

to our small band of colleagues as a family, and he always treated us as such. As a mentor, his comments were both meticulous and fair, and his emotional and academic support was simply unflinching.

The title of his first book (with Lloyd E. Berry) was recycled for a collection of essays in his honor, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom Revisited* (2008), where the reader can find a full bibliography of his work. The Festschrift is evidence of his colleagues' great esteem and respect for him as a scholar, as well as their fondness for him as a friend. Robert Crummey was a kind person, intensely supportive of his own students, and welcoming and helpful to all who knew him. We will miss his wry and erudite wit and his big-hearted winning smile.

## Arthur Benoit (“Ben”) Eklof

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On December 2, 2023, one of the rooms at ASEES was filled for a panel commemorating the life and work of our friend and colleague, Ben Eklof (1946–2023). The panel was not originally intended as a memorial, but as a celebration of Ben's achievements as a scholar, mentor, and friend. Even though the planned event went against the grain of his strong sense of humility, Ben was looking forward to being there, but he did not make it; Ben had sadly passed on October 24 after a long struggle with cancer. He was notorious for not showing up for panels, and all assembled could not help but chuckle at the fact that he'd managed to do it again. Only this time, there would be no apologetic emails or phone calls from Ben. He had gone, to quote one of his favorite Van Morrison tunes, “into the mystic.” Yet, the consensus of the room—the consensus of all who experienced his graceful, innate sense of politeness, the warmth of his charm, and the sharpness of his intellect—was that Ben had always showed up where it mattered most in our academic lives: in his scholarship, in the classroom, and in his role as a mentor.

Ben's life and scholarship reflected his passionate love of Russia's past and present, its culture and daily life. Like many of us, his path to history began with an early fascination with nineteenth-century literature that led to studying the language. Over time, he developed a special affection for the short story genre, not only the obligatory Aleksandr Pushkin stories, but also (and especially) Anton Chekhov's pointed depictions of peasants and the many other character types that populated the post-emancipation Russian empire. He pursued his curiosity about Russia amidst the Cold War and its heated proxy, the war raging in Vietnam. Ben became convinced that understanding all of this required an understanding of history. He completed a BA in history at Middlebury College in 1968, and then a PhD at Princeton in 1977.

Ben arrived in Moscow on a Fulbright to conduct his dissertation research in the early 1970s and immersed himself in the Brezhnevian world, not only as a researcher, but also as a translator for Progress Publishers and as a friend and colleague. For Ben (and most others), observing day-to-day life debunked the paradigm of the totalitarian model that had governed conceptions of the Soviet Union since the mid-1950s and reduced attempts to understand the place to Kremlinology. The USSR was not just a row of gray old men on top of the Lenin Mausoleum on Soviet holidays, but a vibrant society that hummed its own tune both because of (and despite) the Party and the Plan. Understanding the Soviet Union and

its successor/precursor, he came to believe, required a focus on lived experience, a point he emphasized to his students.

Ben's scholarship emerged at a time when focusing on the lived experience of those outside the halls of power—social history—was just coming into its own in the United States and in our field. Ben brought this perspective to his work on the history of education and the peasantry. His first monograph, *Russian Peasant Schools* (1986), approached the topic through a wide array of published and archival sources to discover what education meant to peasants themselves and describe peasant agency. Of special note, Ben was one of the first western scholars to make extensive use of the volumes of materials published by provincial and district zemstvo organizations between 1864 and 1917. In this respect, *Russian Peasant Schools* was one of the first works to consider life outside of Moscow or St. Petersburg. Ben's later works, including edited collections, continued these lines of inquiry.

Through a critical, yet empathetic analysis of the reports from peasant correspondents and other sources, Ben found peasant agency in an aspect of life about which peasants were not supposed to care very much: education. Peasants actively sought out primary education on their own terms; they realized its value as a tool for protecting and advancing their interests vis-à-vis those outside the village. Peasants employed adaptive strategies to village schooling that suited their needs but frustrated teachers, zemstvo deputies, and officials seeking to shape peasant society to their own purposes. State and zemstvo primary education initiatives produced positive results: by the end of the empire's life, for example, peasant village school alumni reported a great volume of the agricultural information available to state and local decision-makers. Yet, increased peasant literacy had done little to fill the cultural chasm between peasants and elites.

Two other monographs followed. The first, *Soviet Briefing: Gorbachev and the Reform Process, 1985-1988* (1989), contextualized Gorbachev's attempts to save the Soviet Union within the historical arc of reform in the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, explaining them as a product of interest group politics and the pressures of civil society. Based on Ben's knowledge of this arc and his immersion in pre-Gorbachevian day-to-day life, *Soviet Briefing* suggested both that the Soviet Union could transform itself peacefully and that the final product might look very different from the image carried in the minds of outsiders celebrating the so-called end of the Cold War.

Ben's final monograph, co-authored with the Siberian scholar Tatiana Saburova, made a significant contribution to the recent biographical turn in the profession and our field. *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushin and Russian Populism from the Great Reforms to Perestroika* (2017) is simultaneously a biography of a person, a movement, and place. In tracing the Populist Nikolai Charushin's life from Viatka (Kirov) to St. Petersburg, and then into Siberian hard labor and exile and back to Viatka, the book details a path not taken—a path where Populist revolutionaries like Charushin returned from exile to construct the society they imagined within the framework of zemstvos and provincial city governments. For the local librarians and others who preserved Charushin's memory, and for Ben as well, this was a story about what Russia could have been and could still be.

To the end, Ben was more concerned with others than himself. In phone calls during my commute, despite my best efforts to discern how *he* was doing, he always turned the conversation to others. How was *my* work progressing? How did I think such-and-such former student was doing? And, inevitably, Ben's generous soul would turn our conversation to the sadly unrealized project of compiling works on adult education by our mutual friend, the late Scott Seregny, into a posthumously published volume. His empathy for the humanity in us all, past and present, will be missed, as will his intellect and enthusiasm for life. Вечная память.