russia's archaic form of government and appointed a viable Senate, which regulated all branches of administration, as well as making groundbreaking accomplishments in Russia's foreign policy. Peter acquired territory in Estonia, Latvia and Finland; and through several wars with Turkey in the south, he secured access to the Black Sea. In 1712, Peter established the city of St. Petersburg on the Neva River and moved the capital there from its former location in Moscow. Shortly after, St. Petersburg was deemed Russia's "window to Europe."

Under Peter's rule, Russia became a great European nation. In 1721, he proclaimed Russia an empire and was accorded the title of Emperor of All Russia, Great Father of the Fatherland, and affixed "the Great" to his regnal name. Although he proved to be an effective leader, Peter was also known to be cruel and tyrannical. The high taxes that often accompanied his various reforms led to revolts among citizens, which were immediately suppressed by the imposing ruler.



Peter had 11 children, many of whom died in infancy. The eldest son from his first marriage, Alexis, was convicted of high treason by his father and secretly executed in 1718. Peter the Great died on February 8, 1725, without nominating an heir. After his death, his widow ruled Russia as Catherine I until his grandson, Peter II, became old enough to rule. The Russian throne was thrown into turmoil by the very short reigns of the monarchs who succeeded Peter the Great, and stability was not achieved again until his daughter, Elizabeth of Russia, came to power in 1741.