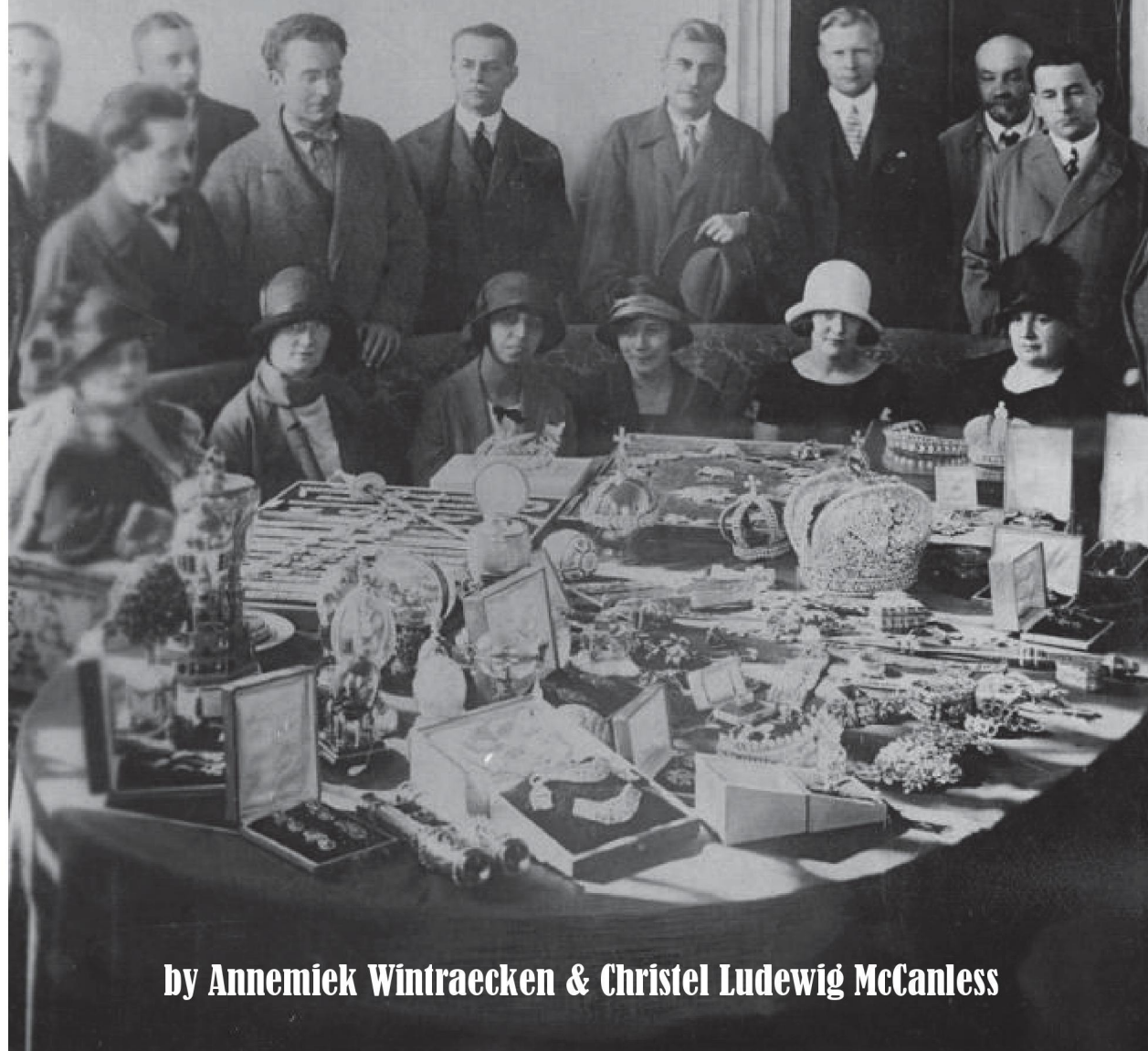




Empress Marie Feodorovna's Missing Fabergé Easter Eggs



by Annemiek Wintraecken & Christel Ludewig McCanless



Emperor Alexander III and Empress Marie Feodorovna

Easter in Russia is the most important time of the year signifying the awakening of new life. Since the beginning of time, human beings have given eggs to each other as a symbol of this new beginning through the exchange of simple chicken eggs dyed in brilliant colors, eggs made out of wood and painted with religious symbols, or the most amazing creations made out of precious material, such as gold or silver and encrusted with precious stones. The Tsars of the Romanov Empire, ruling Russia for more than 300 years, were no exception in practicing the traditional Easter exchange of small pendant eggs adorned with gemstones, porcelain eggs with Imperial monograms, or the now famous Imperial Easter Eggs made by the Russian court jeweler Carl Fabergé (1846-1920).

The largesse of Romanov jewels and 13 Imperial Easter Eggs exhibited by the Bolsheviks, 1923



Emperor Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna

Emperor Alexander III (1845–1894) ordered an extra special Easter gift for his wife the Empress Marie Feodorovna (1847–1928), born Princess Dagmar of Denmark. The Egg now called “The First Hen Egg” was delivered for Easter on March 24, 1885, and is made of opaque white enamel and vari-colored gold. The missing surprises are a crown and a pendant, made of diamonds and ruby. The Emperor apparently liked what Fabergé created, and presented ten Fabergé Easter Eggs to his wife before he died in 1894.

Tsesarevich Nicholas (1868-1918) at age 26 succeeded his late father on the throne and like his father before him, he continued the giving of Easter Eggs from Fabergé—one Egg for his wife Alexandra Feodorovna (1872-1918), and one for his mother, now the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna. Fifty Imperial Easter Eggs were made for the two Russian Emperors before the 1917 Revolution brought an end



to Romanov rule, and also with it the end of the Fabergé era. Like so many of his fellow countrymen, Carl Fabergé eventually fled Russia in 1918.

When the Provisional Government and later the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, imperial property was confiscated and the new government considered itself the sole owner. In the process most of the Easter Eggs made by the Fabergé firm for the Empresses Marie and Alexandra became the property of the State, which sold large volumes of confiscated art in exchange for cash badly needed by the revolutionary government. This too became the fate of many Imperial Easter Eggs. Of the 50 known Eggs, only ten remained in Russia and are now in the Armoury Museum, Moscow. The other 40 Eggs were sold to foreign buyers, smuggled out of the country, or stolen during the tumultuous years of Bolshevik rule. A 1923 exhibition photograph shows the largesse of Romanov jewels and 13 Imperial Easter Eggs, but unfortunately none of the now missing Eggs.

Of the known 50 Imperial Eggs Empress Marie Feodorovna (MF) received 30 and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna (AF) received 20. Eight of Alexandra's Eggs are displayed in the Armoury Museum and the other 12 are in museums and private collections worldwide.

From Marie Feodorovna's 30 Easter gifts only 22 have been traced—two are retained in the Armoury Museum and the other 20 are in collections worldwide. The remaining eight Eggs seem to have disappeared from view:

1886 - Hen Egg with Sapphire Pendant

1887 - Third Imperial Egg

1888 - Cherub with Chariot Egg

1889 - Nécessaire Egg (Pearl Egg)

1897 - Mauve Egg (Mauve Egg with 3 Miniatures)

1902 - Empire Nephrite Egg (Alexander III Medallion Egg)

1903 - Royal Danish Egg (Danish Jubilee Egg)

1909 - Alexander III Commemorative Egg

What has been their fate?

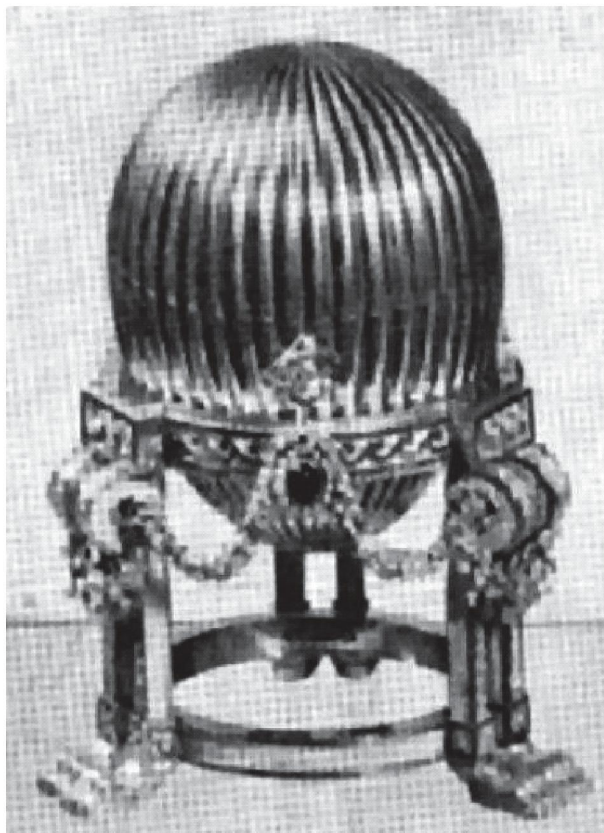
Known facts and recent discoveries about the Eggs will be explored in this essay. The Imperial Easter Eggs were private commissions and very personal gifts, and originally did not have names. Scholars named them based on what they saw in archival photographs, learned from original invoices from the Fabergé firm, and other records. Variations on the names of the missing eggs are noted above in parentheses. In 1984, Russian researcher Dr. Marina Lopato (1) published details found in the Moscow Russian State Historical Archives from a handwritten list of the Imperial Easter Eggs from 1885 to 1890 made by N. Petrov, the assistant manager to the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty. Original invoices and other records for Fabergé Imperial Eggs were published in 1997 by Tatiana Fabergé (2), great granddaughter of Carl Fabergé. In 2001, independent researchers Will Lowes and Christel McCanless published all known information for 66 Fabergé Eggs, including the Imperial Eggs in their retrospective Fabergé Egg encyclopedia (3). During 2007-2008, exciting research discoveries were shared for two of the missing Eggs (the 1888 Cherub with Chariot Egg and the 1889 Nécessaire Egg) in the *Fabergé Research Newsletter* (4), and on two websites (5). The revision of the Fabergé Egg Timeline by Annemiek Wintraecken (4a) sheds new light on previously unanswered questions in the “missing Egg” quest. The following chronological review encompasses the major finds to date since the publication listed above appeared—it is our hope the Eggs will also be found.

1886 Hen Egg with Sapphire Pendant (Survived the 1917 Russian revolution, disappeared after 1922).

“Hen picking a sapphire Egg out of a basket (including a sapphire – 1800 r.) 2986 r [roubles].” (2) The Egg is described as a *hen of gold, set with rose-cut diamonds, ... a sapphire Egg held loosely in the hen's beak, and the wicker basket made of gold and apparently decorated with rose-cut diamonds included one sapphire Egg, 50 rose-cut diamonds 8/32, 60 rose-*



1885 First Hen Egg with the Now Missing Pendant and Crown



1887 Third Imperial Egg

cut diamonds 14/32, 400 rose-cut diamonds 51/4; gold, and two cases. (3) Was the Egg possibly dismantled for the value of the stones?

1887 Third Imperial Egg (Survived the 1917 Russian revolution, made it to the west, sold at auction in 1964). “Easter Egg with clock/watch, decorated with sapphires and rose-cut diamonds 2160 r.” (1)

Details on the Egg were only discovered in 2008 after the revision of the “Egg Timeline” had been published (4a). The Blue Serpent Egg (Collection of Prince Albert of Monaco) was for many years thought to be the 1887 Egg. The new research redates the Blue Serpent Egg to 1895 and the 1887 spot is taken over by its rightful owner, the missing 1887 Third Imperial Egg. The successful identification of this Egg occurred with a 1902 photograph in the von Dervis Mansion, in St. Petersburg, Russia, where the Eggs from the two Empresses were shown. (4b) In 2011, Fabergé researchers Anna and Vincent Palmade matched a ribbed gold Egg with sapphires and diamonds containing a watch in a 1964 Parke Bernet New York auction catalog to the von Dervis archival photograph and their 2007 sketch. The auction lot without any Fabergé identification in its description sold from the Estate of Mrs. Rena Clark for \$2450.

1888 Cherub with Chariot Egg (Known from a reconstructed drawing made in 2007, revised in 2011). “Cherub pulling a chariot containing an Egg 1500 s.r. (silver roubles) Cupid with clock in gold Egg 600r.” (3, 2) Anna and Vincent Palmade created a drawing from the reflection on the glass of Marie Feodorovna’s Egg vitrine shown in the 1902 von Dervis exhibition. (4b)

1889 Nécessaire Egg (Pearl Egg) (Survived the 1917 Russian revolution, made it to the west, and in public view in London in 1949 and the early 1950s).

An invoice to Tsar Alexander III was for many years the only information known about the missing Nécessaire Egg (3, 2). Permission was granted by Kieran McCarthy of Wartski, London, to share his



discovery in the *Fabergé Research Newsletter* (6):

"A Fine Gold Egg, richly set with diamonds, cabochon rubies, emeralds, a large coloured diamond at top and a cabochon sapphire at point. The interior is designed as an Etui with thirteen gold and diamond set implements." This is the description of item 20 under the heading 'Lent Anonymously' from the catalogue of a loan exhibition of the works of Carl Fabergé held at Wartski, 138, Regent Street, London W1, November 8-25, 1949.

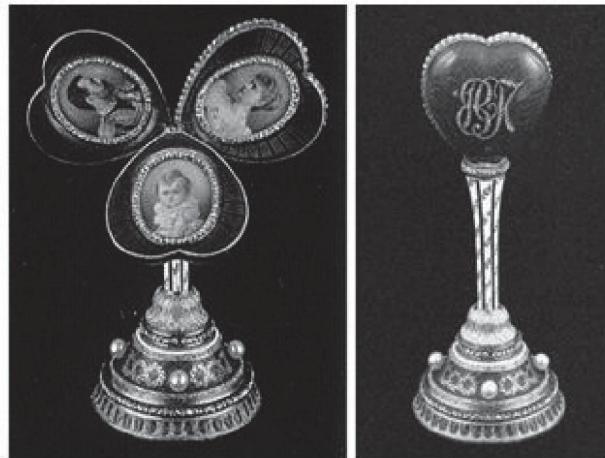
The story of this previously unidentified golden Egg up until 1952 has now been pieced together by Kieran McCarthy of Wartski. His detective work was prompted by the opening up of the Russian archives in the 1990s, where a Fabergé invoice addressed to the Tsar for a "Nécessaire Egg, Louis XV style, 1900 roubles, St. Petersburg 4th May 1889" was discovered in the Imperial ledgers. Two years later, an inventory of items in the Gatchina Palace recorded: "Egg decorated with stones, containing ladies toilet articles, 13 pieces." In 1917, items confiscated by the provisional government included a "gold nécessaire Egg, decorated with precious stones", and in 1922, "1 gold Nécessaire Egg with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and 1 sapphire" was among the goods transferred to the Sovnarkom, the central agency in Moscow from where confiscated items were dispersed and sold off by the state.

Mr. McCarthy has been able to match these descriptions of the Nécessaire Egg with that of an object included by Wartski in the first ever exhibition in the West of works solely by Fabergé. Here, in 1949, many of the splendours of the Russian court were displayed—"relics of a dead civilization and a vanished Empire", as Sacheverell Sitwell wrote in the catalogue. At the time, the identity and Imperial provenance of the Egg were unknown, and there is no indication of who owned it. Four other Imperial Easter Eggs were the stars of the show.

Searching through Wartski's ledgers, Mr. McCarthy found an entry confirming that an object matching the description of the Nécessaire Egg was sold in 1952. The buyer was almost certainly British,

and insisted on anonymity. Wartski observed absolute discretion and never recorded the name, and there is no record of it having been seen by anyone in the art world since.

But last year, Mr. McCarthy discovered the photographs taken at the 1949 exhibition. "When I saw the object on the bottom shelf of the cabinet, I knew in an instant that it had to be it. The detective work was an intellectual exercise, but the effect was physical spine-tingling rush of adrenalin, all concentrated on that square centimetre of print." The grainy images, which have been scanned and magnified, are the only known visual record of the missing Nécessaire Egg.



Heart-shaped Frame, 1897

1897 Mauve Egg (Mauve Egg with 3 Miniatures) (Possibly the surprise is known).

The Mauve Egg (3, 2) is missing, but it has been suggested in the Fabergé literature a frame surprise may be extant. The frame set with the date 1897 in rose-cut diamonds opens as a three-leaf clover with each leaf holding a rose diamond-encircled photograph of Nicholas II and Alexandra and their firstborn child, Grand Duchess Olga. In the 1999 Forbes Magazine Collection catalog *raisonné* the heart is described as *strawberry red* guilloché enamel.

Lopato found the bill of sale in the Russian State Historical Archives in Moscow "an Egg of *mauve* enamel with three miniatures—3,500 silver roubles". In von Habsburg and Lopato (7) the *scarlet*



heart-shaped frame is identified as the surprise for the mauve Egg, and an invoice date of *May 17, 1897*, is cited.

The authors of this essay wonder if the strawberry red color of the frame really blends with the mauve enamel Egg description, and if the suggested surprise frame is indeed part of the lost Egg? A slightly larger, yet similar frame from a private collection was shown during a Stockholm venue in



1903 Royal Danish Egg

1997. (8) A comparison of the two frames:

Egg surprise: Frame (3¼ inches, 8.3 cm.) with the date *1897* in diamonds on the strawberry red (also cited as scarlet) guilloché heart, marked *K. Fabergé*.

Private Collection frame (4½ inches, 11.5 cm.): Red heart with a *XII ½* monogram with Mikhail Perhkin’s initials and an assay mark of St. Petersburg before 1896. When opened the leaves contain miniatures of four children and their father.

1902 Empire Nephrite Egg (Alexander III Medallion Egg) (Only sketchy details extant).

The 1902 Egg has two known pieces of information from the Russian State Historical Archives:

- 1) 1917 inventory of Imperial treasure, sent to Moscow for safekeeping from advancing German troops—*Egg of nephrite with gold base, with a medallion portrait of Alexander III*, and
- 2) Fabergé’s bill to the Imperial Cabinet—*Egg in “Empire” style, of nephrite with gold, two diamonds and miniature*. (3, 2)

A 2004 publication in Russian and English entitled, *The 1902 Empire Nephrite Easter Egg by Fabergé*, suggests this Egg has been found, however, the majority of Fabergé scholars has not accepted the theory.

Two Fabergé Eggs, the Royal Danish Egg (Danish Jubilee Egg) and the Alexander III Commemorative Egg, are known from photographs in the family archives of Tatiana Fabergé.

1903 Royal Danish Egg (Danish Jubilee Egg) (Known from an archival Fabergé photograph).

Two milestones in the lives of Empress Marie Feodorovna’s parents—King Christian IX’s fortieth year on the throne, and the fifth anniversary of the death of his consort Queen Louise, who died at Bernstorff Castle in Copenhagen on September 29, 1898—are celebrated in this Egg. (3, 2) Dowager Empress Marie was in her native Copenhagen at Easter, 1903, and her son, Tsar Nicholas II wrote to her: *“I am sending you a Fabergé Easter present. I hope it will arrive safely. There are no secrets in it—the Egg simply opens from the top.”* The invoice reads: *Gold Egg, Louis XIV style, with two miniatures, 7535 r.* (2)

The Egg presumably returned to Russia with Marie Feodorovna. However, if the Dowager Empress decided to keep it in Copenhagen, interesting possibilities—not yet solved—as to its fate are opened up.



1909 Alexander III Commemorative Egg (Known from an archival Fabergé photograph).

The description from the invoice: *Egg of opaque white enamel with gold stripes, decorated with 2 diamonds and 3467 rose-cut diamonds, inside a gold bust of Alexander III on a lapis lazuli pediment decorated with rose-cut diamonds.* (2)

The Egg recalls the 15th anniversary of the death of Marie Feodorovna's husband (Alexander III), and is one of three memorial Eggs made for the Dowager Empress after 1900. The other two are the missing 1902 Empire Nephrite (Alexander Medallion) Egg and the extant 1910 Alexander III Equestrian Egg now in the Armoury Museum. (3)

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Postscript: It has been over 100 years since the first Imperial Fabergé Egg was made, and the search for the missing Eggs continues.

Who has the missing Eggs? Perhaps a person in possession of a missing original Fabergé Egg does not want it to be known. In view of the high prices paid for pre-1918 Fabergé objects today, will a "hidden Egg" surface? It is very possible the individual owning a missing Egg, does not even know it is Fabergé for some of the early Eggs were not marked!

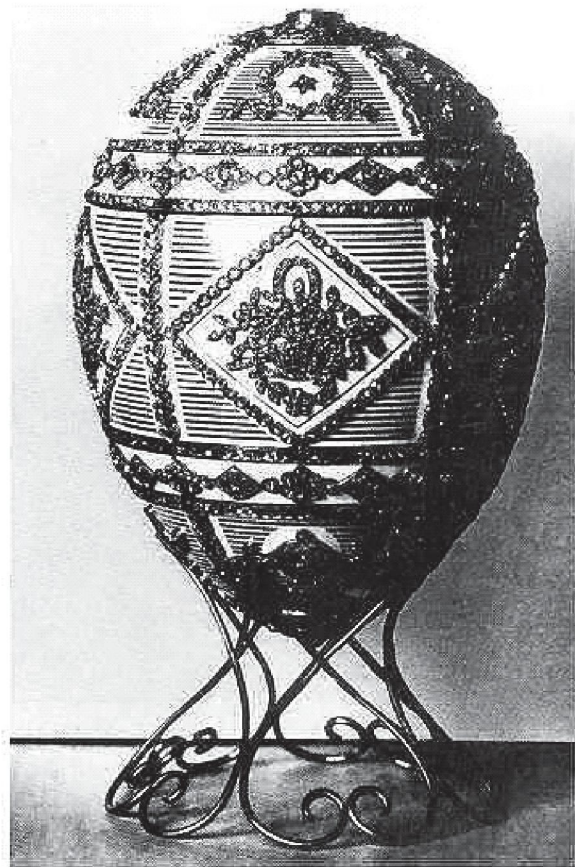
What are the missing Eggs worth? A Fabergé Egg, an engagement present without an Imperial provenance, sold at Christie's London in 2007 for \$18.5 million. Reports in the press have suggested amounts of up to \$50 million dollars, if a missing egg were to be found.

Where are the missing Eggs? Probably in Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Denmark, but no one knows for sure!

When were the Eggs lost? Possibly some were lost during the recipient's lifetime. Did Marie Feodorovna take her personal Eggs commemorating her late husband (Alexander III), and her parents (King Christian IX and Queen Louise) out of Russia when she fled in 1918? It is not known, if the Eggs given to her for Easter, when she was abroad, returned to Russia with her. It is known some Eggs were lost

during the turmoil of the Russian Revolution, but it is highly probable others were lost much later, as in the case of the Eggs seen in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1949-1964 time span.

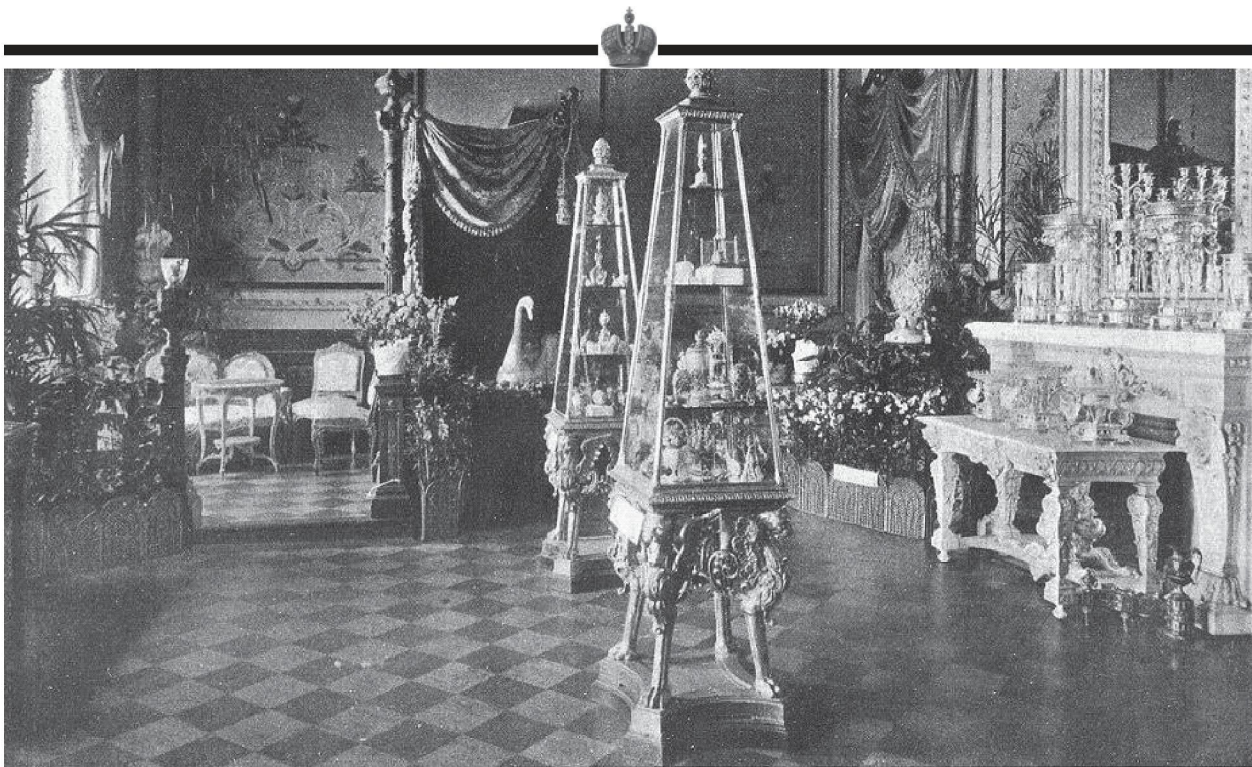
Why are the Eggs missing? Even in their time the Eggs were small masterpieces of art and is it possible they were destroyed or dismantled for their intrinsic value? It is not difficult for students of history to imagine that during those tumultuous years of



1909 Alexander III Commemorative Egg

revolution, civil war, famine and depression, Fabergé Eggs were sold, battered, given away, or totally forgotten.

How can the missing Eggs be found? Spread the word! Use modern social media and let the whole world know about the missing Imperial Fabergé Eggs. Check your attics, and those of your parents and grandparents too! Fabergé experts and dealers worldwide are searching too.



The Fabergé Exhibition at the von Derviz Mansion on the English Embankment, St. Petersburg (1902). Vitrines displaying the Imperial Eggs presented to the Empresses Maria Feodorovna and Alexandra Feodorovna, including several that are among those missing to this day.

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Bio sketch The authors are the co-editors of the *Fabergé Research Newsletter* dedicated to research and news about Fabergé prior to 1918. It is published online (www.fabergeresearch.com) four times a year. They each maintain a website about Fabergé eggs and Fabergé with current news.