

The Tessin-Hårleman collection of the Swedish National Museum of Fine Arts is a unique collection of historic building blueprints and schematics, mostly depicting St. Petersburg. The image of the new Russian capital of the mid-18th century was diligently reproduced from the drawings of the original architects. For over two hundred years the drawings were privately archived, unseen. Only after the second World War was the collection opened to public access and experts were able to start studying it.

In the late 1950s Swedish researcher Björn Hallström who studied the blueprints in the collection of Nationalmuseum was the first to raise the question about their origin. He conducted his own investigation in order to reconstruct its history. By comparing the handwritten comments on some of the blueprints with letters of a Holsteinian, Friedrich Wilhelm von Bergholz, who resided in Russia in the first half of the 18th century, the researcher was able to conclude that it was him who composed the collection and transported it to Germany after he left Russia in 1746.

Friedrich Wilhelm von Bergholz (1699–1771) came to Russia in 1721 in the entourage of Karl Friedrich, Duke of Holstein. One has to note that it was not by accident that this relatively young man was selected for such an important entourage. His father had served under Russian Emperor Peter the Great, as many Germans did at the time. He served in the army, reaching the rank of general, and took part in the siege of Vyborg of 1710 and in the Prussian campaign of 1711. So Bergholz junior spent all his early years in Russia, he was well-versed in the Russian language and local customs. Only after his father's death in 1717 he returned to Holstein, where he joined the Duke's court. When the Duke was about to marry a Russian princess, he remembered the young man with an extensive Russian background and enlisted him as a Kammer-Junker in his entourage. The Duke left Russia in 1727 and so did Bergholz. However, in 1742, after the old Duke's death, Bergholz came back as the Oberkammerherr of his son Karl Peter Ulrich, future Russian Emperor Peter III.

The diary Bergholz was keeping during his time in Russia was, essentially, an internal log of events of the Duke's life in St. Petersburg and the phenomena around him. It is still considered one of the most detailed sources on 18th century Russia ever written by a foreigner. But apart from writing the memoirs, Bergholz took great interest in Russian architecture. He befriended many famous architects of St. Petersburg and bought or traded sketches and blueprints of new buildings from them throughout his stay in Russia. When he was unable to obtain the originals, he managed to at least make a copy. To that effect, he hired an assistant who was known to copy the blueprints quickly and with great precision.

It was the time of a major reconstruction of St. Petersburg, when the city was rebuilt as a permanent capital rather than the "regimental camp" it was in Peter's time. So in a short while Bergholz was able to collect an expansive collection of blueprints and schematics of not just the most noteworthy buildings of the city, but also of pretty much all the buildings along the principal streets of St. Petersburg of the time: in total 306 blueprints showing 331 buildings. On each of the drawings he personally inscribed the name and rank of the building's owner.

In 1746 Bergholz retired to Holstein with a pension equal to his court salary. While leaving Russia he managed to transport almost the whole of his collection to Germany. Only about two dozen drafts remained in Russia and eventually made their way to the State Hermitage. It is not exactly known as to how the Bergholz collection arrived in Stockholm, but we know that in 1749 he received a sum of 1000 Écu from the Swedish government for "great service to Swedish state".

The first mention of the Stockholm collection of architectural drawings from Russia dates to 1790, when the Royal Librarian Wilde created a full "Catalogue of original drawings of the most famous masters of all schools, which are kept in the Royal Library of Stockholm" (Catalogue Des Dessins Originaux Des plus fameux Maitres De toutes les Ecoles Qui se conservent a la Bibliotheque Royale De Stockholm). The

collection was transferred to the Royal Museum (Kungliga Museet), established in 1792. In 1866 it became a part of Nationalmuseum. It is there where it was discovered by Hallström in 1958.

Hallström published a catalogue of Russian blueprints from the Swedish collection, in the introduction to which he characterized the collection of blueprints dating from the first half of the 18th century. The blueprints obviously belong to different authors and differ in manner and technique, presenting buildings from St. Petersburg. He systematizes the collection and defines three major groups: fixation drawings of 1740s buildings (most probably issued by state offices such as St. Petersburg Building Commission), architectural drawings (blueprints, projects, schemes, both original and copied, used in their work by the city's architects, including such famous masters as F. B. Rastrelli) and amateur pencil drawings. In 1962 Hallström managed to convince Nationalmuseum to exhibit a part of the collection in Leningrad. This exhibition attracted a lot of attention, as it turned out that the early architecture of St. Petersburg is much more rich and diverse than it was originally anticipated.

However despite the effect the exhibition had, Bergholz collection is not as of yet available for study. Even though it is known, it can't be accessed by anyone other than museum workers; specialists and amateur students of history of architecture in general and St. Petersburg in particular are still not able to use it for their studies.

In 2007 after long and tedious negotiations Russian company Kriga Publishing came to an agreement with Nationalmuseum about republishing the Bergholz collection in Russia. Following the agreement, the publisher have paid for all the works needed to create digital copies of all the blueprints, including restoration of those of them that were damaged. After obtaining the copies, St.Petersburg researchers have conducted extensive investigation and attribution of the images, thus creating a separate volume of comments. Only now, after almost 9 years of work, the collection is finally ready for publishing

The blueprints (253 originals on 369 plates) are reproduced in original scale, conserving the color and the handwritten notes by F.W. Bergholz. Apart from precise images of buildings and schematics of their facades showing all the architectural details, the notes contain mentions of their owners, nearby objects (streets, canals, bridges, squares etc.) and notable occasions that took place in or near the buildings.

The plates contain all the reference information on the original, the current addresses corresponding to the buildings shown, translation of Bergholz notes into Russian and sometimes modern photographs of houses that are now standing in place of the 18th-century buildings shown on the blueprints.

The blueprints are systematized and arranged topographically by nearby streets, embankments, parks etc.

Each of the blueprints is described and commented upon in great detail in a separate "Comments" volume. It also contains historical plans of St. Petersburg, information on the history of the corresponding part of the city and biographical data on each of the buildings' owners up to the end of 18th century.