What Records are in the Archives

All records are divided into **Church** and **Civil** Records.

Peter the Great demanded that all churches, including Jews and Muslims, start keeping ‘proper’ church (religious institution) records. Before that, clerics kept records as they saw fit, in any old style that suited them. Peter wanted to keep track of the population and started to streamline procedures. Peter also introduced the revisions/census, which were civil records for tax purposes, and state service.

Later, it was deemed that there must be interim Civic records, which could be called “Admin Records”, which each parish/precinct had. These were to keep records between census times, and keep track of the population. These records were kept by the village secretary. They can also be called, in the GR-sense, “Village Lists”.

These interim population records are colloquially known as “Family” Lists, because there is one double-page spread in a bound book for each family unit living in one household. These records are numbered. These were filled in, but it depended on the efficiency of the village clerk/secretary. Some were very efficient and wrote in massive detail. Information that was included was a new bride's/wife's maiden surname, and from which village she came. Some would just note the first name (no surname, no village of origin).

Under the "comments" column, again, depending on the efficiency of the scribe, you will see which person has been sent on military duty/national service, if he is in the Reserves, if he has moved to another village, if he has applied to leave the village commune, (that is the precursor to emigrating to USA), if he finished university education, with a degree, etc.

In the "Family Lists" of 1885, one can see ‘additional notes' in various different handwritings which were added at different times to original info. This information can be up into the 1900’s.

All these records were copied/or and kept in the "Village Admin", in smaller villages, these would be copied out/or original sent to the "main" village, which is the same as the "Village District" office, or the "volost". The "Village District" is the same as Volost' and is made up of 2 - 4 villages, and is also known as "Rural Admin/ Area".

Several Volosts make up an Uezd, known in books like “Russian-German Settlements in the United States” as Districts. Several uezds, districts (later called rayon), make up a Gubernia/Obloast' which is a Province. The Provinces were Saratov and Samara.

The Archives in Engels and Saratov, and all provincial archives, eventually became repositories of the Church Books/registers, the Admin/Volost/Civil Records including census/revisions/"Family Lists".

The Admin records section includes commerce, trading, mills, shops, memos between the various government departments, overseers/mayors between the village mayor and the village district (volost') mayor; land and boundary and grazing on meadowland disputes; court cases, imprisonments, fines, whippings, theft, divorce, bankruptcy, wills, inheritances, debts, schools, etc. and all other such civic matters. These records go right back to the Khirgz/Kalmuck attacks and Pugachev rebellions.

Admin records for Saratov, for example, include the Diaries of the Chief Judge for 1774, who was head of the Chancellery of Guardianship for Foreigners, the disputes, petitions and settlements (I have this book in Russian) between Villagers and their Mayors/overseers and petitions of villages and individual colonists.

So, when you ask to have your genealogy done, all researchers immediately go to the (1) census or/and the (2) Family Lists, extract the detailed info, and only then go over to the (3) church books, for more details, such as dates of birth, baptism, godparents, name of church, witnesses, name of priest, etc...

When you ask for a “marriage / Birth / Death certificate”, all you will get is a photocopy of the extract from the church book.
When GRs or Russians requested "civic records", say for things like a passport application, emigration, university entrances/admissions, up to 1918 (maybe later), the church authorities would type out on 1-2 sheets of paper, all the relevant details from their own church books, and have then verified, signed and sealed.

The main thing to remember is that the Archives hold both church and civic records, and the archivist will know what is available and what they can consult. They will use the archives Card-Index to find the information.