

## **Adventures in the Smolensk Archives: The Confessions of an American Sovietologist**

by Roberta Thompson Manning

I first encountered the American-held Smolensk Archive in the early eighties, over two decades after Merle Fainsod. By then, I had become a historian of pre-Revolutionary Russia against my will. I entered graduate school at Columbia University's Russian Institute in the fall of 1962 at the height of the Cold War. Before I was on campus for long, New York City was plastered over with neon yellow placards with nuclear symbols that directed passersby to the nearest bomb shelter, which turned out to be nothing more than the nearest basement. Whoever installed the signs in my dorm had a sense of humor, as the arrows ended up pointing to the largest dryer in the basement laundry room. Columbia students thought the signs were a joke. But the sign-maker evidently knew something that we didn't. In October, a grim-faced President Kennedy suddenly appeared on television and announced that the Soviets were installing nuclear missiles in Cuba, capable of striking most of the US. Everyone figured that New York City was Target Number One. The campus filled up with cranks—hell and brimstone preachers asking us to repent before it was too late and scruffy-looking Communists who carried ladders and climbed them to attract a crowd. They told us that capitalism and Kennedy, not Khrushchev, caused the crisis. I waited on pins and needles for the bombs to fall and jumped out of my skin every time aircraft flew overhead, convinced these were my last hours. Then suddenly it was all over. The Soviet ships carrying the bombs to Cuba turned around! For many years thereafter, I sometimes wondered if I hadn't died back then in the nuclear holocaust and what I thought was my life was just "the rest of my life" flashing before my eyes.

When things settled down, I realized that I didn't belong at the Russian Institute. I was not Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, a graduate of the Army Language School, or a member of the US Armed Forces in uniform. I wasn't even an Armenian like Ron Suny. I was female—one of two—in an entering class of two dozen, and a fourth-generation Texan to boot. Everyone else came from the East Coast or the Mid-West. Students constantly made remarks about my Southern accent and were astonished that I had never before taken any courses in Soviet Studies, since my undergraduate school—Rice University—then offered none. What meager Russian I knew, I had learned from the university tennis coach, the former tennis pro at the pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg Tennis Club, in a special gut-language course intended primarily for athletes. When I took my first colloquium from Mark Raeff, who assigned a hefty set of 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian memoirs a week, I found perilously few familiar Russian words per page swimming about in a sea of pre-revolutionary hieroglyphics and archaic syntax and spelling. I survived through sheer determination and because my training in history at Rice was excellent. But this proved a mixed blessing in the strange new world of American Sovietology.

Most of the faculty at the Russian Institute were political scientists, model-builders and/or embittered émigrés who actively disliked the Soviet Union and firmly believed that everything worth knowing about that dismal land was already known. They did not encourage students to question established views, much less seek new answers. To be sure, there were a few bright lights—the required courses in Russian literature, Marc Raeff, the marvelous Aleksander Erlich, who almost made an economist out of me, and John Hazard, who entertained his classes with tales of attending Soviet law school in the

1930s and provided us with source books on Khrushchev's legal reforms that I still draw upon for my lectures. But all my teachers insisted that I could not study what I came to Columbia to study—Soviet history—as “no reliable sources” on the subject existed! If I wanted to remain in Soviet studies, I would have to become a political scientist—a discipline that I soon detested—or a specialist on pre-revolutionary Russia. I was baffled, trained as I was at Rice University by Francis Lowenheim in the rigors of German historicism and the arts of critical reading and source analysis and well aware from my own life that no two human beings regardless of political persuasion ever viewed the same event identically.

Khrushchev's Thaw was at its height, but the contemporary courses at the Russian Institute, except Hazard's, managed to avoid what was actually happening in the USSR. To be sure, we read Khrushchev's Secret Speech to prepare us for the Institute language exam. But in our contemporary politics class, a professor who would later become a National Security Adviser discussed at length Khrushchev's angry outburst at the modern art exhibition in the Manezh but managed to say nothing about the Secret Speech, the release of prisoners from the gulag, and the marvelous *shestidesiatniki*, the Soviet people of the Sixties. I first learned of *shestidesiatniki* from James Billington, who was invited to speak at the Russian Institute on his way back from Khrushchev's new US-USSR exchange program. He told us about the “exciting” new cultural atmosphere in Moscow, a word that I never before heard applied to the USSR. But when the talk ended, an ancient Bernard Wolfe, whose book *Three Who Made a Revolution* I greatly admired, got up and insisted that the young Billington did not understand what he saw in the USSR. The Soviet Union was a totalitarian dictatorship incapable of change!

How on earth did someone like me, who had always questioned everything, end up in a dogmatic field of study like this? Well, I got hooked on Russia early on. For some people, Russia is like salty peanuts or potato chips—you can never get enough. So it was with me. Russia was everywhere in the 1950s, even in Texas. Russia filled the newspapers with stories so uniformly negative I couldn't help but wonder if they were really true. I discovered the Russian literary classics and they overwhelmed everything else I read, with their insights into the human soul and the human condition. Only Russians seemed as crazy, complex, and as dysfunctional as my large oddball Irish-American family with all its eccentrics, recluses, rival political dynasties and skeletons spilling out of closets everywhere. Unlike everyone else I knew, but like the Russians in those novels, our family scandals and secrets were public, discussed openly with everyone all the time. Of course, the Russians in those novels weren't at all like those in the newspapers, and that intrigued me too.

Cold War images of Russian women began to fascinate me. There they were in the newspaper every day—photograph after photograph of pudgy, drably dressed Russian women *working*, usually at manual and menial tasks with an occasional woman scientist thrown in. These images were propaganda photos, designed to offend and repel most Americans in the 1950s when the Feminine Mystique reigned unchallenged and women stayed in the home doing nothing and often going crazy. But those propaganda photos fascinated me. You see, I was a fat girl who dreamed of being a scientist. But my Mother was a Southern Belle who was bent and determined to make a proper lady out of me. But ladies were not fun. They did not live interesting lives. They were not allowed to think or work. They were not even allowed to eat, as they had to be slender to attract

beaux, their only mission in life. So my Mother was everywhere, regulating my diet, taking away my books and insisting that I go shopping with her instead. At registration time, she filled my schedule with courses in home economics to prepare me for my inevitable fate. But I always managed to pick up another registration form at school and registered for advanced physics, chemistry, pre-calculus and *no* home economics instead, since my Dad, who encouraged my ambitions, signed my schedule behind my Mother's back.

I did *not* want to be a Southern Belle, because the Southern ladies I knew were bored out of their minds once the courting was over. They took to drinking for consolation but were careful to drink only after four o'clock to prove that they were not alcoholics, and they went crazy from staying at home and doing nothing. This happened even to my lovely, charming Mother. I nursed her through nervous breakdown after nervous breakdown, while dreaming of fat Russian women who worked, did what they wished, and were free. Since they supported themselves, I assumed, they could eat whatever they wanted to. Men weren't in the pictures because the women obviously didn't want them there! Little did I know that the Russian women in these photos were fat and worked because they were poor and needed to support their families. They did without men, not because they were feminists and chose to so, but because the men they might have married perished in the very worse war ever. My role models had experienced horrors I couldn't even fathom. I didn't know what "The War"—World War II to us--was to Russia until I went to Leningrad on the "Exchange"<sup>1</sup> to do my dissertation research and found "The War" and "The Siege" everywhere, overpowering the memories and psyches

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<sup>1</sup> The "Exchange" is now called by the initials of the institution that administers it—IREX.

of everyone more than a quarter of a century after it ended. My teachers at Columbia never taught us anything about “The War” in Russia. It was one of many things we learned for ourselves on the Exchange.

Cold War propaganda photos of working Russian women provided me with role models. But it was the Soviet Sputnik—the first one—the world’s first man-made satellite, launched in orbit in 1957 on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, that prompted me to become a Soviet historian. Sputnik came as a total shock to the United States, for it showed that the USSR could do something that we couldn’t do for another whole year. Panic over Russian scientific prowess swept the nation. Soviet space success was attributed to their education system that stressed the natural sciences and encouraged girls as well as boys to become scientists. Over night it became a good thing for girls to aspire to be scientists, even in the backwaters of Corpus Christi, Texas, my hometown. The local newspaper sent a reporter out to the high schools to see if we had any budding woman scientists to show those Russians up. He discovered me, the only girl enrolled in advanced science and math classes in town! I was called to the principal’s office to meet the press. Only yesterday the school oddball, I was now considered a patriotic soul who would save America by designing weapon systems to destroy those awful Russians. I was horrified and outraged. No one in my hometown save my father thought it was OK for me to study science to satisfy my own curiosity and ambition and escape my mother’s fate. But now suddenly it was OK to do what I wanted to do *if and only if* I used my skills to develop weapons to kill other people on the other side of the world who had done nothing to me except to inspire me with their literature and encourage me to think women could aspire to more than mere housewifery. So I made the decision that shaped

my life. I told the reporter, “I’m not planning to become a scientist. I am going to be a Soviet historian.” Needless to say, this decision of my lifetime did not make the local press. But I never looked back, not even when the only college that I applied to, selected in an earlier phase of my life, turned out to teach lots of science but no Soviet studies.

The stubbornness that inspired me to enter Soviet Studies kept me at Cold War Columbia for three semesters, trying valiantly to become a Soviet historian against the advice of my instructors. I finally threw in the towel after taking a Seminar designed to help us choose the topics for our Master’s Essay. The instructor, a genial man who had once taught 17<sup>th</sup> Century British history at Yale, had somehow had managed to become a Soviet historian during World War II through the back door by joining the OSS **[Roberta, please spell out: Officers ?? Can’t remember!]** and learning Russian. I hoped he might be able to show me how to do the same, without having to go through the OSS’s far more inept successor, the CIA, where students who did not meet Columbia standards for research and academic careers were routinely routed, to the detriment of the nation’s intelligence gathering.

My earlier classes had interested me in the fate of the *zemstvos*, local institutions of self-government that, I had been told by all my instructors, had done so much good for the Russian people before the Revolution. But the *zemstvos* disappeared completely from the history books after 1916. That intrigued me. What happened to them? I decided to find out by reading the contemporary Russian press of all the major political parties in 1917, drawing on Columbia’s excellent collection, which was rapidly falling apart unread. I discovered that the *zemstvos* were not as democratic as my instructors maintained, since the election system was heavily skewed towards the landed gentry

and disenfranchised the far more numerous peasantry, a group that already fascinated me. After the February Revolution, the Provisional Government democratized the *zemstvos*, and the old conservatives and liberals who had led them were voted out of office and replaced by all sorts of socialists, including many Communists. At the end of the semester, I presented my research findings to the seminar.<sup>2</sup> My classmates were discomfited by my report, which contradicted prevailing views of “the democratic *zemstvos*.” The instructor expressed his doubts about the accuracy and validity of my research. “Communists don’t win elections,” he said dogmatically!

I left Columbia the next week in disgust and traveled around Europe for a couple of years. I finally got to Russia at the end of 1965, not too long after Khrushchev’s fall. I was shocked by the poverty and wondered why we couldn’t find ourselves an enemy more worthy of us. But then I stood with hundreds of poorly clothed and poorly shod Russians in line for four hours in the bitter January cold, ankle-deep in snow and slush, to see the treasures of the Hermitage and realized that Russians lived “not by bread alone.” Graffiti was somehow everywhere you looked in this “totalitarian nation” at the end of the Cold War crisis years. The form it took was a single word: “*peace*,” which was hand scrawled on fences, walls, and restroom stalls. “*Peace*,” paradoxically, was also the most common graffiti found at Columbia when I returned there a couple of years later at the height of the Vietnam War.

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<sup>2</sup> The gist of my research was not so dissimilar to an article published two decades later that was very well received by William Rosenberg, who tapped the same sources. William G. Rosenberg, “The *zemstvo* in 1917 and its Fate under Bolshevik Rule,” in Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich (eds) The *Zemstvo* in Russia: an Experiment in Local Self-Government London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 383-422.

I came back to Columbia a complete cynic in so far as Soviet Studies was concerned, determined to finish my MA degree with as fast as possible and find a job in “a working class junior college,” where I could devote my life to making, not studying, revolution. But the Columbia I returned to was an entirely different place from Cold War Columbia. Military personnel in uniform had disappeared from the campus as they no longer felt welcome because of the war and the draft. Young men grew their hair long; androgyny was the rage and nonconformity was the style. Women were now 40% of the students in graduate classes. And most astonishingly, the once quiescent campus was dominated by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which soon led the first major US campus revolt against the Vietnam War, kidnapping a dean, occupying buildings and closing down the campus at finals time.

Russian Studies too had changed. The faculty now included the noted Revisionist historian Leopold Haimson, whose famous *Slavic Review* articles had scandalized many because he “dared” to say what his research showed-- that the Bolsheviks had working class support that was growing even before the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>3</sup> Haimson’s Colloquium and then Seminar on “the Russian Pre-Revolution” was packed with students and rapidly turned into an ideological proving ground for the New Left as supporters of every single pre-revolutionary Russian faction had its own representative among the students. Rightists, liberals, all sorts of socialists--Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Bundists, and Social Revolutionaries--contended with each other once again. One member of the class, inspired by the People’s Will, was arrested in Morningside Park

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<sup>3</sup>Haimson, Leopold, “Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1914, *Slavic Review* Part One: Vol. XXIII, No. 4 (December, 1964), 619-642 and Part Two: Vol. XXIV, No. 1 (March 1965), 1-22.

with a primitive home-made bomb that the police fortunately thought was narcotics and tested as such. Haimson's Research Assistant--our main stream "SR" (Social Revolutionary) Steve Hallowell--went to Cambodia to negotiate with the Vietcong for SDS. Afterwards he was assigned his own FBI agent who dutifully "tailed" him about the campus. Today he is a Wall Street stockbroker!

By the end of my first semester back, I had joined Leo Haimson's crusade to revise the history of the Russian Pre-Revolution. Haimson knew students needed encouragement and to feel that their research was an important endeavor so he provided us with plenty of both. The result was my first book, *The Crisis of the Old Order in Russia*.<sup>4</sup> I still planned to become a Soviet historian, but I figured out that once I had a Ph.D., I could do whatever I wanted. The opportunity to do Soviet history, however, came sooner than expected. After I defended my dissertation, there were two positions in Russian history in the entire country, both in Soviet history and both in Boston. Affirmative Action was in force and there were precious few who labeled themselves as Soviet historians (much less who also claimed, as I did, to be able to teach courses in Russian women's history, a subject that I had never studied but which was then in considerable demand on the job circuit). Since Russian women had made me a Russianist, I had few qualms about making such claims. So Nina Tumarkin got the job at Wellesley, and I went to Boston College with considerable trepidations about working for Jesuits.

I needn't have worried. BC turned out to be the best place around to do Russian/Soviet history. The BC history department's new Ph.D. program at its onset attracted the best

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<sup>4</sup> Roberta Thompson Manning, *The Crisis of the Old Order in Russia: Gentry and Government*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

and most successful group of graduate students that we have ever had. In Russian history alone, there were Chester Dunning, an early modernist, who was already working on a dissertation nominally under the direction of a BC faculty member but really directed by the able Ned Keenan at Harvard; and J. Arch Getty and William J. Chase, who wanted to study Soviet history and whose presence at BC had created my position! Needless to say, Arch Getty, Bill Chase and I taught ourselves Soviet history, while in my undergraduate classes I fended off peculiar questions prompted by Catholic feminist theology and the way history was still taught in some Catholic high schools, like the amount of animal protein consumed in various periods of Russian-Soviet history<sup>5</sup> and what the Russian Orthodox Church was doing at whatever time period I was discussing.<sup>6</sup>

I was convinced that there was no reason why Arch and Bill shouldn't become Soviet historians if they wanted to. So we soon got down to the serious business of selecting dissertation topics and locating sources. Paradoxically, sources turned out to be the least of our problems. Bill was interested in labor history and decided to do a dissertation on Moscow workers in the 1920s based on the 1926 census that would allow him to employ his substantial quantitative skills. Arch was fascinated with Stalin and the Purges but was uncertain exactly how to approach such a topic. I had just read Merle Fainsod's

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<sup>5</sup> This question came from the students of Mary Daly, then the best known BC professor and theologian, a former nun who had become a radical feminist and militant vegetarian. She believed that the deity was a woman, not a man, and that sexism was rooted in the amount of animal protein consumed. No men were allowed to sign up for her courses. Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, New York: Harper & Row, 1968 and Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Haimson and Raeff, being good Russian *intelligentsy*, didn't teach us much of anything about the church, while some of my students had learned nothing but church history in their previous classes and were discomforted with my secular approach to history! Gregory Freeze, who would rectify this omission in our education, was still in the process of turning his dissertation into a book.

*Smolensk Under Soviet Rule* for the first time to prepare my lectures in Soviet history, and suggested that Arch might take a look at the archive and see if Fainsod had really exhausted its possibilities. The result of these endeavors is history: Arch Getty's once notorious but now classic *Origins of the Great Purges: the Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938*, and Bill Chase's *Workers, Society and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929*.<sup>7</sup>

In 1981, with Arch in an Assistant Professorship at UCSD, Bill in a similar position at the University of Pittsburg and *The Crisis of the Old Order in Russia* in press, I decided to take a look at "The Smolensk Archive" myself, beginning with files of peasant complaints that Arch Getty had called to my attention while researching his dissertation. I focused on the complaints from Belyi raion in 1937 at the height of Stalin's Terror, because the Belyi files contained not just letters but *investigations of complaints by Party officials on the spot*, unlike the many complaints that have subsequently been examined by other historians totally out of context. I combined my study of the letters with an examination of the stenograms of the 1937 Belyi raikom and raion party conferences to provide still more context. The result was my conference papers, articles and then book on Belyi Raion, 1937.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> J. Arch Getty, *The Origins of the Great Purges: the Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (London-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and William J. Chase, *Workers, Society and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Roberta Manning, *Bel'skii raion, 1937 god* Smolensk, SGPU Press, 1998; Roberta T. Manning "Government in the Soviet Countryside in the Stalinist Thirties: the Case of Belyi Raion in 1937," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and Eastern European Studies Paper* No. 301 (fall, 1984); Roberta T. Manning, "The Great Purges in a Rural District: Belyi Raion Revisited," in J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (eds.) *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 168-197; and Roberta T. Manning, "Peasants and the Party: Rural Administration in the Soviet Countryside on the Eve of World War II," in John W.

Using “The Smolensk Archive” for the first time was the major intellectual experience of my academic career. Hitherto I had seen Soviet history through the eyes of others, portrayed in black and white and usually very one-dimensional. But the Belyi files were Technicolor and 3-D! The real living Russia existed after all behind the grim Stalinist façade! Here were complex flesh and blood human beings, living, loving, hating, suffering, complaining, feuding, and insisting on their human rights, largely oblivious to the Terror *at the very height of the great purges*, just like the Russians in those wonderful novels I read in my youth! Even today, after more than a decade of work in archives in Smolensk and Moscow--the latter under the auspices of the research project *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*-- I have not encountered a single source that has produced as intense an impact on me as these Belyi complaints of 1937 in what we then thought was “The Smolensk Archive.” To be sure, the same kinds of materials are found throughout other Stalin-ra archives and are even commonplace, but their impact is muted and diluted because such materials are generally scattered about randomly in different files, intermingled with other materials and humdrum purely bureaucratic stuff.

What I found in the Belyi files, however, was not anything like the Soviet history hitherto written by either Soviets or Americans. Once again, I told the story as I found it and refused to force the complex, lively Belyi materials into the politically correct but confining paradigms of what was then American Sovietology. The major complaint of Belyi peasants in 1937 at the height of the Great Purges was “the lack of collective farm

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Strong (ed.) Essays on Revolutionary Culture and Stalinism (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1990), 224-44. There is as yet no English edition of the Belyi book because it was in press so long, first in Tver and then in Smolensk as Russian academic publication collapsed and then slowly revived. By the time the book was published in Russia, it already needed to be revised, and I was involved with other projects.

democracy,” and I said so in my presentations and papers to howls of “How dare you!” that followed me everywhere for a number of years. The journal *The Russian Review* identified Arch, Bill, Lynne Viola, Hiroiaki Kuromiya and me as “young revisionists.” Works we hadn’t even published yet were subject to vehement criticism by people who had not read them.<sup>9</sup> The worst came at the meeting of the AAASS Conference in Washington D.C. in 1985, when I appeared on a panel on the Purges along with Arch, Bill and the much more outrageous French revisionist Gabor Rittersporn. The panel commentator, a noted senior scholar, resigned in protest and posted himself outside the conference room door so he could tell everyone that the papers had rendered him speechless, while a hysterical Russian émigré so disrupted the session that she had to be removed from the room by hotel security guards!

With this kind of reaction to my work, it is not surprising that as soon materials began to open up in Russia, I went there immediately at the end of the 1980s and then annually every year since to explore newly declassified Soviet archives. In recent years, my visits to Russia have centered around helping Lynne Viola and Russia’s greatest living historian, Viktor Petrovich Danilov (1926-2004), also one of the greatest of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Russian Review* Vol. 46, no. 4 Oct. 1986 is almost totally devoted to a critique of our work after an article by Sheila Fitzpatrick in *ibid.*, Vol. 45, no. 4 October, 1986, identified the five of us as “young revisionists.” I believe this was a neutral term for Sheila, but others jumped to the conclusion that we were denying the existence of the Terror and the oppressiveness of Stalin. In my view, some people read too much into the label. We were historians, not political science model-builders. We just reported what we found in our sources, and we found people behaving more spontaneously and having some impact on the Terror. Some political scientists jumped to conclusions without bothering to examine sources, and when they did bother (as did Fainsod) they called it “inefficient totalitarianism.” Yet totalitarianism, by definition, was supposed to be efficient.

*shestidesiatniki*, complete our project *Tragediia sovetskoï derevni* <sup>10</sup> and make highly secret OGPU-NKVD documents that we had declassified for the purposes of publication readily available to scholars the world over so that the Russian archives could not close up entirely again, as they had done at the end of the Khrushchev era. But whatever time I could spare has been spent in Smolensk working on a study of the Sychevka Show Trial.<sup>11</sup>

In 1991, I made the first of a series of trips to Smolensk to use the local archives—the other 99% of the materials for 1918-1939, as my colleague Evgenii Kodin subsequently discovered. From the onset, I loved the warm, friendly atmosphere in the regional history

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<sup>10</sup> The result is five hefty volumes of otherwise unavailable materials. V. Danilov, R. Manning and L. Viola (eds.), *Tragediia sovetskoï derevni: kollektivzatsii i razkulachevanie: dokumenty i materialy v piati tomov* Volumes 1-5 Book 1 (1937) (Moscow: Rosspen, 1999-2005). Volume 5 Book 2 (1938-39) should be in print in the fall of 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Sychevka is a raion that borders on Belyi and it is not surprising that I first encountered materials on this show trial reeling through the microfilms of “The Smolensk Archive” between Belyi files. For as I reeled between Belyi files, I noticed a document that mentioned undulant fever (or brucellosis), a livestock disease with a bizarre pathology that can be contracted by human beings, which my mother had come down with from consuming unrationed, unpasturized milk from my Grandmother’s cow during World War II. I looked closer at the document and found that it was an NKVD report on a Purge case, the only one I’ve ever seen despite my nominal visits to FSB archives! By 1989, I was hooked on the Sychevka Show Trial from reading edited accounts in the provincial and raion press. In 1990, I was able to find materials on this case in RGAE by posing as “a specialist on large livestock farms in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” from Texas no less, armed with a letter to this effect written by a pre-revolutionary specialist at the Institute of Russian History who knew of my work on the Pre-Revolution. At the time I knew not a single Soviet historian in the USSR. For some discussion of the Sychevka Show Trial, which has been on hold until *Tragediia* is finished, see Roberta Manning, “Massovaia operatsiia protiv “kulakov i prestupnykh elementov:” apogeï Velikoi Chistki na Smolenshchina,” in E. B. Kodin (ed.) *Stalinizm v rossiiskoi provintsii: Smolenskie arkhivnye dokumenty v prochtechanii zarubezhnykh I rossiiskikh istorikov* (Smolensk: RGPU Press, 1999, 230-254 and Roberta T. Manning, “Politicheskii terror kak politicheskii teatr:” raionnye pokazatelnye sudy 1937 g. i massovye operatsii,” in V. Danilov, R. Manning, and Lynne Viola (eds) *Tragediia sovetskoï derevni: kollektivzatsiia i razkulachevanie: dokumenty i materialyn 1927-1939* Vol. 5 1937-1939, Book 2 1937, Moscow: Rosspen: 2004, 51-70.

room of the local Lenin Library, the state archives (GASO), and the local Party Archives (TsDNISO), which contains materials that cannot be found in RGASPI in Moscow, where little or nothing at the *raion*-level--the level of government closest to the people and, hence, of greatest interest to me as a social historian--ever made its way. I even managed to work briefly in the Smolensk FSB [**Roberta, spell out and identify as KGB successor, here or in a note**] archives, using files on the mass operations that had most of their pages blocked off to me by manila envelopes held in place by a watchful young FSB officer, "Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov," who identified himself to me as "an officer and a gentleman" as well as a former Komsomol activist. He politely inquired about how I managed to make a respectable academic career after my youthful transgressions in Leningrad in 1970-71, protesting the Christmas bombings of Hanoi! The Smolensk FSB archive, like its counterpart in Moscow, is located in a functioning police station, so I worked amid couples coming in for divorces, wailing mothers and wives of drunks arrested the night before, and a steady stream of elderly people trying to prove that they were victims of Stalinism so that they might receive higher pensions! At the end of each working day, I had to submit my notes to the head of the local FSB archive, who carefully screened them for the names of any NKVD officers and then blackened all these names out, saying, "They were all simple country boys who believed they were dealing with real enemies. They did what they were told and thought they were doing the right thing. But they came from families who are very good families today and we do not want to embarrass them!"

Other than the Smolensk FSB archive, which was only little marginally better than its Moscow counterpart, it is much easier to work in Smolensk archives than in their

Moscow counterparts. The state and party archives in Smolensk were (and still are) open all summer. But Moscow archives operated on erratic schedules in the 1990s and were likely to close down the moment one arrived in Russia to do research. The Smolensk archives also give visitors unlimited numbers of documents right away upon submitting an order. One does not have to wait around for days as in Moscow and then be restricted to only three files every other day. The archives in Smolensk also do not place limits on the quantity of Xeroxes and microfilms one can order, and you can take copies home with you, and pay for them by bank transfer upon one's return! (Moscow archives have yet to learn about bank transfers.) Indeed, initially Smolensk archivists were so glad to see foreign scholars that they fed us tea and sweets and let us nibble away while working with documents, a practice that ended only with hyperinflation and the collapse of the Russian economy under Yeltsin.

I fell in love with Smolensk, a charming, largely 19<sup>th</sup> century provincial capital of half a million friendly inhabitants, built in traditional imperial style architecture with a 16-17<sup>th</sup> century Kremlin, Russia's largest, that runs through and around the town. The city center contains an amusement park and dozens of interesting, often unique museums, art galleries, and churches as well as a number of lovely parks where townsmen and visitors alike stroll in the evenings amid kiddy rides and monuments to Smolensk's notables, like the architect of the Smolensk Kremlin, the Commanders of the War of 1812, the soldiers from Smolensk who died in repressing the Kronstadt Rebellion in 1921,<sup>12</sup> brotherly graves containing the victims of various Nazi atrocities during the

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<sup>12</sup> It seems that most of these came from Smolensk, since M. N. Tukhachevsky was then the Commander of his native Western Military District and could not rely on the

Occupation, and statues of the composer Glinka and the poet Tvardovskii, who is portrayed in his World War II uniform listening to the lively tales of his famous protagonist Ivan Torokin.

Smolensk possesses an active cultural life that one encounters only in much larger American cities. Its theater is first-rate, and the annual Glinka Music Festival attracts visitors from all over the world to the city in June. Nearby is Talashkino, Princess Tenisheva's world famous artist's colony, where modernist culture was born and Stravinsky composed his convention-defying ballet *The Rites of Spring*, inspired by the Princess' own peasant folk music ensembles and folk art collection that was exhibited at the Louvre, no less, in 1907 and still hangs in Talashkino. There are also dozens of institutions of higher learning of every kind imaginable in Smolensk, which draw their student bodies from a land area as large as France. All of these require their students to take history courses, so Smolensk probably has more historians per capita than any other community of its size in the world.

Not surprisingly, I soon became acquainted with Smolensk's many historians in the archives—first of all with members of the older generation like the senior Smolensk archivist Mikhail Naumovich Naumov, and with D. I. Budaev, one of P. A. Zaionchkovsky's best students, who made the history department at the local pedagogical institute one of the best provincial history departments in Russia. It took me only a little longer to begin to meet my peers. I first got to know really well the local self-proclaimed dissident historian Valentin Afans'ev, who taught at the local Higher Party School and now runs his own political counseling business that aids local politicians with elections

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reliability of the forces in Petrograd and brought in his own troops. Laurence X. Clifford, "Tukhachevsky and Blitzkrieg" (Boston College Doctoral Dissertation, 2004). Chapter 4.

campaigns, and his charming, lively wife Natasha Starodvortseva, also a historian at the local technical institute, who is now a college administrator and *doctor nauk*. The couple rescued me from the drunken carousing of the black marketeers who had established themselves in the centrally located but rowdy *Gostinitsa* “Smolensk” by generously inviting me to stay in their home.<sup>13</sup> I was soon working on their new garden plot, since Gorbachev had made land available to everyone who wanted and used it, and food had disappeared from Smolensk stores by then. We visited the great Russian poet Aleksandr Tvardovskii’s younger brother Ivan and his wife Tina, who met at a dance for deported kulak youth in Nizhnii Tagil in the 1930s and were still madly in love sixty years later.<sup>14</sup> I later visited them again with Evgenii Kodin and Lynne Viola to take Tina glaucoma medicine and let Lynne hear the story of the kulak deportation from living “kulaks.” Valentin and Natasha also took me the nearby Katyn Forest for the first time, to visit the graves of the Polish officers killed by Stalin, and to Hitler’s Bunker, where the German dictator hid from Soviet air raids when he visited the battlefields of World War II. Visitors were still discouraged in Katyn at that time, and one had to crawl over barbed wire, put up by the KGB, while trying not to step on all the beautiful little green toads that hopped about the pathways of this dense, rarely visited, and sinister forest. By 2001,

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<sup>13</sup> For many years a militia paddy wagon was permanently stationed outside this hotel to control the drunks!

<sup>14</sup> While Aleksandr Tvardovsky was lionized as one of Russia’s greatest writers, his entire family was dekulakized as his father, a former Donbas coal miner who established a blacksmith shop to support his large family, was considered a kulak. Ivan, the loyal younger son who stayed at home to help his parents, spent most of his life in exile, prison and POW camps or in hiding as an escapee. He took us to the nearby Tvardovsky family home *cum* blacksmith shop, which he has turned into a museum-monument to his famous brother. Here he showed us the family’s most treasured possession-- worn copies of Tolstoy that his father used to read the children nightly, which Ivan took with him into exile, prison, and war and sustained him.

however, the forest that had witnessed so much death became the site of the Katyn Monument, Russia's first monument-museum of the repressed of the terrible 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For here are mass graves containing not just the Polish officers shot by Stalin on the eve of World War II, but also Soviet POWs shot by the Nazis and local victims of the notorious mass operations of the Great Purges, who far outnumber the Poles. The graves are now carefully marked and the woods are now full of monuments, crosses, and chapels to commemorate the victims of these various mass killings. The forest has ceased to murmur as ominously to itself as it used to, now that the spirits of the dead lie at rest at last, properly honored and remembered.<sup>15</sup>

The Smolensk historian I have come to know the best, however, is one of the most important historians and innovative university administrators in the new Smolensk and the new Russia--Evgenii Kodin, a former professor of history, then head of the History-English Department, and now the Assistant Rector of the Smolensk Pedagogical University (SGPU). Evgenii has visited Boston three times now in the last decade on various exchange programs, twice to research history and once to study with the BC

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<sup>15</sup> One now can access the names and biographical information on the Smolensk victims of the mass operation and other purge victims in Evgenii Kodin's Computer Databank of the Smolensk Repressed, produced in collaboration with the Smolensk Memorial Society and all the local archives, including the FSB Archive. [The FSB now takes credit for the databank, which was produced under Kodin's direction in the computer center at the Smolensk State Pedagogical University (SPGU).] The databank can be accessed on the official Smolensk oblast website in English or Russian. <http://www.Smolensk.ru>. Click on "istoriia" then on "elektronicheskaiia kartiteka zhertv politicheskikh repressii Smolenskoi oblasti, 1917-1953 g.g." The Smolensk website also contains a link to the Katyn Monument website (under "istoriia") that contains maps and photographs. 4,234 of the 15,000 Polish officers were killed and buried here—the last resting places of the others are found in Ukraine and elsewhere. "Massovoe ubitstvo v Katynskom lesu." In E. V. Kodin and Maikl Khiki (eds.) *Smolenshchina na stranitsakh amerikanskoi istoricheskoi literatury* Smolensk: SGPU Press, 2000, 361. This comes from a report of the US House of Representatives translated by Evgenii Kodin.

Graduate Department of International Higher Education Administration with university administrators from around the world. Every one of his visits to Boston, which freed him from the time-consuming burdens of academic administration, has resulted in a series of publications that have collectively made Evgenii Kodin post-Communist Russia's leading expert on what he calls "American Sovietology" or U.S. Soviet Studies. Evgenii began by publishing a Russian edition of Merle Fainsod's *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule*.<sup>16</sup> He then revised and published his *kandidatskaia dissertatsiia* on the Smolensk scandal, the first Stalinist Purge of a provincial party organization that occurred in 1928, as a work of micro-history, a new historical genre that Evgenii became acquainted with in while in the U.S.<sup>17</sup> One of the best parts of this interesting book is his chapter on how the Smolensk scandal played itself out in Evgenii's own university, then called the Smolensk Pedagogical Institute. Next he translated my book, *Belyi raion: 1937 god*,<sup>18</sup> to provide his students with another example of micro-history and show them how very typical Smolensk archival materials might be utilized.

This was immediately followed by what many consider to be Evgenii Kodin's masterpiece and *doktorskaia dissertatsiia*, "*The Smolensk Archive*" and *American Sovietology*.<sup>19</sup> Previous Soviet and Russian works on American scholarship had either denounced American scholars as "bourgeois falsifiers" or else accepted American scholarship uncritically and dogmatically as the truth incarnate. But Evgenii Kodin was the first Russian scholar to take American scholarship on Russia seriously as scholarship

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<sup>16</sup> Merle Feinsod, *Smolensk pod vlast'iu sovetov*, Smolensk: Trast-Imakom, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> E. V. Kodin, *Smolensk naryv*, Smolensk: Smirnov Press, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> *Bel'skii raion: 1937 god*, Smolensk: SGPU Press, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Evgenii Kodin, "*Smolensk arkhiv*" i *amerikanskaia sovetologiiia*, Smolensk: SGPU Press, 1998.

that he could use to teach his students, his colleagues and other Russians how scholarship changes over time and how various scholars can look at a given source and find different things, thus demonstrating how history can be written in the free, pluralistic and democratic nation that Russia aspired to become. Several years later, after yet another stay in the U.S. freed of his duties as the academic vice rector (vice-president) of the SGPU, Evgenii Kodin produced a monograph on another major work of “American Sovietology”--the Harvard Émigré Interview Project, which traces the organization and achievements of the project and analyzes the views of former Soviet citizens (or non-Returnees, as he calls them) of the pre-war Stalin period with an eye to showing Russians today what they might learn from this fifty-year-old project.<sup>20</sup>

Somehow, while achieving all of this, Evgenii Kodin managed to convert the Smolensk Pedagogical Institute into a full-fledged university--SGPU or *Smolenskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii universitet*, which grants its own *kandidatskaia* degree when one earlier had to go to Moscow or Leningrad for graduate studies. He also added a number of new departments to give his students—hitherto trained only to become village school teachers--skills that could be profitably employed in the new nation that Russia was becoming, like graphic arts (useful in advertising), journalism, computer science and publishing.

Evgenii also managed to organize the most unusual conference that I ever attended--an international conference on “Stalinism in a Russian Province: Smolensk Archival Documents in the Reading of Foreign and Russian Historians<sup>21</sup>” that attracted scholars

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<sup>20</sup> E. V. Kodin, “*Garvardskii proekt*” Moscow: Rosspen, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> E. V. Kodin (ed.) *Stalinizm v rossiiskoi provintsii: smolenskii arkhivnye dokumenty v prochtenii zarubezhnykh I rossiiskikh istorikov* Smolensk: SGPU Press, 1999).

from Russia (Smolensk and Moscow), the US, Canada and Belorus. Half of the participants came from Smolensk, as this was yet another of Evgenii's Kodin's efforts to educate local historians by exposing local scholars to the work of their Moscow and North American counterparts. Some Smolensk participants gave papers on antiquated, even Stalinist topics taken from their ancient doctor of science dissertations that had been gathering dust for decades. Most had rethought their topics in light of subsequent developments, but one member of the SGPU history department presented a paper entitled "The 1937 Constitution: the World's Most Democratic," fitted in between two papers on the Great Purges, to the astonishment of the Moscow contingent!

The conference terminated in a now usual ritual visit to the Katyn Forest and a banquet on a nearby state farm, where overladen tables on the banks of the Dnieper in countryside crossed by Napoleon on his way to Moscow looked like a recreation of a scene in the Stalinist film "Kuban Cossacks." Plagued by armies of persistent mosquitoes but fortified by much to drink, we sang Russian folksongs, while divisions among us eroded and the standoffish Muscovites, charmed by how much life in Smolensk provoked Communist era nostalgia, took to quarreling among themselves. Meanwhile a renowned scholar from MGU, Evgenii's *doktorskaia dissertatsiia* advisor, who, when drinking, could speak only a tongue-tied German and fondly recall his military service in East Germany, decided to strip off all his clothing and go skinny-dipping in the Dnieper! Among the collective farmers who partied with us were the assistant *sovkhos* chairman and his wife, both Meskhetian Turks, refugees from ethnic violence in Central Asia, who had found refuge on and were assimilated into underpopulated Smolensk collective

farms, which had somehow survived the fall of Communism and efforts by Yeltsin to destroy collective farming.

The last of my many adventures in Smolensk with Evgenii and his family—his wife Natalie, a high school history teacher and head of history curriculum development in the Smolensk Public Schools, and his daughters Olga and Anya--occurred a few years later when we took the SGPU car into the woods in search of “hidden lakes” and got thoroughly stuck in the mud. After futilely pushing and pulling for what seemed to be hours, an armored car with four-wheel drive suddenly materialized from nowhere and pulled us out. It was the Secret Mail Service to the rescue! This was a two-hundred-year old Russian institution that I had never heard of, founded in 1801 by Emperor Paul I to carry secret government correspondence. It survived through Tsarism, Communism, and now Post-Communism, carrying the sensitive papers of Russia’s new private businessmen as well as those of the government. The Secret Mail Service, skinny-dipping at an academic conference, and Meskhetian Turks living amiably in the depths of the Great Russian countryside: Where else in the world can you find things so improbable but in Russia? It is the continually unexpected that renders Russia still as irresistible as salty peanuts and potato chips!