Catherine II's Charters to the Nobles and the Towns of 1785 marked a clear attempt to systematize, regularize, and in some measure to harmonize the legal status of the different estates of the Russian Empire's population. The state peasants, like the serfs, remained outside the Charters' provisions. Various measures concerning their administration were promulgated in the 1770s and 1780s, notably those of the 1775 provincial reform; but the work of Catherine and her officials upon a comparable Charter for the state peasantry remained incomplete and unknown.

This document first reached public notice only in 1837, when Count P. D. Kiselev started preparations for the reform program which would result in his major reorganization of Russian state peasant administration. As a first step he had a study made of previous work in the field, and circularized all government departments with a request for relevant materials in their possession. In response he received from the foreign minister, Count Nesselrode, a copy of a project for state peasant reorganization composed under Catherine II, which was preserved in the Foreign Ministry archive. This material was duly considered with other, later, papers which came in; but Catherine's project was found inappropriate for Kiselev's purposes, and in 1839 was returned to the Foreign Ministry.1

Thus disturbed in its at first sight incongruous resting place, the project received no further public attention until Russian historians in the period of the emancipation began to look back at earlier peasant administration and at Kiselev's work. In 1862 A.

* In preparing this study I have benefited greatly from discussions with a number of colleagues, most notably Prof. O. Crisp, Dr. J. Hartley, and Prof. I. de Madariaga of the University of London, and my fellow-contributors here.

1. A. Smirnov, "Predpolozheniia ob ustroistve kazennykh krest'ian so vremen Imperatritsy Ekateriny II do 1836 goda," Zhurnal Ministerstva Gosudarstvennykh Imushchestv, 1, Nos. 11-12, (1862), ii, 420-22.
Smirnov published a summary of the project,\(^2\) and in 1877 V. Veshniakov published the whole thing in Volume XX of the Collection of the Imperial Historical Society, with a useful introduction.\(^3\) The project is well known to modern scholars on the basis of that publication.\(^4\) It is commonly referred to as a draft charter to the state peasantry, and for convenience and brevity will be called here the draft peasant charter, abbreviated as DPC. It has apparently never been the subject of a separate discussion, however; nor has any further directly-related archival material been brought to light. The present investigation will analyze once more the material presented by Veshniakov, and also seek to determine the place of the project in the evolution of state peasant administration and civil rights. It should be emphasized, however, that further work in the archives might alter our picture, particularly regarding the genesis of the project, the thinking behind it, and the subsequent application of its provisions.

\(^2\) Ibid.
