

An American in Magnitogorsk, 1930: Clare F. Saltz's Letter and a Half to His Aunt Hazel in La Crosse, WI

Author: Alison Rowley

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Abstract

This article tells the story of Clare F. Saltz, a married middle-aged man from the Detroit area, who spent roughly two years working in Magnitogorsk in the early 1930s. The included letters predate John Scott's well-known account of the city, and hence offer different information for historians. Saltz's experiences reveal much about everyday life – everything from working conditions, to securing provisions, to social activities – at a time when the Soviet state had fewer resources to invest in cultural work and had yet to establish the food rationing system or the special enclave that offered better accommodations to foreign workers.

An American in Magnitogorsk, 1930: Clare F. Saltz's Letter and a Half to His Aunt Hazel in La Crosse, WI

Alison Rowley

Roughly fifteen years ago, I bought these two letters on eBay. Once I had a chance to read them, I immediately contacted the seller to ask how he acquired them and, if I am honest, to see if he had any others. He let me know that the letters were in a box of papers that he bought at a garage sale, that he knew nothing about the person who wrote them, and that he did not have any more. At that point in my career – when I was a newly hired Assistant Professor – I did not have time to spend on a research project that might not go anywhere, so I too filed the letters away in a box. But I did not forget Clare Saltz and the heartfelt words he wrote to his aunt in the United States in 1930. Now, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, his longing for family, friends and the familiar confines of North American life resonated with me, and I decided this brief research note is the ideal way to ensure that his letters reach a wider audience.

Clare F. Saltz was born to John and Cora (nee Hern) Saltz on 18 August 1899 (or 1890) in La Crosse, WI.¹ The 1890 census puts La Crosse's population at 25,000 and the city – one of the largest in the state – was a center for the lumber and brewing industries. Its economy benefited from being part of the rail link between Milwaukee and St. Paul, MN as well as from having access to the Mississippi River. A decade later, census data shows the family had moved a hundred miles away to the much smaller town of Rock in Wood County. That move meant Clare likely did not benefit from the growing educational opportunities available in La Crosse, where three colleges and universities were established between 1890 and 1912. Instead, this young man, who told census officials in 1930 that he was literate but did not attend school, must have gone to work and his lack of formal or advanced education is perhaps borne out by the frequent spelling errors that pepper his letters as well as his irregular use of punctuation. On April 3, 1911, Clare married Irma Glen (sometimes written Glenn in documents) in Walker County, Georgia. The couple was soon on the move; small want ads in

1. Information about Clare Saltz's life has been drawn from documents found through *Ancestry.com* and *Newspapers.com*. A FOIA request turned up no information about him at all.

the *La Crosse Tribune* for April 26 & 27 show Clare was looking for work in familiar territory. “SITUATION WANTED – Young man of 21 wants work of any kind. Must have work. Address Clare Saltz, 1702 Loomis Street, city”, the earnest sounding text read. Given that a similar ad – this time saying “SITUATION WANTED – MILK DRIVER; 3 YRS experience. CLARE SALTZ. 1630 Devon Av” – ran in *The Chicago Tribune* less than a year later, it is clear that Clare’s hopes for a long-term position in Wisconsin had not panned out.

A five-year gap in the documentary record means we have no sight of Clare Saltz until he registered for the draft in 1917. His registration card provides us with our only physical description of him; it notes that he was of medium build and medium height, with brown hair and blue eyes. By this point, Clare was apparently working as a building superintendent for the Concrete Steel Bridge Co. in Clarksburg, WV. The expansion of his family is evident because Clare asks for an exemption on account of it – noting that he had a wife and two children. These were his daughters Anna (sometimes Annie in census records) and Margaret; son Clare Saltz Jr. was not born until a few years later). By 1920, the family had moved from West Virginia, settling into a rented house in Cuyahoga, OH. That year, the census taker recorded Clare’s occupation as “carpenter,” but given that his wife’s name is erroneously listed as “Mary,” one must take that information with a grain of salt.

At this point, there is another large gap in the documentary record, meaning we have no information about Clare Saltz and his family until 1930. The census that year asked more questions than the one a decade earlier, so we get a few more snippets about their lives. The family lived in a rented house on Jefferson Avenue in Macomb, MI. Macomb is a civil township within Metro Detroit, suggesting that Clare might have been commuting for work in the larger city as he did when they later lived in Ypsilanti, MI. In 1930, Clare gave his occupation as “construction engineer in general building.” We have no way of knowing with any certainty how the Great Depression affected the family’s fortunes but, by the end of that year, Clare Saltz had signed a three-year contract and found himself in Magnitogorsk no later than September. Unlike more well-known engineers and scions of industry who sometimes had the chance to bring their families with them, Clare left his behind. But perhaps he had no choice for, as he implies in one of the letters below, Clare went to the Soviet Union for the money. As he put it: “I intend to fight it out to stay out the time so I will have some means to fall back on.”

And he did stick it out, despite the homesickness he evinces in the letters to his aunt. Passenger lists for the *SS. President Roosevelt* show Clare sailed home from Hamburg Germany on April 13, 1932, which means he left Magnitogorsk at the same time as most of the foreign specialists. Clare’s ship docked in Southampton the next day and then arrived in New York on April 22nd. He traveled second class – so maybe he did manage to save some of his earnings from his time in the USSR – and he told immigration officials that his home address was 1122 Pearl Street, Ypsilanti, MI. The Ypsilanti city directories for 1933 & 1934 describe him as a construction engineer and show that the family had moved to 14 Ford Street.

Clare F. Saltz died in a work-related accident on Saturday January 5, 1935. His death certificate says that he had been working as a “steel worker” for the past two years. An autopsy showed that he died from “shock and intercranial hemorrhage following crushing fractures of [the] skull.” His injuries were the result of a 21-foot fall while trying to make a pipe connection and his death was deemed accidental. Clare Saltz is buried in Highland Cemetery in Ypsilanti, MI.²

The letters that are reproduced here – unedited and in their entirety – are a valuable source concerning the earliest days of Magnitogorsk and the roles that Americans played in its development. Since Clare Saltz arrived almost two full years before John Scott, he describes a very different, and less privileged, world than the one we see in the latter’s widely read account, *Behind the Urals*.³ The food rationing system had yet to be introduced and the waves of kulak deportees sent to work on the site had yet to arrive. Construction of the special enclave which offered better accommodation and a more comfortable way of life to foreign specialists was only just being completed. Since, at this point, the authorities were scrambling to provide even basic housing and services, there was little time or money to devote to cultural activities and propaganda work, which left the population free to determine how they spent their time away from work – a subject which Clare addresses at some length for his relatives. But all was not fun and games, for references to some of more ominous aspects of Soviet life – notably to censorship and the removal of Soviet personnel from their jobs – do creep into the letters and foreshadow the purges and arrests that Scott describes in detail.

LETTER ONE –

[Start page 2] This country seems to grow a kind of black wheat because the bread is almost black. Large loaves about 18” long by 10” the other way. Most all the labor works sub contract each laborer digs his particular hole and is paid by the meter. There is no unemployment in fact we need at least a thousand laborers on the several jobs. Lumber is plentiful logs are used for all timbering round. I have seen several people making lumber by sawing logs lengthwise with a crescent saw. One man gets up on top of some high horses the log is also on the horses the saw is raised by the man on top but cuts only on the downward stroke pulled by the man below. The wheelbarrows are all so wide at the handle you can hardly reach between them. This makes them very awkward, imagine trying to push a wheelbarrow with both hands straight out. Work clothes seem to be made of a kind of gummy sack material boots of leather are on the better clad people. The peasants wear some shoes made of woven wood strips. In summer nearly everyone is barefooted men and women. I was in the former czars house was in

2. Saltz’s headstone (which he shares with his wife), as well as his death certificate, can be seen here: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/150896615/clare-f.-saltz> [Accessed 15 May 2021]

3. John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia’s City of Steel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

the room he died in. Ill [sic] tell you about that make sometime after I am back. I went through all the museums in Moscow and 2 other cities art galleries I guess thats misspelled but I havent any dictionary now. Berlin is in the town to see relics in. The language is very hard to learn. I don't know if I will ever get it. So many words are so near alike. Ne ponie meya means I don't understand but ya ponie meya means exactly opposite. Say Ivebeen [sic] away a whole day did you miss me? I just had a seamstress call and sew some of my coat linings and I couldn't get her to take a cent of pay how do such people get along is more than I can say. I live in a new Hotel that is not quite done yet.⁴ It has been pretty dirty around here the sewers dont run yet and we have water once in a while in the pipes. It seems strange to me to do everything by hand. All the lumber is planed by hand all the trim lumber is chopped out with an ax and then about half planed [illegible word] and then nailed up. We will have steam heat someday. They are building our power house for central heat. If I get cold Ill run down to the central heat plant. I would guess this town to be about 30 or 40 thousand people and they say there were only a few hundred a year ago. A huge camp you can imagine. **[Start page 3]** They tell me there are some good hunting grounds in the Ural mountains about 40 miles west of here. It is noised around there is fishing near here also on the way here at several of our stops we could buy eggs, cucumbers milk (boiled) and a few tomatoes at some places they had pears and peaches but dont think about the cost and every thing will be lovely unless you happen to buy rotten eggs and 12 ½ cents each for eggs and ½ of them rotten adds to the zest. You will be thinking Im blue but 50 cents for a pear will make any one homesick did I tell you about getting homesick I played a piece on the phonograph called the "Spring time in the Rockies".⁵ It says among other things "when its spring time in the Rockies Ill be coming home to you" and those words together with a very sweet melody moved me to tears. I dont like leaving all of you people for so long. I have such a good time when I got to Sparta Id just love to live near you and Aunt Belle.⁶ If I can stay out the three years mabe I can visit you people more. I would write direct to Aunt Belle but I am very busy now and this letter can do for both of you if you will be so kind to show it to her. I remember my Aunt Belle in my childhood days and spent many hours of pleasure with her I only wish I could see her after and have many real visits. How well I remember when she was a young school teacher and that little John Davis was coming around. I used to get jealous because she liked to talk to him out in the hammock under the big oak trees of the Cole place. I couldnt understand why I was in the way. haha. I was probably all of five years old at the time. The hours spent at the old farm are with me yet. I remember I used to bawl a week every time I had to go back to La Crosse to live. Well Im writing about Wisconsin instead of Russia. I cant write much as the most

4. This was the Magnitogorsk Central Hotel.

5. "When It's Springtime in the Rockies" was written by Mary Hale Woolsey and Robert Sauer. The single Saltz is referring to was recorded by Bud and Joe Billings and released in July 1929. Gene Autry's 1937 version is better known. See <https://secondhandsongs.com/work/138137/all> [Accessed May 15, 2021]

6. Sparta, WI is just under 30 miles from La Crosse, where Saltz was born.

interesting things are not [Start page 4] written about and you may never get this letter. I have tried not tell anything objectionable but I dont know this kind censor but let me thank him in advance to pass this letter. You don't know how much letters mean way out here and it seems so long between word from the States. I have heard from Irma twice since I came in [illegible] weeks so I think some at least of the letters never get through. I was certainly glad to get your letter and I hope the little information I have given will help some when I get back. I think Ill take the platform haha. Like some of the people who make those trips to the South pole etc. I may think its the North pole before I get out of here. They say it gets 40 below here. Its my day off tomorrow if I can get water enough together Ill take a bath and get my laundry together write to Irma and my mother. I heard from both of them about a week ago working every day you lose track of what day it is. I think this is Saturday. You see we are supposed to work 5 days and off the 6th day this throws the week days off. I hope someone keeps track of the day of the month for I wont know when my three years is up. My how I envied you going to a show in La Crosse. Id give all my rubles to see a good talkie. We are allowed to receive bundles by mail but the duty is very high and some things you cant afford to send. I know of a case where a party bought 3 pairs of silk hose (Ladies) and the duty was 90 rubles about 45 dollars or \$15 per pair. Socks are the same. Foodstuffs will come through but duty is very high. Ill be glad to pay the duty because by xmas Ill have so many rubles I wont know what to do with them. Ill try and send some xmas cards from Russia if I can only buy some. Perhaps by standing in line my off day I can get permission to buy some picture cards to show you what a drosky looks like and some of their [Start page 5] buildings. It takes 14 days for a letter to get to Moscow and about 2 weeks for them to send it on to me. Just about a month each way will hit it about right. I have no assurance yet that my letters are going out. I havent received any answer from a letter written here. This a very large operation as large as the Panama Canal and nearly as much cost. Digging till you cant rest. I am designing form work for all the jobs. I go in and get the jobs all laid out and made up and move on to another place. I like my job very much and if only I can stay it out I can do something when I get back to the States. Mabe I can get some of you for business partners when I get back. Ill organize a stock company and sell shares haha. In Moscow the buildings bear the marks of struggle most of the sidewalks are torn up. The streets are paved with cobble stones a few automobiles run through the streets and pay no attention to the people who jump and run to get out of the way. Street cars that look like the Chicago ave line in Chicago run in trains of about 3 cars each. Never any seats and no place to stand. They seem to all want to go home at once. A few vendors of fruit are still selling pears at 50 cents each and peaches at 2 for 50 cents. There are about 1/10 enough places to eat in. No real restaurants mostly those café type sort of cellar café. A meal costs at least 2 dollars. Beer 50 cents a bottle and no soft drinks like you get at any stand in the U.S. to be had. Im homesick for a hot dog stand or a gas station. There is no such a thing here. You see small stations about 12 feet square at some street corners

you see a long line of people lined up to get something and when you find out what they probably have some cabbage a few apples some potatoes, black bread and cigarettes and you find after you get through the line that money wont buy anything you have to have a card to buy. I gave up after the first experience. Yesterday two of our party left for the States. They [**Start page 6**] were good and homesick. I know they will cry when they see that good statue of liberty at New York Harbor as I did when it was dimming to my view. I know what it means now to live in the best country on the globe. One has to leave U.S. to know what a heaven it is. I intend to fight it out to stay out the time so I will have some means to fall back on. There will be a job here 5 years hence I guess. Some of the men make more than I do I know one man making \$150 more than I. I may get a raise if I put it over. Ill have to stop or Ill have to charter a ship to carry this letter. I want to hear from you as often as you can spare the time and Ill drop bits of pictures from time to time so you can construct how it looks. I have pictured a skeleton and any thing you may tell your club wont be far wrong if you picture Montana and its barren ness. There is no effort to make any thing beautiful in fact beauty doesnt enter into any consideration anywhere. The [illegible] isn't there. A Raw open new country yet to be developed. A few American tools and when they learn to run the tools the thing can go. A lot of children playing with toys and liking to take time to play too. An argument must enter into every operation and if talk and jabber would build the job we would be already on our way back. Every one is a student and wants to know why and how before they will believe you. Every word name and picture I say and draw is written down as though it was gold, ha ha. To draw form work as I have here is new to all. Will both of you write me from time to time and Ill always be more than pleased. Give my regards to Uncle Mait Uncle John, Grover and for yourselves I send a regard I cant express and may you be kept in health and may God grant I may be spared to again spend some happy hours in dear old Sparta. Until next time good bye Clare.

Union of Soviet Socialist
 Republics.
 Magnitogorsk
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 Magnitostroy.
 Nov. 12 1930
 Dear Hazel:- your answer to my letter of Sept 25
 attempting to describe some of this country at hand
 I was delighted to find out that they would pass such
 a letter. I had my doubts about your ever receiving
 it. The picture this morning is one of winter snow
 as far as you can see and while very bright its
 pretty cold. I have been sick for three days
 myself and I feel pretty good again but I am awful
 weak. My hand wont write very well either but I
 trust somehow you can read it. I sure put in a
 miserable three days. We had a dance at the
 American Dining Room and I tried to dance
 the Russian Waltzes and got over heated and over
 strained too and ever since I've been bungled up.
 They played some of our waltz like "Over the snow"
 they played it so fast it was about tripple time
 and I tried my best to keep up but had to fall out
 before the dance was through. Later in the evening
 they were playing a game similar to "postoffice".
 They put a man and a woman in the center of a
 circle of people the people composing the ring
 were to hit the woman out, but not the man
 he was to try and catch her and land a kiss while
 she was in the center. I looked on for a while and
 finally they pushed me into the center and a
 big girl who sits on the table here who is so large
 we call her "Ting" I havent going to be out done
 in an attempt anyhow. I had some struggle
 but I finally made her give up by using
 the half Nelson hold. I smacked her hard
 amid the applause of a couple of hundred
 people. I must have wrinched my back in the
 scuffle, because in the ~~morning~~ morning I awoke
 so lame and stiff I could hardly move alone my
 wrist. I worked that day at the board but I
 didnt get much done and kept getting worse.
 I come home and ~~later~~ took a hot bath and
 soaked for 2 hrs in the hottest water I could
 stand this relieved me some but I was sure
 miserable in the morning. I tried to get a
 Chiro tractor and there is no such thing around
 here. I tried to have one of our boys treat me and

LETTER TWO

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Magnitogorsk
Uralsky – oblast
Magnitostroy

Nov. 12 1930

Dear Hazel: - your answer to my letter of Sept 25 attempting to describe some of this country at hand. I was delighted to find out that they would pass such a letter. I had my doubts about you ever receiving it. The picture this morning is one of winter snow as far as you can see and while very bright its pretty cold. I have been sick for three days myself and I feel pretty good again but I am awful weak. My hand wont write very well either but I trust somehow you can read it. I sure put in a miserable three days. We had a dance at the American Dining Room and I tried to dance the Russian waltzes and got over heated and over strained too and ever since Ive been bunged up. They played some of our waltzes like “Over the Waves.”⁷ They played it so fast it was about tripple time and I tried my best to keep up but had to fall out before the dance was through. Later in the evening they were playing a game similar to “post office”.⁸ They put a man and a woman in the center of a circle of people the people composing the ring were to let the woman out, but not the man he was to try and catch her and land a kiss while she was in the center. I looked on for a while and finally they pushed me into the center and a big girl who waits on the table here who is so large we call her ‘Tiny’. I wasn’t going to be out done in an attempt anyhow. I had some struggle but I finally made her give up by using the half nelson hold. I smacked her hard amid the applause of a couple of hundred people. I must have wrenched my back in the scuffle because in the morning I was so lame and stiff I could hardly move above my waist. I worked that day at the board but I didn’t get much done and kept getting worse. I came home and took a hot bath and soaked for 2 hrs in the hottest water I could stand this releaved me some but I was sure miserable in the morning. I tried to get a chiropractor and there is no such thing around here. I tried to have one of our boys treat me and [Start page 2] he made a good stab at it and in a couple of hours I could feel I was getting stronger. My pulse got so feeble I thought they would stop altogether, but after this heating and twisting I made him give me it improved. I feel pretty well today except very weak and

7. “Sobre las olas,” (“Over the Waves” in English; “Ueber den Wellen” in German) was written by Mexican composer Juventino Rosas (1868-1894). The waltz was published in 1888. See Guadalupe P. Quintana P., ““Over the Waves’: The Mexican Waltz that Conquered the World,” www.puertovallarta.net, https://www.puertovallarta.net/fast_facts/over-the-waves-juventino-rosas. [Accessed 15 May 2015]

8. References to a kissing game called “Post Office” can be found in American popular culture as far back as the 1880s. See “Post office (game),” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post_office_\(game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post_office_(game)). [Accessed 15 May 2021]

shaky. I cover with perspiration very easily and I dont want to take any more cold now. Ill stay off from work one more day at least. One thing about this job you dont lose time due. Cant tell though there is apt to be a blow up and mabe we wont have a job long. It isnt likely but you never can tell over here. They pull their own bosses out and fire them so much it makes me leary. Not long ago they made away with 48 of their head men in Moscow. One is up against conditions we cant imagine over there. I never realized that countries could be so different. They want to do everything by hand all the time. The shovels they use are so poor it is long handled like our long handled shovel but has no crook at the shovel in the handle and no dish in the shovel its self. The wheel barrows are all wood wheel and all except for the axle they make the handles too far apart so your hands are straight out nearly where they lift them up to go. Your description of Drosky is about right all the horses have a yoke over their collar fastened to the shafts. The body of a Drosky is any shape from our old [illegible word] type to a one horse wagon. Most of them are weaved baskets with a seat crosswise. There are millions of them. Cars are very scarce we have 3 for our use. The place about we are was a field a year ago and now they have about 25000 town here no theatres, no stores, no churches, only barracks and camps. Our village is about 4 miles from the job and quite decent compared to some of the places. All the houses here have double windows one in the outside and one on the inside. Last night I was sleeping away and one of my inside windows blew out and smashed all over the floor thats a real tragedy for I dont know where I can get some more glass. I was so sorry to hear of your fathers illness. I trust ere this he is well again. Winter is a dangerous time and we must be very careful not to get caught. Ill go to no more dances [**Start page 3**] believe me.

I have been for about a month drawing designs of different kinds of concrete control mixing plants. All sorts of combinations I'm trying to design a steel derrick now to use in the plants. I never had any actual experience trying to build with steel and its up bull work. I think as far as due gone its safe enough. I sure have to look up a lot of dope. I cant remember all the formulas etc. When I come back from here if I say out the time I should be able to do anything. Im getting a varied experience. We fill in the evenings pretty well several nights ago they had comunity singing. Irma sent me 3 song books and we practice singing once or twice a week. There is one piano here and a woman who plays some. We play poker about 2 nights a week and write letters read etc other nights. It isnt safe to run out of the village at night so everyone stays in at night. We have military passes but I dont care to run around nights anyhow. You couldnt go anywhere nor do anything without some agent goes along so there is no fun in going all the car drivers interpreters etc are lined up if you get what I mean. This eternal feeling of being watched gets your goat. I have quite a good house now steam heated and while not furnished as it should be does pretty well better than that cold Hotel. Theyve turned on the heat there now though. Our water problem remains. All drinking water must be boiled and we must be saving on that. I had letters from Irma the other day saying she was sending the 'Post' and she said she had sent a

pair of working gloves song books etc the song books came through but nothing of the other packages heard of. I do not hold much faith of any merchandise coming through. There is so much want most everything is stolen I guess. Its a long way to america and a lot of hands handle a package we can never tell where it stops going. Razor blades are my most urgent need but Irma says she has sent them. I can get barber work done though so that dont hurt so much. Will manage to stand it I guess now that the hardest part is over that first few weeks were so long and dreary. Not being able to talk the language makes it pretty hard. **[Start page 4]** The upper class you speak of are no more. You can guess what happened to them. There is a lot that will never be told I guess. Im not getting along very fast with my Russian. I know a few words you would change your mind about learning it when you get into it. German is much easier I think. I think the stories you speak of were true because they wouldn't dare print it if it wasn't. Yes they always serve tea in glasses and most places coffee too. The mail is a irregular problem and you would wonder how any of it got over here when you look at the disorder in the stations and post offices. Unless you buy stamps early (about 4 am) you simply cant get them there is a line a block long trying to buy stamps get permission stand in line for it and then stand in line to get the goods. Thats the shopping tours over here. After you go through the 2nd line you find they havent got what you want. ha.ha. I dont try because theirs no use. I should think those blocks would bring up old scenes. That was the time when I knew Hazel also and went fishing etc. Those were happy moments indeed and I will always remember that spring at your place accross the street from the Wisconsin Hotel as well as Sparta people and the whole Lacrosse destries [?] are very dear to me and I long for the time when I can again see all of you. Three years is a long time to take out of ones life at this time of my life and it took a big fight with myself to agree to do it. I miss so much everything that makes america so worthwhile. It is indeed the best country on earth (except of course Russia) haha. You can actually figure when you can take a train over there here you may go today and you may not go for a month depending on conditions and someones agreeableness. Some of the boys are able to go hunting about once a week and we get some game to eat that way. There are prairie chickens some ducks and geese large rabbits. We have about twice a week the best wall eyed pike fish I ever ate. I should judge they weigh about 10 lbs. I think they come from a sea about 300 miles from here. They are certainly good. The dishes they want to give you in the morning are fried pie and a kind of waffle with hard boiled eggs in them. I dont like either another distasteful dish is fried rice fried like potatoes. **[Start page 5]** They put rice and roast beef together also. There are 4 kinds of drinks available to americans a "vodka" which is (in appearance) like our white corn whiskey champhansky genuine champaign and 2 or 3 kinds of other wines and "conyack".⁹ I dont drink

9. This reference to alcoholic beverages is interesting since the sale of vodka and beer was apparently prohibited during the first two years of Magnitogorsk's construction – a prohibition that some got around by visiting nearby settlements to purchase vodka. The ban ended in the mid-1930s. See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 189.

any of them so I'm out on that score. Candies available are country chocolate 4 kinds of bar chocolate beginning at 1.40 to 4 Rubles a bar. Until recently there were Russian cigarettes available but I am told they are going to be out before long. On 3 days a week Friday Saturday & Sunday there is a peasants market about 6 miles from here. The prices will knock you cold but the articles were pretty good. I saw potatoes as good as you could want 2 Rubles a peck. There is all kinds of fresh killed meat there. A peasant kills an animal & does his best to sell out some come in and camp the whole 3 days. There is onions, beans, eggs, and earlier melons. An abundance of hay straw etc. Much the same as any farmer would bring. The butter is not salted here. It isn't salted in Berlin either. I guess we invented that once there. There isn't any chance of going hungry over here this year as long as we get Rubles enough. I understand there are over 300 cars of potatoes here now. That seems like a lot of potatoes. The crops were sure good over here all over Europe. When we sighted England I was struck with how green everything looked France and Germany the same way. One does not realize how much territory this country covers. It is vast indeed. There are vast deposits of all kinds of ores in fact I think they have wonderful natural resources. They are like Mexicans a lot though tomorrow is the day never today and they are long on promises and very short on performance. I sure would like to see more dirt dug will never get done if they don't get the dirt out of the way. It certainly is a big project much too big for anyone to handle in that short time. We can stop the Ural river any time we want to now.¹⁰ Just now it's a creek about ½ as big as Lacrosse River. There is a perfect site for a dam though and they have it nearly built. We just heard there was four feet of snow in Buffalo New York and we only have about 3" here. Its cool but not cold. [Start **page 6**] I think the real way to get over this country is by plane. The Railroads will always be congested and the plane isn't so much more only about twice fare. On my vacation I think I'll fly to Berlin. I can fly there in 3 days or parts of days. It takes about 3 hours to fly what the train takes 2 days to go and in about 7 hrs more to cover what the main line trains make in 48 hours.¹¹ The biggest delay getting out of here is getting permission to leave Moscow it usually takes 5 days. The trains are so sold out too you can hardly get passage. One thing on the main line of the Trans-Siberian they sure do run and the sleepers are as good as ours. On branch lines the Pullmans are what they call "traveling soft" small compartments with 4 beds crosswise the train 2 on each side of the compartment one above the other. There are no blankets or pillows furnished in a "travel soft" car. The next class is the same scheme only wooden seats are the beds one above the other. The third class can be anything from a old car with wooden benches on it to an ordinary box car and no seats. Our train in here had

10. In 1930 a dam was built on the Ural River in order to supply the steel factory with water. Supply problems persisted however since the dam was not sufficiently deep. Work on a second, much larger, dam began immediately but it was not finished until 1938. See Kotkin, 92.

11. In these early years, there was no direct train route from Moscow to Magnitogorsk. Travellers had to change trains five times and the trip regularly took at least a week. See Kotkin, 106.

about 8 box cars filled with peasants. They were packed in so thick they had to stand. I wonder how they stood it for 48 hours. I told you before how they stopped for about an hour at each station. Ive found out since they had to stop for steam to get up. Well Ive about written the limit again and Im so sorry the writing is so poor but my hand is pretty unsteady yet due to weakness. How Id like to drop in at your club and give you a talk cant be told but I trust some of the available information will be useful. I think by the time I am out of here I could tell some real experiences at building under such difficulties. There are many problems yet unsolved one is the almost universal distrust and suspicion. You never will be able to override it completely I feel it myself ha ha. Well Hazel your letters are one bright shot in the winter and darkness let me hear often as you can conveniently find to write. Clare. love to all of you

About the author

Dr. Alison Rowley is a Professor in the Department of History at Concordia University (Montreal) and Past-President of the *Canadian Association of Slavists*. She is the author of a number of articles and the following books: *Putin Kitsch in America* (McGill-Queen's, 2019) and *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard, 1880-1922* (University of Toronto Press, 2013).