Reflections on Russian-American Relations... 10 Years Later

This issue of the *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*) marks the end of the tenth year of the journal. We are extremely proud of the work we have done together over the past ten years as an editorial board with our authors and reviewers! We look forward to ten more years! Some of the members of the editorial board offer below some reflections on the journal and the field of Russian-American relations over the past ten years in their own ways. Much has changed since we started in 2017, but we persist in our work to provide an outlet for publishing in this field as we move forward.

A note of thanks is necessary here. The staff at the University of Kansas Libraries has hosted the journal since the beginning. Without their assistance in this endeavor, there would be no journal. Marianne Reed, Pam LeRow, and Eric Bader have been excellent to work with over the years, and they deserve great praise for keeping this journal afloat. We appreciate their work so much! Thank you!

The other note of thanks is to the editorial board. The editorial board has always been the same and their dedication to the journal is highly appreciated. The original co-managing editors were Norman Saul and Ben Whisenhunt. A few years ago, Norman took a step back and remains on the board. Lee Farrow stepped forward to be the co-managing editor. The board also includes David S. Foglesong, Lybov Ginzburg, Ivan I. Kurilla, Matt Miller, Norman Saul, and Victoria I. Zhuravleva.

History of the *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*)
by Ben Whisenhunt

The story of this journal begins nearly twenty years ago. I emailed Norman Saul a question about a book I was working on at the time about Russian traveler, diplomat, and painter Pavel S. Svin'in. Norman graciously answered my question and further inquired about my research and future ideas. This started a conversation that became an opening to a new group of scholars working in this field. Norman, of course, had written several books on the broad history of Russian-American relations that were instrumental for people like me moving into this field. Through Norman, I met many of the people in the field, including the people you see on our editorial board.

These conversations turned into conference panels, conferences in the US and Russia, and more. Eventually, Norman and I co-edited a volume on Russian-American relations published by Routledge. At that same time – about ten or eleven years ago, these conversations also led to the creation of a book series. This series was originally published by Slavica Publishers, but now it is the Anthem Americans in Revolutionary Russia series published by Anthem Press. Norman and I were the series co-editors in the beginning. Lee Farrow is now a co-series editor, and the series has eighteen books in print. These were accounts

by Americans who were in revolutionary Russia between 1914 and 1921, with scholarly introductions, footnotes, and indexes.

During this time, though, there was an ongoing conversation about the need for an academic journal in this small, but important, field. Norman and I both wanted a print journal, but we began to see that this was not feasible. So, we connected with the University of Kansas Libraries and created the *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*) as an online, peer-reviewed journal. To be honest, it was a lot of trial and error. Marianne Reed, especially, at Kansas helped us avoid many errors along the way.

Our goal in the beginning was just trying to get the issues out, so several elements were not included. For instance, we did not require abstracts, but we do now. A note of thanks to Joanna Dobrowolska (recent Ph.D. in Polish history from the University of Illinois Chicago) who helped us create abstracts, update our website, and apply for a Web of Science designation. We also did not have covers. Several years into the process, Lee Farrow volunteered her son, Benjamin Farrow IV, to create our book covers. He moved from being a high school student to a professional graphic designer. He still does our covers. Thank you so much.

Without question, though, over the years this is a true labor of love. There is no massive organization behind it, nor does it have a massive budget (or a budget at all!). It is these people above giving their time and effort toward a project that provides a space for discussing a topic that we find meaningful. It is gratifying that more people have found our journal. This is because of the increasing volume of our publications, but also to the social media work of Lee Farrow. It is also rewarding to see material published in our journal now being cited in other scholarly articles and books. It is an indication that we are doing good work here.

As readers of our journal probably know, Norman Saul, is one of the leading figures in this field. It has been a true honor to work with him on many projects over the past twenty years, especially this journal. Even though he has stepped back from day-to-day work on these projects, his scholarly work and generosity over many years is unmatched. It is hard to express the importance of his being a part of these projects. Simply said: thank you!

Since we started this journal, Russian-American relations have changed fairly dramatically. We started about two years after the initial Russian invasion of Ukraine and now, of course, we are more than four years into a regional war. This has made cooperation across the Atlantic with our Russian friends and colleagues more difficult. It is more difficult for Russians to come to the US and more difficult for the Americans to travel to Russia. There are even political implications for Russians cooperating with Americans. There have been dark times in the relations before, but that makes the need for a journal like ours even more important. So, we have decided to persist to help bring light where there is darkness.

As always, we are always looking for articles, reviewers, etc. So, please take this opportunity to join us in our second decade of scholarly output! We would love to hear from you.

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Beyond the Prologue: JRAS at Its Tenth Anniversary
by Lyubov Ginzburg

This project also has its own prologue.
Norman Saul, Professor Emeritus, the University of Kansas
Journal of Russian American Studies, Special Edition, *Ernest Poole*
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When Russian-American art photographer Mark Serman found himself on the roof of the State Hermitage Museum, he experienced what he described as "his first encounter with perfection as [he] understood it then." Beyond the exceptional vantage point, he was struck by "an unusually high key diffused lighting … with enough haze in the air" that cast a "shadowless glow allowing one to shoot in any direction."[1]

That "long-forgotten feeling of a shift in space" came over Serman again several years later, when he was standing atop a New York skyscraper, "glued to the sights unseen and unexpected … completely humbled and awed by this avalanche of new sensations."[2]

In the fall and winter of 2016-2017, a collection of Serman's photographic impressions was on display at Columbia University in Manhattan under the title "Urban Poetry: St. Petersburg - New York." Although praised as "one of the Harriman Institute's most successful exhibits in the twenty years that we have been mounting exhibitions...,"[3] it was not mentioned in the nascent *Journal of Russian American Studies* that released its first issue only months after the show was over. Today, while reflecting upon versatile multidimensional and bilingual content of the publication on the occasion of its tenth anniversary, we are borrowing the photographer's associations, and thus finally making up for this inadvertent omission.

The journal is not published on behalf of any organization, government agency or think tank. Rather, it is driven by the collective effort of its editorial board, led by Dr. Lee Farrow of Auburn University at Montgomery and Dr. William Benton Whisenhunt of the College of DuPage, to steer toward a research altitude, which allows, as Serman once put it, for "all the points of compass and approaches [to be] covered."[4] The ever-expanding scope of themes, concepts, places, events and personalities discussed, analyzed or deconstructed in the periodical, turned it into a gripping page-turner series, with keenly anticipated new releases. Each issue promises to unleash yet another set of Russian American encounters that flow into a confluence of the two streams, swelling from the interplay of myths and realities, cultural influences, political pronouncements, ideological divisions, moments of rapprochement, military posturing, and personal experiences, such as Serman's Petersburg-New York rooftop flânerie, among countless others.

From its conception, the founding editors - Professor Emeritus of the

[1] Mark Serman, "Mark Serman Photography Exhibition," Russian American Cultural Center. Available at Russian American Cultural Center - Mark Serman Photography Exhibition

[2] Op. cit.

[3] Photography by Mark Serman. Available at Zenfolio | Photography by Mark Serman | About

[4] Mark Serman, "Mark Serman Photography Exhibition."

University of Kansas, Norman Saul and Dr. Whisenhunt - envisioned a forum for publicizing research rooted in rigorous analysis of historical context cleared from variables of changing politics and regimes. The publication permeates contributors' knowledge and wisdom stemming from decades of scholarship, deep appreciation of the freedom to transcend the boundaries, and sincere efforts to unveil the humanistic component of our field of studies. From its pages authors appeal to shared history rather than strategic vagaries, seeking to revisit precedents of meaningful engagement between the two geopolitical giants and their populations, emphasizing these tangencies' consequential outcome for the entire planet.

As the journal enters its second decade, navigating through Russian American currents is growing ever urgent and, at times, more challenging. The torrent is becoming muddier and more turbulent, steadily roaring over its well-established and carefully explored streamway, eroding entrenched assumptions and juxtapositions, the tendency to pit strength against each other, or win the other side over. Instead, it now runs into unchartered waters of unfathomable infatuation with the rogue obscurant prowess within the top echelons of the American establishment, on the one hand, and, on the other, the foreseeable rise of a new generation of the Democratic Socialists of America who are fearless of this political label since most of them came of age long after the fall of the Soviet state and thus not been affected by the Cold War propaganda. Meanwhile, Russian elites are sneering with schadenfreude at yet another awkward attempt to "play the Russian card" in America's internal struggle, and ordinary citizens in both countries take their frustrations out on "the other," falling victims to misunderstanding, misrepresentations, bitterness, and enmity. All of this unfolds against the backdrop of raging wars and deepening global uncertainty.

Our articles will continue to respond to treacherous trends and contentious dystopian narratives, calling phenomena and actions by their real names, in order to avoid being swept away by crushing ignorance or drawn into the black holes of disinformation.

When asked about his work of over four decades that includes the four-volume magnum opus chronicling two centuries of history of Russian-American relations, Dr. Saul referred to his scholarly approach as a "comprehensive treatment of the topic," acknowledging that there is always more to be found, or, as he aptly put it, "more trunks out of attics" to be retrieved. In that spirit, the editorial board welcomes more discoveries that deepen our appreciation of the past and help us make sense of the present, defying the recurrent threats of our times to further distort, marginalize, or altogether disregard history and other social sciences. And just as ostensibly foreign urban landscapes converged in the discerning eye of the photographer,[5] so too do seemingly disparate lofts and garrets coalesce into a more coherent whole, while the contents of those "trunks" inside continue to evoke the famous prophecy of Russia and America's common destiny.

Postscriptum

On a personal note, although I never had the opportunity to behold my native St. Petersburg from atop the Winter Palace, as a teenager and later as a young adult, I ascended to many roofs and mansards, including the glass-and-iron tower

[5] Василий Рудич, «Город, образ и взгляд: фотографии Марка Сермана», in *Elegant New York*, December 2016. Available at https://elegantnewyork.com/mark-serman-exhidition/

of the American Singer Manufacturing Company, which rises above its carefully gauged Neoclassical neighbors lamenting the loss of its landmark counterpart of Lower Manhattan. There was even a slimmer chance that I might locate the cluster of New York rooftops huddled together in one of Stern's photographs. And yet, against all odds, our universes, spanning two continents and myriads of similar structures adorned with graffiti and studded with "huge crystals" of skylights,[6] seemed to collide when I ran into his picture while jogging across the Manhattan Bridge and capturing snapshots of city life during the COVID pandemic. I rediscovered that still image right outside my long-term home in the city as it came to life with residents, driven from their apartments by lockdown, gathered on rooftops to seek respite from isolation, banging pots and pans to cheer for first responders.



Photographs by Mark Serman exhibited at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, New York. Fall – Winter, 2016- 2017. To view more photographs of Petersburg and New York cityscapes by Mr. Serman, visit https://www.markserman.com/

[6] Mark Serman, "Mark Serman Photography Exhibition," Russian American Cultural Center.

Studying Russian American Relations in an Era of Rupture: Access, Distance, and Presentism
by Ivan I. Kurilla

Since February 2022, historians of Russian-American relations have faced a paradoxical situation. The demand for historical explanation has grown just as many of the institutional conditions that made independent research possible, including access to sources and sustained professional contact in both countries, have been dismantled. Russia's war against Ukraine and subsequent policy decisions in Russia and the United States transformed a gradual erosion of the field, underway at least since 2014, into the near-collapse of Russian-American academic exchange and cooperation.

Many of these developments affect the much broader study of Russia and Eastern Europe. Their consequences are particularly significant for the history of Russian-American relations, however, because this is by its nature a relational field. Its practice has depended on simultaneous engagement with sources, scholarly communities, and historiographical traditions in both countries.

Many American specialists on Russia have been barred from entering the country. Since the beginning of the war, travel to Russia has also become unsafe, while cooperation with Russian universities has become undesirable or explicitly prohibited. Russian scholars, meanwhile, face greater difficulties in obtaining U.S. visas, sharply higher travel costs, and restrictions imposed by the Russian state on cooperation with the United States as an "unfriendly country." A number of American universities and professional organizations have been designated "undesirable" by the Russian authorities, making cooperation with them or participation in their activities potentially subject to fines or criminal prosecution.

Opportunities for joint projects, research in archives and libraries in the other country, personal contact, and sustained scholarly discussion have consequently declined dramatically. The expanding volume of digitized books, articles, and archival materials has helped sustain research, but the increasing fragmentation of digital access, especially on the Russian side but partly on the American side as well, has reduced even these possibilities. Russian authorities have made the websites of the National Electronic Library, e-library, and many state institutions inaccessible from outside Russia. American databases have terminated subscriptions for Russian universities, while some websites cannot be accessed from Russian IP addresses. U.S. and other Western financial sanctions have also made it difficult or impossible for individuals in Russia to pay for services in the United States, including database access and archival digitization.

The result is an asymmetry of knowledge. Researchers retain easier access to the sources, databases, and institutions on their own side of the divide, while materials on the other side become increasingly difficult to reach. Scholarship thus risks returning to a situation in which it is easier to study "how the United States viewed Russia" or "how Russians viewed the United States" than to reconstruct the interaction of the two societies and states. The asymmetry itself is uneven. Restrictions are more extensive on the Russian side, where fewer digitized collections are available, leaving scholars based in the United States with greater room for maneuver.

The war has also changed the geography of the scholarly community. Many Russian scholars have left the country; those who remain work under substantially

greater political and legal risks; and once bilateral professional networks are now dispersed among Russia, the United States, and numerous centers of emigration. The field can no longer be mapped neatly onto the territories of Russia and the United States. A Russian specialist may now work in Berlin, Prague, Riga, Yerevan, or at an American university, retaining language skills, professional contacts, and years of accumulated archival experience while losing access to new materials in Russian archives. A scholar who remains in Russia may still have physical access to those archives but far less freedom to participate in international academic cooperation.

For historians of Russian-American relations, this dispersal has a particular significance. What was once largely a bilateral field is increasingly becoming a transnational scholarly network whose geography coincides with neither Russia nor the United States.

A new structure of opportunities and constraints is also producing a different professional experience for younger scholars. A historian entering the field today may have access to far more digitized material than someone who began research twenty years ago, while having far less direct familiarity with Russia or with the Russian academic community. This changes the evidentiary base of scholarship, but it also changes the intellectual perspective from which evidence is approached.

The generational consequences may prove among the most durable effects of the present crisis. Current restrictions may eventually disappear, but scholars formed under them will remain. Senior researchers often spent years working in Russian archives, living in the country, building professional networks, and assembling personal collections of sources. Younger historians are entering the profession under a very different regime of access. The resulting generational divide may therefore concern more than the sources scholars use. It may also shape their understanding of what it means to be a specialist on Russia and on Russian American relations.

The broader transformations in Russian Studies have a more specific consequence for our field: they are changing the questions historians ask of the Russian-American past. Since 2022, that past has inevitably been reread through the prism of current confrontation. Empire, geopolitical rivalry, images of the enemy, propaganda, ideology, security, and historical memory have moved to the foreground. The shift is especially visible in the wider field of Russian Studies. ASEEES made "decolonization" the theme of its 2023 convention as part of a broader effort to reconsider inherited Russocentric hierarchies. Debate has followed over the extent to which this turn corrects genuine blind spots in earlier historiography and the extent to which the present war is itself retrospectively reorganizing our understanding of the field.

For historians of Russian-American relations, the more consequential question is what decolonization does to the object of study itself. If "Russia" is no longer automatically treated as the organizing center of the entire former imperial and Soviet space, the history of contacts with the United States changes as well. Russian-American relations increasingly have to be considered alongside U.S. connections with other societies and polities of the former imperial and Soviet space, including Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and other parts of Central Asia. The Russian state can no longer be taken for granted as the sole framework for organizing the history of American encounters with the territories and peoples of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. This shift corrects an older state-centered perspective. At the same time, it

creates a risk of presentism if contemporary national and political boundaries are projected too directly into the past.

Presentism poses a broader problem for the history of Russian-American relations. The current confrontation may encourage a teleological reading in which the entire preceding history of the relationship appears to lead toward the crisis of the present. Cooperation, mutual curiosity, transnational connections, and when genuine alternatives remained open begin to look like deviations from a deeper historical trajectory.

War therefore changes more than the research agenda. It can alter the hierarchy of historical significance. If historians begin with the present state of relations, periods of conflict readily appear structural, while periods of cooperation become anomalies requiring explanation. Yet the question can be reversed. Why did a relationship that for much of the past two centuries involved no direct strategic confrontation become so intensely conflictual at particular moments? One task for historians is to reconstruct the different configurations Russian American relations assumed over time, to recover moments when alternative paths remained open, and to identify the factors that made particular outcomes possible.

The present constraints may also accelerate an older historiographical shift. Loss of access to some sources encourages greater use of others: personal and émigré archives, regional collections, digital databases, and materials located in third countries. These constraints may reinforce a long-standing shift toward transnational approaches to Russian-American relations, making topics such as religion, migration, business, science, culture, journalism, social movements, and intermediaries between the two societies still more prominent within the field. This development long predates 2022, but the current crisis gives it additional momentum and makes its methodological implications harder to ignore.

A related effect concerns periodization and political language. The widespread description of present-day Russian-American relations as a "new Cold War" inevitably encourages historians to compare the current confrontation with the Cold War of the 1940s through the 1980s. At the same time, contemporary analogies feed back into our understanding of that earlier conflict. The language of the Cold War therefore requires historical analysis of its own. The phrase "Cold War" in 1947, its political uses during the renewed confrontation of the early 1980s, and the language of a "new Cold War" in 2026 belong to different political contexts and perform different rhetorical and analytical functions. The recurrence of similar vocabulary across different historical contexts therefore calls for closer attention to the changing meanings and functions of these terms.

The present condition of Russian-American relations thus makes one function of the historian especially important: resisting the colonization of the past by the present. Historians must explain how today's confrontation emerged while keeping visible the possibilities, actors, and trajectories that did not lead to it. In this sense, the history of Russian-American relations retains its distinct value as a field of historical inquiry precisely when Russian-American relations themselves are in profound crisis.

Five New Books on Russian-American Faith Connections
by Matthew Lee Miller

Over the past five years several scholars have produced high-quality, creative studies on Russian-American links in the field of religion. These historians and anthropologists have asked new questions, explored new archives, and considered new perspectives. Here are a few new books to add to your reading list.

Aram G. Sarkisian's *Orthodoxy on the Line: Russian Orthodox Christians and Labor Migration in the Progressive Era* (New York University Press, 2025) examines the expansion of Russian Orthodox Christianity within the United States during the early twentieth century and pays special attention to the experiences of these believers as immigrants and workers. Sarkisian analyzes their movement from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and interaction with the existing Orthodox churches of North America. These churches provided religious, social, and other forms of support for industrial workers and miners. Sarkisian's book presents rich archival details and vivid personal reflections from believers who were served by the Russian Orthodox Immigration Society, an organization that provided information and support for travel planning, legal entry to the US at Ellis Island, and employment opportunities. The author describes the goals and perspectives of multiple periodicals, including *Russkii emigrant* (known also by its English-language title *The Russian Immigrant).* New arrivals often stayed for a time at the Russian Immigrant Home in New York City, which included an Orthodox chapel in the building. The book provides significant detail on the employment settings, including the coal mines of Pennsylvania, steel mills of Gary, Indiana, and factories and lumber mills of northeast Minneapolis. Missionary clergy organized and served parishes for communities while they interacted with the leadership of the archdiocese in North America. Believers participated in the establishment and expansion of dozens of local church Russian Schools, a theological seminary in Minneapolis (relocated to Tenafly, New Jersey), and an orphanage in Springfield, Vermont. Fascinating chapters explore Orthodox responses to the complex challenges of World War I, the Bolshevik revolution, and the influenza epidemic of 1918.

In *Before We Disappear into Oblivion: San Francisco's Russian Diaspora from Revolution to Cold War* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025) Nina Bogdan focuses on the Russian community in San Francisco and explores the interaction of Orthodox Christians, non-Orthodox Spiritual Christians, and Jewish neighbors with eastern European family roots. Her analysis pays attention to the cultural, social, artistic, and economic dynamics of the city and highlights the key role played by Holy Trinity Cathedral and Holy Virgin Parish. She also examines the important role played by Archbishop John (Maximovitch) and other clergy. This is a remarkable study which hopefully will inspire scholars to write similar works on other locations in the US. This book will open the eyes of readers to the complex, contrasting, and confusing realities experienced by many immigrants to the US. The author's full review of this book is in this issue.

Scott M. Kenworthy's *The People's Patriarch: Tikhon Bellavin and the Orthodox Church in North America and Revolutionary Russia* (Oxford University Press, 2026) offers the first comprehensive scholarly biography of Tikhon, who served as a bishop and archbishop in North America for eight years from 1898 to

1907. Chapters two and three address his years of service in the US and Canada and explore several essential topics in detail. Kenworthy describes his extensive pastoral travels from New York to Pennsylvania, Illinois, San Francisco, Alaska, and Canada. Tikhon led parishes which included Russians as well as many other nationalities. In his teaching and writing, he consistently emphasized the universal character of the Orthodox faith more than its distinct Russian forms. During these years he guided the complex transitions of many Greek Catholic (Uniate) parishes with roots in eastern Europe into Orthodox parishes. Tikhon built friendly relationship with several leaders of the Episcopal Church and attempted to find common ground for cooperation. For example, he interacted with Isabel Hapgood as she completed a translation of the Slavonic liturgy into English. The bishop was an enthusiastic fundraiser, collecting funds for the construction of new church buildings in Chicago and New York City (on 97th Street). Philanthropist Charles Crane made significant donations to these structures and additional Orthodox projects. Tikhon oversaw the organization of a seminary in Minneapolis and the Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk in Pennsylvania. However, he was not simply a church administrator. His warm pastoral spirit generated deep appreciation from many across North America. These factors all contributed to his later selection as patriarch in Moscow in 1917. Chapter seven in this book addresses his connections with leaders of the American Relief Administration (ARA) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) during the famine of 1921-22. This is a solid work of scholarship which carefully explores Tikhon's thoughtful reflection on how believers in North America and Russia were responding to the trends of modernity in contrasting cultural settings.

Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia (Fordham University Press, 2022) by Sarah Riccardi-Swartz addresses developments in one 21st century context. She explores a small community of Orthodox Christians in West Virginia as an anthropologist. The parishioners and monks are members of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), and the majority are converts to Orthodoxy rather than "cradle" members of this jurisdiction. Many turned to the Orthodox faith after journeys which led them from evangelical Protestant Christianity to ROCOR after times of disillusionment, questioning, and experimentation. Also, many in this community believe that the US system of representative government is not able to withstand multiple cultural changes to which they object, such as shifting views on gender. However, they decided that the monarchy of Russian Emperor Nicholas II and the leadership of President Vladimir Putin were among the best models for opposing unwelcome cultural developments. Riccardi-Swartz is also co-author with Candace Lukasik of the forthcoming *Orthodox Christianity in America: An Introduction* (Routledge, October 2026).

Finally, another noteworthy work has been written by anthropologist Elena V. Kravchenko: *Becoming Orthodox: Women, Religion, and Ethnicity in the American South* (Fordham University Press, August 2026). The author concludes that "Russian women who immigrate to the United States and American women who convert to Orthodox Christianity engage with the materiality and visuality of the Orthodox Church to embrace conservative gender roles of a patriarchal tradition in a way that propels them to actively advocate for the equality, freedom, and empowerment of women." (https://fordhampress.com/becoming-orthodox-hb-9781531513870.html)