

DMITRI MENDELEEV AND TOMSK POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

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What connects the life of Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev and the Tomsk Polytechnic University Born in Siberia, the prominent Russian scientist Dmitri Mendeleev became internationally renowned for formulating the Periodic Law and for various works in many fields; he was also an important figure in the field of public enlightenment. One of his specific interests was to create a network of polytechnic (technologic) institutes and thus to promote chemical science. Mendeleev was especially interested in establishing such institutes in Kiev, Warsaw, Riga, and Tomsk. Physicist Sergey Kapitsa once said: „...Mendeleev was largely a visionary of state-capitalistic development of Russia. Thanks to him, some great pedagogical institutions were created – Higher Technical Institutes in Saint Petersburg, Kiev, Ekaterinburg and Tomsk. To this day, this legacy determines scientific and technological potential of our country...“¹.

Notably, Dmitri Mendeleev was initially opposed to the idea of independent technological institute in Tomsk. He thought that the foundation of technical education in Siberia, should be laid by a separate faculty of industrial knowledge within the Tomsk State University. According to Mendeleev, „combining philosophical and industrial knowledge under one roof presents beneficial conditions not only for the purposes of higher enlightenment, but also for a new university in a remote region, such as Siberia“². Moreover, Mendeleev thought that the Institute would experience issues with student recruitment and academic staff, since the University would be located far away from the capital².

Ministry of Public Education deemed Mendeleev’s suggestion too daring. It contradicted the popular belief at that time that classic university education should not be combined with applied knowledge taught in institutes. Hence it was decided to establish a separate Tomsk Technological University³.

The position of the first Director of Tomsk Technological University was offered to Dmitri Mendeleev but he had to decline it due to health issues, suggesting his former student Efim Zubashev as an alternative candidate⁴ (Fig. 1). However, Mendeleev actively participated in the

establishing process: he helped to fit out the laboratories and rooms with the most advanced equipment, and to select qualified academic personnel.

In gratitude for Mendeleev’s invaluable help and as the recognition of his merits in the development of higher education in Siberia, the Council of the Tomsk Technological University elected Dmitri Mendeleev as the First Honorary Member. The voting took place on January 22, 1904, shortly before Mendeleev’s 70th birthday.

Minutes of the Meeting of Institute’s Council, January 22, 1904

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Report was delivered by Professor D. P. Turbaba to suggest selecting D. I. Mendeleev as a honorary member of the Tomsk Technological Institute (TTI) on the occasion of his anniversary, i.e., the 70th birthday of this brilliant physical-chemist.

The Council listened to a brief reference from Professor Turbaba on Mendeleev’s work in Physics and Chemistry.

The Director referred to the Regulations of TTI and talked about the merits of Mendeleev in the field of Russian technology.

Dmitri Mendeleev was unanimously chosen as a Honorary Member of TTI by means of secret ballot. He was immediately notified about it by a telegram stating that the Council of the Institute ordered (using a special fund) his large portrait for the Big Chemical Lecture Hall and his bust to be installed in front of the Chemical Building of the Institute⁵.

Mendeleev could not leave this congratulation from his fellow Siberian colleagues unanswered. In February 1904 he wired a telegram of gratitude to Efim Zubashev. The Council of the Institute decreed that this wire is to be stored in Institute’s library.

The Council of the Institute petitioned to assign Dmitri Mendeleev to be a Minister of Education and asked the authorities for a permission to place his portrait in the Big Lecture Hall of Chemistry. Already by March 13, 1904, the Ministry approved the petition of the Council, appointing the scientist a honorary member of TTI.

Minutes of the Meeting of Institute’s Council, March 13, 1904

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March 13, № 1476. Interim Administrator of Public education: to approve the candidate selected by the TTI Council, Dmitri Mendeleev, Head of Chamber of Weights and Measures, Professor and privy councilor, to be granted a title of Honorary Member of the abovementioned Institute and, alongside with it, to permit the placement of

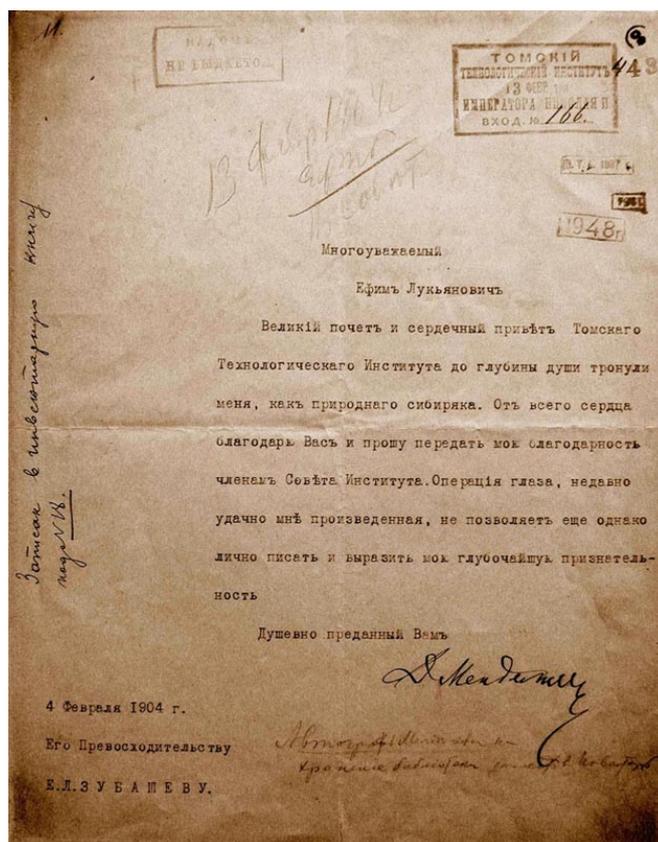


Fig. 1. Letter of D. I. Mendeleev to E. L. Zubashev

the portrait in the Big Lecture Hall of Chemistry by the Supreme Order of December 5, 1881.

It is ordered to inquire about the Diploma templates and to formulate it during the meeting in May; the oil portrait must be placed in the Assembly Hall, and a copy of the portrait in drawing ink should be placed in the Big Lecture Hall of Chemistry, for the former can be damaged by chemical fumes which can be oftentimes found in the atmosphere of the lecture hall because of the experiments⁶.

Director of TTI Efim Zubashev turned to Mendeleev's wife, Anna, asking to paint a portrait of the great scientist⁷. She agreed and started to work (Fig. 2). After some time the portrait was ready and the painter set it on display in a Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. After it was approved by the public, the question of transporting the piece to Tomsk became relevant.

A long-time friend of the family, prominent Russian physiologist Alexey Kulyabko, who was also born in Siberia, helped Anna Mendeleeva with this task. This talented student of Ivan Sechenov graduated from four different universities – in Saint Petersburg, Tomsk, Berlin and Leipzig. In 1903–1924 he was a Chair of the normal physiology department of the Tomsk University⁸. Besides, Alexey

Kulyabko was married to Mendeleev's niece, Maria. In 1906, on his way back from a business trip, he took the portrait of Dmitri Mendeleev to Tomsk.

The portrait was delivered to Tomsk Technological Institute and officially installed in director's office by the end of May, 1906. The oil painting was mounted in an exquisite gilt frame, which led to the portrait being almost destroyed later. In 1917, after Nikolas II abdication, and later, after the October Revolution, vandalism has swept the country, including Tomsk Technological Institute: imperial monograms were thrown down from the facades, a painting of Nikolas II disappeared, and Emperor's name was excluded from the name of the Institute. Mendeleev's portrait was also defaced: the canvas was punctured and had a rupture in the upper part. The frame was seriously damaged⁹. In 1941, due to accommodation of military units, the portrait was transferred to the chemical building. Later, in 1970, the portrait was discovered, restored and placed on permanent display in the Museum of the Institute.

In 2009, due to some capital repair of the exhibition halls of the Museum of Tomsk Polytechnic University History, the portrait, which had already required restora-

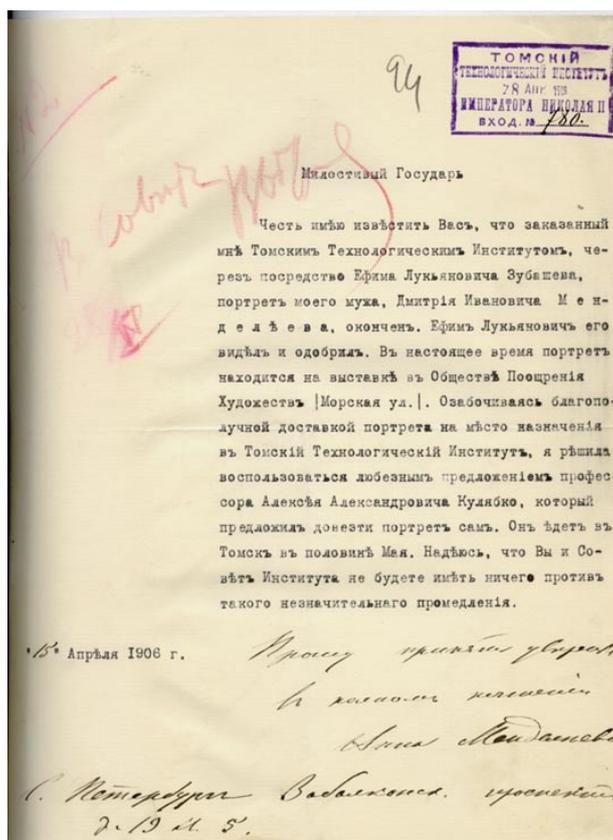


Fig. 2. Letter of Mendeleev's wife

tion, was put for conservation to be stored in the museum holdings.

The memories about this great scientist still reside in the walls of TPU. February 8, 2014, on Dmitri Mendeleev's 180th birthday, the portrait of the famous chemist was passed over for restoration. A festive opening of the Exhibition of One Portrait was held already in October 2014, when one of the last portraits of Dmitri Mendeleev painted during his life returned back to its place of honor.

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L. Lozovaya and S. Grigorieva (*Tomsk Polytechnic University*): **Dmitri Mendeleev and Tomsk Polytechnic University**

The article assesses the role of the great scientist D. I. Mendeleev in the organization and development of the Tomsk Technological Institute. It also traces the fate of a portrait of the scientist, painted by his wife A. I. Mendeleeva. Original documents and extracts from archival sources are presented.

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