

PHOTOGRAPHERS RECORDING HISTORY, ARCHIVISTS PRESERVING HISTORY

The ITAR-TASS Photo Archives in Moscow holds millions of negatives from the past century. Throughout the decades of revolution, war and political upheaval, the archivists kept on with the unglamorous but important task of preserving these valuable documents of human history.

On these fragile slivers of film lies irrefutable proof of horrific crimes against humanity that took place more than half-century ago. Images of the Nazi death camps bear witness to atrocities that would be almost impossible to believe had they been reported solely through verbal testimony. But the archival evidence exists.

These archives also enrich our perspective on the progression of events over the past century. A photograph of a wedding in modern Moscow demonstrates the enormous transformation that has taken place in Russia since the days of the militaristic displays in Red Square of the 1920s and 1930s.

In 2004, the speed of digital technology and the internet enable contemporary photographers to capture a triumphant moment at the Olympic Games and transmit the image around the world in seconds.

But within days, through the photographer's lens, graphic images of the tragedy at a school in Beslan serve as a grim reminder of humanity's capacity for inhumanity. Both of these events will be preserved in the archives to bear witness for future generations of life at the turn of the 21st century.