



inflections

A newsletter devoted to diversity and opportunity in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, published by the Duke-UNC Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies

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Reconnecting the Threads of History

It has always pained me to hear strangers, in response to learning my profession, comment, "I hate history. It's so boring." Too many Americans have come to know history as a litany of dates and names, battles won and lost, treaties and elections. What initially drew me to the field was the human aspect of history – how individual lives both shaped and were shaped by the events that made it into the textbooks. What does it mean, for example, that Poland was essentially picked up and moved west at the end of World War II? Awareness of the new lines on the map or the number of people displaced by that diplomatic decision barely scratches the surface. What of the homes and communities shattered? The daily lives and relationships altered? How did people make the decision to leave and maintain citizenship in the Polish state, at the cost of abandoning their homes, their fields, the graves of generations of relatives?

Such concerns brought me to my current research. Much of the world knows that 4,500 Polish army officers were found murdered in mass graves at Katyn, but how many are aware that they were among 1.6 million individuals forcibly transported to the Soviet Union early in the Second World War? That the majority of them were administratively exiled, without being charged with any crime? These people ended up at collective farms and deportation settlements, where they were forced to labor for the Soviet state. A portion of the exiles was rescued by the Polish government-in-exile which negotiated an "amnesty" for its citizens after the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941. After evacuating some of its citizens to Iran, the Polish army had them write about their experiences in Soviet exile. Reading them, one comes face-to-face with the realities of life in Stalin's Russia, from the hard labor to the hunger, from the political indoctrination to the NKVD interrogations. One is also allowed entry into

intensely personal worlds, in which wives unaware of the Katyn massacre fret over husbands who suddenly stopped writing, and mothers describe desperate struggles to keep their children alive, conveying boundless grief when they fail.

In the fall of 1997 I returned to the Hoover Institution Archives, where most of these documents are kept, to continue my research. I came across the personal statement, written in 1943, by a Józef Ptak. I immediately recalled that name from my childhood, hearing my father, a Polish immigrant, talk about his friends in the local Polish community in Cleveland. Although the name is probably similar to Joe Brown in its frequency, a phone call to my father established that his friend was indeed deported with his wife and children to a settlement in the Gor'kij oblast'; the birth date, hometown and occupation recorded on the document confirmed that these men were one and the same.

A photocopy of the document, intended for my father to read and then pass on to Mr. Ptak, lay on my desk when I received a phone call several weeks later informing me of my father's death. The trip to Cleveland and the funeral preparations remain a blur. I recall flowers and handshakes, kleenex and condolences. A veteran of the Korean War, my father had been active in the Polish League of American Veterans. As he had done for many others who had passed away earlier, a delegation from the organization came to the funeral home to honor him. In uniform the elderly men held a brief ceremony, which ended with one of them speaking, in Polish, about my father and his military service. It was Józef Ptak. When he finished I approached him as he stood with his wife, and told them that in California I had read the document he wrote more than fifty years ago in Iran, describing his ordeals under the Soviet regime. He replied that he had long forgotten about it, and would be happy to read it once again, to show it to his children. The fact that I, a young American, knew somewhat of their wartime ordeals created

an unspoken yet immediate connection, and I was overwhelmed with emotions I once felt in the archives, when I held the wallet of a Pole who had died in exile. Though holding his identity card, gazing at his family photos and sorting his memory at first seemed a violation, that feeling was quickly replaced by a sense of justice and comfort: his life ended abruptly and tragically, but I knew—he didn't just disappear. And here I was, standing with two others from that world. Ptak's wife, Janina, who not only fell ill herself while in the Soviet Union but lost two children there, was frail and soft-spoken. But the strength and warmth with which she clasped my hands, as she thanked me profusely and wished me well, gave me a hint of how individuals managed to survive the atrocious events I have been studying.

Katherine R. Jolluck

Assistant Professor of History

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

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## Calendar

The NATO Scientific and Environmental Affairs Division will sponsor an advanced research workshop titled "Caspian Sea: A Quest for Environmental Security," in Venice, Italy, March 15-19, 1999. The workshop is being organized by an international committee of scientists from the United States, Russia, Italy, and Georgia. If you are interested in attending, please contact: Workshop Secretariat, c/o Jonathan Abels, Center for International Development Research, 114 Sanford Institute Building, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708-0237.

The Center will join World View in sponsoring a seminar in March on Russia and Eastern Europe. World View is a new international program for educators at UNC-CH. The seminar, which will be held on March 17 and 18 at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill, will give public school and community college educators a better understanding of Russia and Eastern Europe. In June, World View is taking a group of 24 educators to Russia and Finland. The group, composed of public school and community college administrators, will spend a week in Moscow and a week in St. Petersburg visiting local schools, educators, and cultural landmarks. The Center is providing assistance in the planning of this two-week trip and will work with group members once they have returned home to begin implementing school action plans based on what they have learned. Anyone interested in participating in either program should call the Center or contact World View: tel. 919-962-9264; fax: 919-962-5375.

On March 23 Thomas Goltz, author of *Azerbaijan Diary* (M.E. Sharpe, 1998), will give a presentation on "Ethnic Strife in the Post-Soviet Caucasus: A View from the Front." The presentation will begin at 4:00 in the UCIS Conference Room at 223 E. Franklin Street.

Colleagues are invited to participate in an event being proposed for the Southern Conference on Slavic Studies in Richmond, March 25-27: **A Literary Quadrille: Dead Russian writers comment, in poetry and prose, on the state of world affairs at the end of the twentieth century.** All participants must be prepared to role play. Non-Russian writer-pretenders are also welcomed, as long as they are dead. For more information, contact Carol Flath, <flath@acpub.duke.edu>.

The Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU) announces a special conference on "Czech and Slovak America: Quo Vadis?" The conference, organized in conjunction with the visit of President Václav Havel to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN, will be held on April 24-26, 1999, at the University of Minnesota, Macalester College and the University of St. Thomas. Individuals interested in presenting a paper or attending the conference should contact SVU President, Dr. Miloslav Rechcigl, 1703 Mark Lane, Rockville, MD 20852, tel. (301) 881-7222, email: <rechcigl@aol.com>.

**The Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East  
European Studies at UNC-CH  
is now accepting applications for its new  
MA Program**

**Applications for Fall 1999 term must be  
returned by June 15, 1999.**

## Other Opportunities

On behalf of the Class of 1938, the International Center is accepting applications from currently enrolled sophomores and Juniors for the **Class of 1938-1999 Summer Study Abroad Fellowships**. The purpose of the fellowship is to allow UNC undergraduates a chance to pursue independent study projects abroad that will enhance their personal and career interests. Five fellowships for \$3,000 each will be awarded this year, and applications are available at the International Center located on the main floor of the Student Union. Applicants must be US citizens who are currently sophomores or juniors and will be enrolled at UNC for the 1999-2000 school year. The application deadline is March 4. Students who wish further information about the application process and eligibility criteria may stop by the International Center, or call 962-5661, or visit their web site, <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/interctr/>>.

The **Institute for Research in Social Science** at UNC has made available several quantitative studies on all countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Students and faculty interested in public opinion data (Euro-Barometers, World Value Surveys, and the International Social Survey) should contact Jose Sandoval; those interested in economic data (IMF International Financial Statistics, Global Data Manager, and World Bank World Tables of Economic and Social Indicators), should contact James Cassell.

Live and work in beautiful St. Petersburg! **Adventures in Education** announces **Petro-Teach 1999-2000**, a non-profit program providing 20 internships to teach English in Petersburg schools. Both single semester and academic year programs include accommodations with a Russian family, Russian language courses at St. Petersburg's Institute of Foreign Languages, Professional pedagogical training and a local team of support staff, group excursions to Tallinn, Estonia, Pskov, and other cities, and other cultural events. To receive an information packet with application materials, send a letter or email with resume showing language, teaching, and travel experience to: Adventures in Education, Inc., c/o Professor John F. Bailyn, Dept. of Linguistics, SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY 11794-4376, email: <jbailyn@ccmail.sunysb.edu>.

The **Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center** at Indiana University announces research grants for scholars who wish to come to Bloomington to use the university's unique resources on Central Eurasia, including the Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies (RIFIAS) Library. Grants may be used to cover or defray travel expenses or other direct research costs. While IAUNRC research grants are limited to \$300, additional funding may be available to scholars who agree to give a public presentation or participate in a similar outreach activity. Application information is available on the IAUNRC web site, <<http://www.indiana.edu/~iaunrc>>. Applications should be received no later than 30 days before the time that the scholar intends to come to Bloomington.

You are cordially invited to attend the **1999 Summer Research Laboratory on Russian and East Europe at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**. This program, which began in 1973, provides an opportunity for scholars and dissertation-stage graduate students to benefit from the resources of the University of Illinois Library, and to meet with colleagues to discuss current research. Associateships will be available from any period of time between June 14 and August 6, 1999. For more information, please contact the Russian and East Europe Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 104 International Studies Building, 910 South Fifth Street,

Champaign, IL 618280, tel. (217) 333-1244, fax. (217) 333-1582.

The **University of Pittsburgh** is offering six week intensive courses in Bulgarian and Macedonian languages during their Summer 1999 Russian and East European Summer Language Institute, June 28-August 6, 1999. Applications are now being accepted, and courses are contingent on minimum enrollment. For application forms and funding information, please contact Christine Metil, Coordinator of Summer Language Programs, tel. (412) 624-5906, or visit their web site at <<http://www.pitt.edu/~slavic/summer.html>>.

### **The Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies**

- ⌘ Administers the curriculum in Russian and East European studies
- ⌘ Sponsors lectures, workshops, conferences, concerts, and colloquia
- ⌘ Collaborates with Study Abroad and other units on campus to sponsor exchange programs for faculty and students
- ⌘ Provides programming and published materials for use in K-12, community, and 4-year colleges

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The Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies/ 223 E. Franklin Street/ Campus Box #5125/ UNC-Chapel Hill/ NC 27599-5125.

More information on any of the above opportunities can also be obtained at the UNC-CH Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies, 223 E. Franklin Street, Chapel Hill, or on our web page: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/slavic>

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Any contributions and announcements that you would like included in *inflections* should be sent to the Center in Chapel Hill. The deadline for contributions to the next issue of *inflections* is March 19, 1999. For more information on any of the above events or opportunities, please feel free to contact the Center on either campus or stop by and browse through our bulletin board postings. We can be reached as follows:

UNC at Chapel Hill Center
223 E. Franklin St. CB#5125
UNC Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5125
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/slavic>

tel: (919) 962-0901
fax: (919) 962-2494
e-mail: slavic@email.unc.edu

Duke University Center
302 Languages, Box 90260
Durham, NC 27708-0260

tel: (919) 660-3157
fax: (919) 660-3188

We look forward to seeing you soon!

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Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies
233 E. Franklin Street
Campus Box #5125
UNC - Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5125