

Richard Hellie, 1937–2009

Richard Hellie, Thomas E. Donnelley Professor of History at the University of Chicago, died at his home on 24 April 2009, of complications from cancer. Born in Waterloo, Iowa, on 8 May 1937, Richard came to the University of Chicago in the 1950s and virtually never left. He received his BA, MA, and PhD from the university, taught for one year at Rutgers University, and rejoined the university as a faculty member in 1966. He taught undergraduate and graduate courses of all kinds, chaired the Russian Civilization program, served as director of the University's Center for East European and Russian/Eurasian Studies and was for decades a fixture in the history department, always in his office surrounded by books and papers, always ready to talk.

Richard's research and writing were incredibly wide ranging; he seemed tireless and produced articles on many seemingly unrelated subjects that simply caught his fancy. Despite this variety, several themes run through much of his work. Particularly in his early career, but also continuing throughout his life, Richard focused primarily on Muscovite legal history, on the interaction between laws and the larger society out of which they came and which they themselves affected. His first, prize-winning monograph, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago, 1971), examined the growth and decline of the social group that stood most to benefit from serfdom—the middle service class—in relation to the changing legal restrictions on peasant movement that culminated in the *Ulozhenie* of 1649. He found the *Ulozhenie* to be central to the story of enserfment as well as the founding document of all future Russian history. His translation of the *Ulozhenie* was published in 1988, and much of his planned book-length commentary on that law code appeared in *Russian History* (he began serving as editor of that journal in 1988) over the next several years, although the commentary as a whole remains unfinished. So too does a project Richard always said was seventh (or thereabouts) on his list of things to do: a historical novel about N. I. Odoevskii, the man who oversaw the compilation of the *Ulozhenie*.

Enserfment and Military Change also focuses on technological change and its effect on society, and technology was another abiding interest of Richard's, both as an object of study and, in particular, as a tool of the historian. His second monograph, *Slavery in Russia, 1450–1725* (Chicago, 1982) is an examination of the legal institution (or, really, institutions) of slavery in Russia, a wide-ranging comparison of the Russian case with other cases of slavery in history, and his first major engagement with using quantitative methods to deepen our understanding of social structures of the past. Published in Russian translation (Moscow, 1998), this is perhaps his most influential book. His expertise on the subject is likely never to be equaled; Richard continued to publish articles on slavery in Russia and more generally. And yet I think he was always somewhat disappointed that his fellow historians were less influenced by the methods of this study. Although he could speak eloquently about the power of quantitative methods in historical inquiry, he found himself more frequently drawn into the orbit of economists and economic historians. Much of his later work, beginning with his extensive efforts to bring Arcadius Kahan's *The Plow, the Hammer, and the Knout* (Chicago, 1985) into print, and culminating in *The Economy and Material Culture of Russia, 1600–1725* (Chicago, 1999), speaks to this movement, as he used quantitative methods (and the help of an ever-changing stream of research assistants and computers) to investigate the economic structures of late Muscovy.

Over the last several years, Richard made a return to narrative history, concentrating on a manuscript titled "The Structure of Modern Russian History." He was always interested in continuities and connections, and this manuscript took advantage of his decades of teaching and writing about the long span of Russian history to build on his 1977 article of nearly the same name, in which he proposed a series of service class revolutions that structured Russian history from the rise of Moscow through the Soviet period. Although the manuscript remains unfinished, Richard was able to put its drafts in order before he died.

Although he would hate to be called anything so trite, Richard was a colorful character, a man of strong opinions and a willingness to express them. He could not abide the

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pretentious, either in people or in scholarship. His reviews were notoriously sharp—and so too could be his marginal notes on student papers. But he was also always willing to admit when he did not know something, to appreciate a difference of opinion if it was well argued, and he rather enjoyed being challenged, both in conversation and on the page. He had wide-ranging collegial relationships, perhaps because you always knew where you stood with Richard. This is best demonstrated by the Festschrift in his honor edited by Lawrence N. Langer and Peter B. Brown, published over the last several years in *Russian History*, which has grown to include sixty-eight contributors over six volumes.

I began writing this in Moscow, where among other things I read a petition that made me wish I could share its contents with Richard. I would have written to him about the unusual ways it talked about serfdom, slavery, and the *Ulozhenie*. He would have written back immediately, would have found nothing at all surprising in the fact that the *Ulozhenie* continues to resonate more than three centuries after its composition, and would have signed off with the two words he always used, which could be read as encouragement or as admonishment, but I think were usually meant as the former: keep working.

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